

LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Human Condition,
Values, and the
Search for Identity

edited by

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and

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Introduction

DEFINING LATIN AMERICA: NATIONAL VERSUS CONTINENTAL APPROACHES

The selections included in Section A of Part IV deal with the problem of determining what it means to speak of "Latin America" and "Latin Americans" and the peculiar problems facing thinkers who analyze Latin American social reality, both within the countries of Latin America and in the United States. The nations and the people of the region that has become known as Latin America are not homogenous, as the umbrella term might lead some to think. The countries that constitute Latin America have different political systems, different currencies, different languages, and significantly different histories. Simón Bolívar was "the Liberator" of most of the countries of South America, including Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru (and British Guiana), but he did not liberate Mexico or Argentina from the clutches of Spain, for example. Obviously, each of the nations of Latin America shares a common past of colonization and an ensuing struggle for independence, but Brazil's relation to Portugal was quite unlike the relation that the Spanish colonies had to Spain. The nations of Latin America did not deal with the condition of colonization in identical ways, nor were they colonized in the same way.

Nevertheless, there are common themes that tie the philosophers of the region together at particular times. In dealing with the problem of defining the identity of Latin American philosophy, some philosophers favor what can be called a national approach whereas others favor a continental approach. For example, Sarmiento deals in particular with Argentina and the special problems besetting that nation. Likewise, Mar-

iátegui addresses Peruvian reality, not Latin American reality, and Ramos turns his attention to the problem facing Mexicans. In contrast, Martí addresses issues of *nuestra América* (our America), emphasizing what is common to all the nations that compose Latin America, and Vasconcelos speaks of a *raza cósmica* (a cosmic race), not of a Mexican race.

Which approach makes more sense? Certainly, if the main question facing Latin American philosophers is that of cultural identity, given the fact that there is great variety among the populations of different countries within Latin America, answers to the question might be substantially different from country to country or even within the same country, and so national or regional approaches might be more appropriate to capture the identity of these peoples. Consider, for example, the Mayan population of Chiapas, Mexico, and the Náhuatl-speaking weavers of Guerrero, as compared to the cosmopolitan population of Mexico City. (The radical differences between the lifestyles of the *criollos* or American-born Spaniards, the *mestizos*, or peoples of mixed indigenous and Spanish heritage, and the *indios* are still evident today.) Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay have large indigenous populations, whereas countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela, for example, do not.

So, one may ask whether this difference might not give rise to a substantially different response to the question: Who are we? Is it not the case that a Peruvian philosopher concerned with capturing or attempting to provide an analysis of Peruvian social reality has to take the Amerindian culture into consideration, whereas a philosopher in Argentina with the same philosophical task might legitimately be more concerned with the ways in which various waves of European immigration have influenced the social reality of Argentina? The popular and rather humorous saying that "The Mexicans descend from the Aztecs, the Peruvians from the Incas, the Argentinians from the ships, and the Venezuelans from the oil" has some truth in it insofar as it points to the unique historical circumstances of each of these nations. And this truth might be overlooked when we approach the issue of cultural identity by attending merely to Latin America.

The issue of identity has also a political dimension, for it is clear that the nations of Latin America have varied political pasts. Therefore, something important is lost when we generalize in our philosophical investigation of identity and speak of the identity of all Latin Americans as if it were the same, whether one is concerned with a Náhuatl-speaking weaver in Mexico or a cattle rancher in Argentina.

In order to arrive at a definition of Latin American identity, we would do well to pay close attention to both the national and the continental approaches to this problem. There is something like *nuestra América* that is worthy of philosophical attention and, therefore, it behooves philoso-

phers to go beyond national boundaries and to take something like a *raza cósmica* seriously. It does indeed make sense to speak of a Hispanic/Latino identity, yet this must be done with the awareness that the *gauchos* are particularly Argentine and an important element in understanding the particular breed of Latin American reality that is not only Latin American but also Argentine. Likewise, the problems of the indigenous populations in Peru and in Mexico are particular to those nations and are not representative of any continental problems besetting the entire region. In short, to capture accurately the social reality of Latin America, we must adopt both a continental and a national approach, for when we deal with the problem of the nations and the peoples of Latin America, certain aspects of social reality can best be addressed continentally and others are best dealt with via a national or regional approach. We uncover certain aspects of the social reality of the nations of Latin America if we approach the reality of postcolonial Latin American countries one by one, giving each their proper place of cultural, historical, and political significance, which otherwise would be missed.

A NEW DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY: HISPANICS/LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES

The problems facing philosophers as they grapple with the issue of the identity of Latin American nations and peoples become even more complicated for philosophers who deal with these issues in the context of the United States. What happens to the identity of Mexicans (whether of European, indigenous, or *mestizo* descent), Cubans (of Spanish, African, or mixed race descent), Colombians, Dominicans, etc., who immigrate to the United States? Can we speak meaningfully of these groups with one single term? If so, what term would capture the identity of this group? Or is the group so diverse that no single term can adequately capture its identity?

These issues become particularly relevant when the question of rights is raised. In particular, do groups of immigrants from Latin America have special rights and should they receive special benefits because they belong to those groups? To shed light on this problem, we have included three selections from contemporary philosophers who have dealt with these issues. Selections from the work of Jorge Gracia, Linda Martín Alcoff, and Ofelia Schutte show that the discussion of the identity of Hispanics/Latinos in the United States is complicated precisely because the group comprises a variety of ethnic, religious, and racial strains. And it is no easy task to find a term that will do justice to this diversity, while capturing the underlying unity of the group.

Latin American philosophers have discussed and developed views of

the identity of the nations and peoples of Latin America, but their discussion of identity does not end there. They have also posed questions concerning the identity of Latin American thought and philosophy itself. There are many different approaches to this problem. Let us begin by considering the traditional ways in which this problem has been addressed by Latin American philosophers.

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICAN THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY: UNIVERSALISM, CULTURALISM, AND THE CRITICAL VIEW

In spite of the fact that Latin American philosophers have expressed many positions on the subject of what constitutes Latin American thought and philosophy, their opinions can be classified under three basic headings: universalist, culturalist, and critical. The first refers to a view inspired by a long tradition that goes back to the Greeks. According to this view, philosophy is a science (be it of concepts or of reality); as such, the principles it adopts and inferences it draws are meant to be universally valid and, consequently, it makes no sense to talk about a Latin American philosophy, just as it does not make any sense to talk about Latin American chemistry or physics. Philosophy, as a discipline of learning, cannot acquire idiosyncratic characteristics that may, in turn, make it Latin American, French, or Italian. Philosophy, strictly speaking, is simply philosophy, or philosophy "as such."¹ In spite of the fact that normally one may speak of "French" and "German" philosophy, this does not mean that philosophy as such is any different in the two cases. Categories like "French" and "German" are used as *historical* designations to refer to historical periods that include the thinking of the time or place one wishes to discuss. This does not mean that philosophy in a particular period is in itself any different from philosophy in another period. What may be considered idiosyncratic to the philosophy of a given period is not an essential part of philosophy, but simply the product of circumstances surrounding the development of the discipline at the time. As a result, then, such idiosyncrasies, which could also be called accidents, are not part of the discipline and are not included in its study; they are only part of historical studies concerning the period in question, just as a mathematical error is not part of mathematics, and just as the study of Egyptian physical theories is not part of physics. Philosophy, like mathematics and other disciplines of human learning, consists of a series of truths and methods of inquiry that have no spatiotemporal characteristics. Its application and validity are universal and therefore independent of the historical conditions in which they are discovered. The conclusion, for instance, that rationality is part of human nature is intended as a claim that is true or false anywhere and at any time.

Consequently, the answer to the question of whether there is a Latin American philosophy is, from this perspective, negative. Furthermore, this view not only denies that there is a Latin American philosophy, but it also rejects that there could be one, for it sees an intrinsic incompatibility between the nature of philosophy as a universal discipline of learning and such particular products as culture.

To this, the culturalist responds by contending that the universalist makes a serious mistake. Philosophy, as everything based on human experience, depends on specific spatiotemporal coordinates for its validity. There are no universal and absolute truths. Truth is always concrete and the product of a viewpoint, an individual perspective. This can be applied even to mathematical truths, as Ortega, a philosopher followed by many culturalists, suggests.²

Orteguian perspectivism, introduced in Latin America by many of Ortega's disciples, particularly José Gaos, is to a great extent responsible for the popularity of the culturalist view in Latin America. A philosophy that emphasizes the value of the particular and idiosyncratic lends itself quite easily to support the views of culturalist thinkers.³ Consequently, many of them adopted this view without hesitation, adapting it to their conceptual needs. This is how the idea of a Latin American philosophy as a philosophy peculiar to the continent came about, a philosophy different from that of other cultures and particularly opposed to Anglo-Saxon culture and philosophy. This philosophy is supposedly the product of Latin American culture, which is in turn the product of the perspective from which Latin Americans think. This view has given way to the search for an autochthonous philosophy that can unambiguously reflect the characteristics of Latin American culture.

From this perspective, it is not only possible to find a Latin American philosophy, it is actually the case that any genuine philosophy produced in Latin America *must* be Latin American. If it is not, then it is simply a copy of philosophies produced elsewhere, imported and imposed on the continent. As such, these alien ways of thinking do not constitute a genuine or authentic philosophy when they are adopted in Latin America, since they do not have any relation to Latin American culture, being as they are the product of perspectives and conditions completely foreign to those of the continent.

Many of the thinkers who adopt this view conclude that, at present, there is no Latin American philosophy because the only philosophy that has been practiced in the region is imported. But at the same time, while accepting this, they trust in a different future. Others, on the contrary, point out that there are some Latin American philosophical perspectives that can be classified as Latin American, and although they may be few, they are sufficient to justify the use of the term "Latin American philosophy" with a culturalist connotation.

A third view adopted by Latin American philosophers in relation to this problem may be described as critical; it has been put forward as a reaction against both universalism and culturalism, although it takes some elements from both. This view, like universalism, rejects the existence of a Latin American philosophy not because the term "Latin American" is incompatible with the term "philosophy," but rather because until now philosophy in Latin America has had an ideological character, that is, it has not been a free pursuit. Philosophy has been used and continues to be used, *pace* the adherents of the critical view, to support ideas conducive to both the continuation of a status quo and the benefit of certain groups. To support this charge, those who adhere to the critical view point to scholasticism and positivism as philosophical developments that thwarted the development and progress of Latin American philosophy.

With regard to scholasticism, these critics point out that the Spanish Crown made use of scholastic philosophy to maintain its political and economic control over the New World. Scholastic philosophy, they suggest, became an instrument to sustain an otherwise ideologically untenable position.

In the case of positivism, they emphasize how certain Latin American governments used this philosophical school to justify both their notion of social order and supremacy of a ruling elite. The most frequently cited case is that of Porfirio Díaz's government in Mexico, which adopted positivism as the official doctrine of his dictatorship. The inference drawn, on the basis of this and other examples, is that until now there has not been, and in the future there cannot be, a genuine and authentic Latin American philosophy so long as present social and economic conditions prevail. Only when this situation changes and philosophy is no longer used ideologically to justify the *modus vivendi* can there be an opportunity for a genuine and authentic Latin American philosophy to develop. Some of those who defend this view think that this Latin American philosophy will be the product of a particular Latin American perspective, adopting therefore a culturalist view with respect to the future. Others, on the contrary, take a universalist position and suggest that this nonideological philosophy will be universally valid and not relative to the particular circumstances of Latin America. They all coincide, however, in viewing the role of philosophy in Latin America in a critical light.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Explicit questions about the existence of a Latin American philosophy were first explored in the writings of Leopoldo Zea and Risieri Frondizi in the 1940s. The growth of philosophical literature until then seemed to jus-

tify and perhaps even require an investigation into the nature, themes, and limits of the philosophical activity. The proliferation of specialized journals, the creation of philosophy departments in various universities, and the foundation of international associations that had started to coordinate philosophical activity in the continent made possible the raising of an issue that continues to concern Latin American philosophers until today.⁴

Even before Zea and Frondizi, however, the Argentine Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884) had raised the problem of the character and future of Latin American philosophy.⁵ An outstanding member of the thriving liberal movement of his time, Alberdi put forth his ideas under the influence of a liberalism very closely related to the philosophical rationalism, the anticlericalism, and the optimism about industrialization that were so characteristic of nineteenth-century Latin America. His view of philosophy, consequently, is not alien to the basic tenets of this movement. Alberdi, however, had a high degree of awareness with respect to the connection between philosophy and cultural identity that, for good reasons, has drawn the attention of many philosophers who have subsequently focused on the theme of Latin American philosophy.

According to Alberdi, a Latin American philosophy must have a social and political character intimately related to the most vital needs of the continent. Philosophy is an instrument that can help to introduce an awareness of the social, political, and economic needs of Latin American nations. This is why Alberdi categorically rejected metaphysics and other "pure and abstract" philosophical fields, for he viewed them as alien to urgent national needs.⁶

As the selections from Part A indicate, since the independence of the Latin American territories from the Spanish and Portuguese colonial yoke in the nineteenth century, the issue of the identity of the nations and peoples of Latin America has been explored in great depth by a wide variety of philosophers. This search to define the nations and the peoples of this vast and variegated region continued to shape the history of ideas in the twentieth century. The more rigorous philosophical discussion of identity took longer to be developed and sustained.

Our discussion of Alberdi's early comments attests to one of the intellectually rich ways in which this search for Latin American identity was carried out. Yet, in spite of Alberdi's reflections on the character of Latin American philosophy, it was not until the fifth decade of the twentieth century that the problem of the philosophical identity of Latin America was explicitly formulated and fully explored. The decade of the 1940s was a period in which intellectuals looked back on Latin American culture and attempted to use it as the basis for philosophical thinking. A generation of Mexican authors inspired in Ortega y Gasset's perspectivism, introduced in Latin America by the *transferrados*, or Spanish exiles, and particularly by José Gaos, sug-

gested that the cultural "circumstances" of the continent provided the basis for the development of an original Latin American philosophy.⁷ Leopoldo Zea, the leader of these intellectuals, asserted that any type of philosophical reflection emerging on the continent could be classified as "Latin American philosophy" by virtue of the intimate relationship between philosophy and culture.⁸ He also suggested that this philosophy had a historical foundation, owing to the fact that Latin Americans had always, in Zea's judgment, thought of their situation from a vitally Latin American perspective.⁹ Zea categorically affirms the existence of a Latin American philosophy which springs from the unique historical circumstances of Latin American social reality. Following Ortega, Zea has a conception of philosophy as a historical product, emerging from particular perspectives, but not ending there. As he claims in the selection included below, "The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America": "When we attempt to resolve the problems of man in any spatiotemporal situation whatever, we will necessarily have to start with ourselves because we are men; we will have to start with our own circumstances, our limitations, and our being Latin Americans, just as the Greeks started with their own circumstance called Greece. But, just like them, we cannot limit ourselves to our own circumstances. . . . [We] must also be aware of our capacities as members of the cultural community called humanity." The problem that remains is how to bridge the gap between the particular cultural circumstances from which we begin and the universal circumstance of humanity toward which we strive.

Zea's culturalist perspective has won many adherents. His supporters find in his approach to defining philosophy a way of opening space for contributions that do not fall under the umbrella of the European and Anglo-American philosophical traditions and hence tend to remain marginalized. Abelardo Villegas, Diego Domínguez Caballero, and Guillermo Francovich are just a few of the philosophers who support Zea's view.¹⁰

A common criticism of this way of defining philosophy is that it amounts to a kind of philosophical nationalism, and that moreover, it leaves out of the group of Latin American philosophers those who work in logic, theory of action, ethics, and similar traditional, philosophical fields. A philosopher who does not specifically address the Latin American circumstance is not a *true* Latin American philosopher. Risieri Frondizi was a leading critic of Zea's way of conceiving Latin American philosophy. According to Frondizi, philosophy must be distinguished from cultural nationalism and should be considered independently of geographical boundaries. One should speak of philosophy *in* Latin America rather than of a philosophy *of* Latin America.¹¹ Philosophy, as Francisco Romero pointed out, has no last names, that is, it must be understood as a discipline with universal characteristics.¹²

Even Vasconcelos, whose work exerted a strong influence on Zea,

while sympathetic to a culturalist perspective, adopted a universalist position when discussing the nature of philosophical activity. Vasconcelos went so far as to deny explicitly the existence of a peculiarly Latin American philosophy on the grounds that the discipline was universal in character, although he conceded that it was the prerogative of each culture to reconsider the great themes of universal philosophy. Philosophical nationalism had no place in his thought.¹³

The polemic that suddenly surrounded the question of the existence of a Latin American philosophy in the 1940s had the effect, in many cases, of undermining the focus on identity in general that had characterized Latin American philosophical thought prior to the dispute, and which in many respects had prompted it. The controversy set a precedent for discussions of culture that became increasingly separated from the actual analysis of cultural phenomena. The culturalists themselves, who based their conception of a Latin American philosophy on a cultural perspective, have left few detailed accounts of the continent's cultural *ethos*, and frequently refer to culture in very general terms.

The controversy continued to grow and attracted much attention among members of practically every philosophical tradition, with the exception of philosophical analysis. Existentialists, phenomenologists, Thomists, Kantians, Ortegaians, etc., all felt compelled to explore this issue. But since none of the different interpretations of the cultural identity of the continent has become widely accepted, it became impossible in turn to establish a consensus on the notion of Latin American philosophy. This is the reason why during the 1960s a number of authors re-addressed this problem, although this time not in terms of universalism and culturalism. It was at this time that the critical position took shape. Augusto Salazar Bondy, for example, argued for the view that philosophy in Latin America is the province of intellectual elites. These elites borrowed European cultural forms uncritically, and they lacked an identifiable and rigorous method and awareness of other social groups. Viewed in this light, the problems of culture and philosophy have been the problems of only a small minority of intellectuals alienated from the rest of society, and from the economic, social, and political problems of the continent.¹⁴ This position, which has also been shared by Juan Rivano and others, suggests that the history of the controversy concerning the existence and nature of Latin American philosophy epitomizes the lack of concern with the most urgent problems of their respective communities on the part of the region's intellectuals.¹⁵

It is in this context that the (so-called) philosophy of liberation appears. For philosophers like Enrique Dussel, Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, and Arturo Andrés Roig, the fundamental task of philosophy in Latin America consists in the social and national liberation from the unjust relations such as that of dominator-dominated which have traditionally char-

acterized it. For Roig in particular, this implies the integration of the Latin American peoples based on the consciousness of the historicity of the American "man" and of the history of philosophy in Latin America. He rejects the formalism and ontologism characteristic of traditional academic philosophy, favoring instead a philosophy of commitment that seeks integrating concepts in Latin America. This area of philosophy is rooted in the political discourse of the marginal and exploited segments of society, and given the enduring political and economic instability that plagues the countries of Latin America, liberation philosophy continues to be of great social relevance.

In spite of the strong disagreement voiced by the various authors discussed and in the works included below, most of them would agree that philosophy has historically provided one of the most important vehicles for the expression of cultural concerns in Latin American society. Not always listened to, and at times suppressed by regimes of the Right or the Left, philosophy in many ways reflects the very situation of Latin American society today. And given that the region does not enjoy the stability of its Northern neighbor, its philosophy will continue to reflect the general turmoil of the region, a place where the *caudillo* is not a ghost of the past, where tanks still roll onto the streets when problems become too threatening, and, in short, a place where the philosophers have no ivory tower in which they can hide from the distractions of the world.

NOTES

1. Risieri Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (March 1949): 355. See also a slightly different use of the expression in Fernando Salmerón, "Los problemas de la cultura mexicana desde el punto de vista de la filosofía," in *Cuestiones educativas y páginas sobre México*, p. 137; originally published in *La palabra y el hombre* 6 (1958).
2. José Ortega y Gasset, *El hombre y la gente*, chap. 13, in *Obras completas*, 3:115.
3. See Samuel Ramos, *Historia de la filosofía mexicana* (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1943), p. 149.
4. One of the most useful bibliographical tools for the study of Latin American philosophy is the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, which has been publishing a section on philosophy since 1939. The Web site maintained by José Luis Gómez-Martínez, *Repertorio Americano*, is also an excellent resource, with contributions from leading scholars on major Latin American philosophers. Gómez-Martínez's *Anuario Bibliográfico de Historia del Pensamiento Ibero e Iberoamericano* (published in five volumes, 1989-1993) is also a good resource.
5. A prolific writer and one of the outstanding members of the generation of Argentinean intellectuals who criticized the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas,

Alberdi spent many years in exile in Uruguay, Chile, and Europe. The piece of writing that most specifically addresses our subject of concerns here is "Ideas para presidir la confección del curso de filosofía contemporánea," in *Escritos póstumos de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, vol. 15 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Europea, Moreno y Defensa, 1895-1901). This essay was originally published in 1842.

6. Alberdi, "Ideas," p. 613.
7. José Gaos, *En torno a la filosofía mexicana* (Mexico City: Porrúa y Obregón, 1952), 53-54, 88. An excellent study of the impact and importance of the Spanish contributions to Latin American philosophy is provided by José Luis Abellán's *Filosofía española en América* (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1967) and José Luis Abellán and Antonio Monclús, eds., *El pensamiento español contemporáneo y la idea de América*, especially vol. 2, *El pensamiento en el exilio* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1983).
8. Zea, *Ensayos*, p. 166.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
10. Abelardo Villegas, *Panorama de la filosofía iberoamericana actual* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1963); Diego Domínguez Caballero, "Motivo y sentido de una investigación de lo panameño," in Zea, *Antología*, 157-69; Guillermo Francovich, *El pensamiento boliviano en el siglo 20* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956), and "Pachamama," in Zea, *Antología*, pp. 79-87.
11. Frondizi, "Hay una filosofía iberoamericana?" p. 166.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
13. Vasconcelos, *Indología: Una interpretación de la cultura iberoamericana* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1926), pp. 109-10.
14. Augusto Salazar Bondy, *Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1968), sec. 8, "Una interpretación."
15. Juan Rivano was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1926 and taught philosophy at the University of Chile until the Chilean military regime imprisoned him in 1975 and forced him into exile in 1976. Trained in logic, he has written mostly on the subjects of theory of knowledge and philosophy of science. Rivano addressed the problem of Latin American philosophy in his *El punto de vista de la miseria* (Santiago: Facultad de Filosofía y Educación, Universidad de Chile, 1965), pp. 145-72. Some of his publications include *Entre Hegel y Marx: Una meditación ante los nuevos horizontes del humanismo* (1962), *Lógica elemental* (1970), and *Introducción al pensamiento dialéctico* (1972).

JOSÉ MARTÍ
SELECTED WRITINGS

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
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with an introduction by
Roberto González Echevarría

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN  CLASSICS

JOSÉ MARTÍ:
SELECTED WRITINGS

Born in 1853 to a humble family, JOSÉ MARTÍ embarked early on a life of political struggle and literary achievement. At fifteen, he wrote an epic poem in praise of Cuba's war of independence against Spain, and at seventeen he was imprisoned and sentenced to hard labor for his political activities. At eighteen, while in exile in Spain, he published a thundering, implacable denunciation of the Spanish treatment of Cuban political prisoners, which made him an important voice in the Cuban nationalist movement and had considerable impact on the thinking of Spanish liberals. For the rest of his life, he wrote and worked unstopably for the freedom of Cuba. He founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party and was until his death the central architect of the Cuban independence movement. His political involvement was accompanied and complemented by a constant and relentless outpouring of poetry, literary prose, journalism, and political writing. In 1895 he returned to Cuba with a military force to embark upon another revolution and soon thereafter met a suicidally heroic death in battle.

ESTHER ALLEN has translated numerous works from Spanish and French, including *The Book of Lamentations*, by Rosario Castellanos; portions of *Selected Non-Fictions*, by Jorge Luis Borges; and, most recently, *Dark Back of Time*, by Javier Marías.

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a nation of fluttering leaves, spending our lives in the air, our treetop crowned in flowers, humming or creaking, caressed by the caprices of sunlight or thrashed and felled by tempests. The trees must form ranks to block the seven-league giant! It is the hour of reckoning and of marching in unison, and we must move in lines as compact as the veins of silver that lie at the roots of the Andes.

Only runts whose growth was stunted will lack the necessary valor, for those who have no faith in their land are like men born prematurely. Having no valor themselves, they deny that other men do. Their puny arms, with bracelets and painted nails, the arms of Madrid or of Paris, cannot manage the lofty tree and so they say the tree cannot be climbed. We must load up the ships with these termites who gnaw away at the core of the patria that has nurtured them; if they are Parisians or Madrileños then let them stroll to the Prado by lamplight or go to Tortoni's for an ice. These sons of carpenters who are ashamed that their father was a carpenter! These men born in America who are ashamed of the mother that raised them because she wears an Indian apron, these delinquents who disown their sick mother and leave her alone in her sickbed! Which one is truly a man, he who stays with his mother to nurse her through her illness, or he who forces her to work somewhere out of sight, and lives off her sustenance in corrupted lands, with a worm for his insignia, cursing the bosom that bore him, sporting a sign that says "traitor" on the back of his paper dress-coat? These sons of our America, which must save herself through her Indians, and which is going from less to more, who desert her and take up arms in the armies of North America, which drowns its own Indians in blood and is going from more to less! These delicate creatures who are men but do not want to do men's work! Did Washington, who made that land for them, go and live with the English during the years when he saw the English marching against his own land? These *incroyables* who drag their honor across foreign soil, like the *incroyables* of the French Revolution, dancing, smacking their lips, and deliberately slurring their words!

And in what patria can a man take greater pride than in our long-suffering republics of America, erected among mute masses of Indians upon the bloodied arms of no more than a hundred apostles, to the sound of the book doing battle against the monk's tall candle? Never before have such advanced and consolidated nations been created from

LETTERS FROM NEW YORK

OUR AMERICA

This essay is Martí's most frequently cited and anthropologized work. It represents the culmination of a lifetime's reflection on Latin America, its essential unity, and its relationship to the United States, and it deliberately echoes and carries forward Latin American liberator Simon Bolívar's crucial 1815 "Letter to a Jamaican Gentleman," which also insisted on the importance of developing systems of government appropriate to a country, rather than importing them from outside.

The prideful villager thinks his hometown contains the whole world, and as long as he can stay on as mayor or humiliate the rival who stole his sweetheart or watch his nest egg accumulating in its strongbox he believes the universe to be in good order, unaware of the giants in seven-league boots who can crush him underfoot or the battling comets in the heavens that go through the air devouring the sleeping worlds. Whatever is left of that sleepy hometown in America must awaken. These are not times for going to bed in a sleeping cap, but rather, like Juan de Castellanos's¹ men, with our weapons for a pillow, weapons of the mind, which vanquish all others. Trenches of ideas are worth more than trenches of stone.

A cloud of ideas is a thing no armored prow can smash through. A vital idea set ablaze before the world at the right moment can, like the mystic banner of the last judgment, stop a fleet of battleships. Hometowns that are still strangers to one another must hurry to become acquainted, like men who are about to do battle together. Those who shake their fists at each other like jealous brothers quarreling over a piece of land or the owner of a small house who envies the man with a better one must join hands and interlace them until their two hands are as one. Those who, shielded by a criminal tradition, mutilate, with swords smeared in the same blood that flows through their own veins, the land of a conquered brother whose punishment far exceeds his crimes, must return that land to their brother if they do not wish to be known as a nation of plunderers. The honorable man does not collect his debts of honor in money, at so much per slap. We can no longer be

such disparate factors in less historical time. The haughty man thinks that because he wields a quick pen or a vivid phrase the earth was made to be his pedestal, and accuses his native republic of irredeemable incompetence because its virgin jungles do not continually provide him with the means of going about the world a famous plutocrat, driving Persian ponies and spilling champagne. The incapacity lies not in the emerging country, which demands forms that are appropriate to it and a grandeur that is useful, but in the leaders who try to rule unique nations, of a singular and violent composition, with laws inherited from four centuries of free practice in the United States and nineteen centuries of monarchy in France. A gaucho's pony cannot be stopped in midbolt by one of Alexander Hamilton's laws. The sluggish blood of the Indian race cannot be quickened by a phrase from Sieyès.² To govern well, one must attend closely to the reality of the place that is governed. In America, the good ruler does not need to know how the German or Frenchman is governed, but what elements his own country is composed of and how he can marshal them so as to reach, by means and institutions born from the country itself, the desirable state in which every man knows himself and is active, and all men enjoy the abundance that Nature, for the good of all, has bestowed on the country they make fruitful by their labor and defend with their lives. The government must be born from the country. The spirit of the government must be the spirit of the country. The form of the government must be in harmony with the country's natural constitution. The government is no more than an equilibrium among the country's natural elements.

In America the natural man has triumphed over the imported book. Natural men have triumphed over an artificial intelligentsia. The native mestizo has triumphed over the alien, pure-blooded criollo. The battle is not between civilization and barbarity, but between false erudition and nature. The natural man is good, and esteems and rewards a superior intelligence as long as that intelligence does not use his submission against him or offend him by ignoring him—for that the natural man deems unforgivable, and he is prepared to use force to regain the respect of anyone who wounds his sensibilities or harms his interests. The tyrants of America have come to power by acquiescing to these scorned natural elements and have fallen as soon as they betrayed them. The republics have purged the former tyrannies of their inability to know the true elements of the country, derive the form of government from them, and govern along with them. *Governor*, in a new country, means *Creator*.

In countries composed of educated and uneducated sectors, the uneducated will govern by their habit of attacking and resolving their doubts with their fists, unless the educated learn the art of governing. The uneducated masses are lazy and timid about matters of the intellect and want to be well-governed, but if the government injures them they shake it off and govern themselves. How can our governors emerge from the universities when there is not a university in America that teaches the most basic element of the art of governing, which is the analysis of all that is unique to the peoples of America? Our youth go out into the world wearing Yankee- or French-colored glasses and aspire to rule by guesswork a country they do not know. Those unacquainted with the rudiments of politics should not be allowed to embark on a career in politics. The literary prizes must not go to the best ode, but to the best study of the political factors in the student's country. In the newspapers, lecture halls, and academies, the study of the country's real factors must be carried forward. Simply knowing those factors without blindfolds or circumlocutions is enough—for anyone who deliberately or unknowingly sets aside a part of the truth will ultimately fail because of the truth he was lacking, which expands when neglected and brings down whatever is built without it. Solving the problem after knowing its elements is easier than solving it without knowing them. The natural man, strong and indignant, comes and overthrows the authority that is accumulated from books because it is not administered in keeping with the manifest needs of the country. To know is to solve. To know the country and govern it in accordance with that knowledge is the only way of freeing it from tyranny. The European university must yield to the American university. The history of America from the Incas to the present must be taught in its smallest detail, even if the Greek Archons go untaught. Our own Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours; we need it more. Statesmen who arise from the nation must replace statesmen who are alien to it. Let the world be grafted onto our republics, but we must be the trunk. And let the vanquished pedant hold his tongue, for there is no patria in which a man can take greater pride than in our long-suffering American republics.

Our feet upon a rosary, our heads white, and our bodies a motley of Indian and criollo we boldly entered the community of nations. Bearing the standard of the Virgin, we went out to conquer our liberty. A priest,³ a few lieutenants, and a woman built a republic in Mexico

upon the shoulders of the Indians. A Spanish cleric, under cover of his priestly cape, taught French liberty to a handful of magnificent students who chose a Spanish general to lead Central America against Spain. Still accustomed to monarchy, and with the sun on their chests, the Venezuelans in the north and the Argentines in the south set out to construct nations. When the two heroes clashed and the continent was about to be rocked, one of them, and not the lesser one, turned back.⁴ But heroism is less glorious in peacetime than in war, and thus rarer, and it is easier for a man to die with honor than to think in an orderly way. Exalted and unanimous sentiments are more readily governed than the diverging, arrogant, alien, and ambitious ideas that emerge when the battle is over. The powers that were swept up in the epic struggle, along with the feline wariness of the species and the sheer weight of reality, undermined the edifice that had raised the flags of nations sustained by wise governance in the continual practice of reason and freedom over the crude and singular regions of our *mestizo* America with its towns of bare legs and Parisian dress-coats. The colonial hierarchy resisted the republic's democracy, and the capital city, wearing its elegant cravat, left the countryside, in its horseshoe boots, waiting at the door; the redeemers born from books did not understand that a revolution that had triumphed when the soul of the earth was unleashed by a savior's voice had to govern with the soul of the earth and not against or without it. And for all these reasons, America began enduring and still endures the weary task of reconciling the discordant and hostile elements it inherited from its perverse, despotic colonizer with the imported forms and ideas that have, in their lack of local reality, delayed the advent of a logical form of government. The continent, deformed by three centuries of a rule that denied man the right to exercise his reason, embarked—overlooking or refusing to listen to the ignorant masses that had helped it redeem itself—upon a government based on reason, the reason of all directed toward the things that are of concern to all, and not the university-taught reason of the few imposed upon the rustic reason of others. The problem of independence was not the change in form, but the change in spirit.

Common cause had to be made with the oppressed in order to consolidate a system that was opposed to the interests and governmental habits of the oppressors. The tiger, frightened away by the flash of gunfire, creeps back in the night to find his prey. He will die with flames shooting from his eyes, his claws unsheathed, but now his step

is inaudible for he comes on velvet paws. When the prey awakens, the tiger is upon him. The colony lives on in the republic, but our America is saving itself from its grave blunders—the arrogance of the capital cities, the blind triumph of the scorned campesinos, the excessive importation of foreign ideas and formulas, the wicked and impolitic disdain for the native race—through the superior virtue, confirmed by necessary bloodshed, of the republic that struggles against the colony. The tiger waits behind every tree, crouches in every corner. He will die, his claws unsheathed, flames shooting from his eyes.

But "these countries will be saved," in the words of the Argentine Rivadavia,⁵ who erred on the side of urbanity during crude times; the machine is ill-suited to a silken scabbard, nor can the spear be abandoned in a country won by the spear, for it becomes enraged and stands in the doorway of Iturbide's Congress⁶ demanding that "the fair-skinned man be made emperor." These countries will be saved because, with the genius of moderation that now seems, by nature's serene harmony, to prevail in the continent of light, and the influence of the critical reading that has, in Europe, replaced the fumbling ideas about phalansteries in which the previous generation was steeped, the real man is being born to America, in these real times.

What a vision we were: the chest of an athlete, the hands of a dandy, and the forehead of a child. We were a whole fancy dress ball, in English trousers, a Parisian waistcoat, a North American overcoat, and a Spanish bullfighter's hat. The Indian circled about us, mute, and went to the mountaintop to christen his children. The black, pursued from afar, alone and unknown, sang his heart's music in the night, between waves and wild beasts. The campesinos, the men of the land, the creators, rose up in blind indignation against the disdainful city, their own creation. We wore epaulets and judge's robes, in countries that came into the world wearing rope sandals and Indian headbands. The wise thing would have been to pair, with charitable hearts and the audacity of our founders, the Indian headband and the judicial robe, to undam the Indian, make a place for the able black, and tailor liberty to the bodies of those who rose up and triumphed in its name. What we had was the judge, the general, the man of letters, and the cleric. Our angelic youth, as if struggling from the arms of an octopus, cast their heads into the heavens and fell back with sterile glory, crowned with clouds. The natural people, driven by instinct, blind with triumph, overwhelmed their gilded rulers. No Yankee or European book could

furnish the key to the Hispanoamerican enigma. So the people tried hatred instead, and our countries amounted to less and less each year. Weary of useless hatred, of the struggle of book against sword, reason against the monk's taper, city against countryside, the impossible empire of the quarreling urban castes against the tempestuous or inert natural nation, we are beginning, almost unknowingly, to try love. The nations arise and salute one another. "What are we like?" they ask, and begin telling each other what they are like. When a problem arises in Cojimar they no longer seek the solution in Dantzig. The frock-coats are still French, but the thinking begins to be American. The young men of America are rolling up their sleeves and plunging their hands into the dough, and making it rise with the leavening of their sweat. They understand that there is too much imitation, and that salvation lies in creating. *Create* is this generation's password. Make wine from plantains; it may be sour, but it is our wine! It is now understood that a country's form of government must adapt to its natural elements, that absolute ideas, in order not to collapse over an error of form, must be expressed in relative forms; that liberty, in order to be viable, must be sincere and full, that if the republic does not open its arms to all and include all in its progress, it dies. The tiger inside came in through the gap, and so will the tiger outside. The general holds the cavalry's speed to the pace of the infantry, for if he leaves the infantry far behind, the enemy will surround the cavalry. Politics is strategy. Nations must continually criticize themselves, for criticism is health, but with a single heart and a single mind. Lower yourselves to the unfortunate and raise them up in your arms! Let the heart's fires unfreeze all that is motionless in America, and let the country's natural blood surge and throb through its veins! Standing tall, the workmen's eyes full of joy, the new men of America are saluting each other from one country to another. Natural statesmen are emerging from the direct study of nature; they read in order to apply what they read, not copy it. Economists are studying problems at their origins. Orators are becoming more temperate. Dramatists are putting native characters onstage. Academies are discussing practical subjects. Poetry is snipping off its wild, Zorrilla-esque mane and hanging up its gaudy waistcoat on the glorious tree. Prose, polished and gleaming, is replete with ideas. The rulers of Indian republics are learning Indian languages.

America is saving herself from all her dangers. Over some republics the octopus sleeps still, but by the law of equilibrium, other republics

are running into the sea to recover the lost centuries with mad and sublime swiftness. Others, forgetting that Juárez⁸ traveled in a coach drawn by mules, hitch their coach to the wind and take a soap bubble for coachman—and poisonous luxury, enemy of liberty, corrupts the frivolous and opens the door to foreigners. The virile character of others is being perfected by the epic spirit of a threatened independence. And others, in rapacious wars against their neighbors, are nurturing an unruly soldier caste that may devour them. But our America may also face another danger, which comes not from within but from the differing origins, methods, and interests of the continent's two factions. The hour is near when she will be approached by an enterprising and forceful nation that will demand intimate relations with her, though it does not know her and disdains her. And virile nations self-made by the rifle and the law love other virile nations, and love only them. The hour of unbridled passion and ambition from which North America may escape by the ascendancy of the purest element in its blood—or into which its vengeful and sordid masses, its tradition of conquest, and the self-interest of a cunning leader could plunge it—is not yet so close, even to the most apprehensive eye, that there is no time for it to be confronted and averted by the manifestation of a discreet and unswerving pride, for its dignity as a republic, in the eyes of the watchful nations of the Universe, places upon North America a brake that our America must not remove by puerile provocation, ostentatious arrogance, or patricidal discord. Therefore the urgent duty of our America is to show herself as she is, one in soul and intent, rapidly overcoming the crushing weight of her past and stained only by the fertile blood shed by hands that do battle against ruins and by veins that were punctured by our former masters. The disdain of the formidable neighbor who does not know her is our America's greatest danger, and it is urgent—for the day of the visit is near—that her neighbor come to know her, and quickly, so that he will not disdain her. Out of ignorance, he may perhaps begin to covet her. But when he knows her, he will remove his hands from her in respect. One must have faith in the best in man and distrust the worst. One must give the best every opportunity, so that the worst will be laid bare and overcome. If not, the worst will prevail. Nations should have one special pillory for those who incite them to futile hatreds, and another for those who do not tell them the truth until it is too late.

There is no racial hatred, because there are no races. Sickly, lamp-lit minds string together and rewarm the library-shelf races that the hon-

est traveler and the cordial observer seek in vain in the justice of nature, where the universal identity of man leaps forth in victorious love and turbulent appetite. The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies that are diverse in form and color. Anyone who promotes and disseminates opposition or hatred among races is committing a sin against humanity. But within that jumble of peoples which lives in close proximity to our peoples, certain peculiar and dynamic characteristics are condensed—ideas and habits of expansion, acquisition, vanity, and greed—that could, in a period of internal disorder or precipitation of a people's cumulative character, cease to be latent national preoccupations and become a serious threat to the neighboring, isolated and weak lands that the strong country declares to be perishable and inferior. To think is to serve. We must not, out of a villager's antipathy, impute some lethal congenital wickedness to the continent's light-skinned nation simply because it does not speak our language or share our view of what home life should be or resemble us in its political failings, which are different from ours, or because it does not think highly of quick-tempered, swarthy men or look with charity, from its still uncertain eminence, upon those less favored by history who, in heroic stages, are climbing the road that republics travel. But neither should we seek to conceal the obvious facts of the problem, which can, for the peace of the centuries, be resolved by timely study and the urgent, wordless union of the continental soul. For the unanimous hymn is already ringing forth, and the present generation is bearing industrious America along the road sanctioned by our sublime forefathers. From the Rio Bravo to the Straits of Magellan, the Great Cemi,⁹ seated on a condor's back, has scattered the seeds of the new America across the romantic nations of the continent and the suffering islands of the sea!

—*El Partido Liberal* (Mexico City), January 20, 1891

THE LYNCHING OF THE ITALIANS

On March 14, 1891, a mob broke into the New Orleans jail and lynched eleven of the nineteen Sicilians who were being held there. The Italian government subsequently demanded that the lynchers be punished and entered claims for indemnity for the three Sicilians who had been Italian subjects. When it did not receive a prompt

answer, Italy withdrew its ambassador from Washington and there was a brief war scare between the two nations, its flames fanned energetically by the sensationalistic U.S. press. In 1892, after a year-long break in diplomatic relations, the United States paid Italy an indemnity of \$25,000.

From this day forward, no one who knows what pity is will set foot in New Orleans without horror. Here and there, like the last gusts of a storm, a group of murderers comes around a corner and disappears, rifles on their shoulders. Over there another group goes by, made up of lawyers and businessmen, robust blue-eyed men with revolvers at their hips and leaves on their lapels, leaves from the tree where they have hung a dead man—a dead Italian—one of the nineteen Italians who were in jail, accused of having taken part in the murder of Police Chief Hennessy. A jury of North Americans had absolved four of the nineteen, the proceedings against a few others had been declared a mistrial, and others had not yet been tried.

And a few hours after that jury of North Americans absolved the four Italians, a committee of leading citizens named by the mayor to assist in punishing the murder, a committee led by the chief of one of the city's political factions, convokes the citizens in printed and public appeals to a riot to be held the next day, and presides over the crowd that gathers at the foot of a statue of Henry Clay, then attacks the parish jail with only the most minimal interference, meant only to preserve appearances, from the police, the militia, the mayor, or the governor; breaks down the compliant doors of the prison; rushes bellowing through the corridors in pursuit of the fleeing Italians, and with the butt-ends of its revolvers smashes in the heads of the Italian political leader, the banker, and the consul—consul of Bolivia—who are accused of having been the accomplices of a gang of murderers, a secret gang of the Mafia. Three more of those who, like the banker, had been absolved, along with seven others, are killed, against the wall, in the corners, on the ground, at point-blank range. Returning from this task, the citizens cheer the lawyer who presided over the massacre and carry him through the streets on their shoulders.

Can these be the streets of blooming houses where tendrils of morning glory climb between white shutters, where mulattas in their turbans and aprons bring in gaily colored Indian baskets from the wrought-

LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Human Condition,
Values, and the
Search for Identity

edited by

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Introduction

DEFINING LATIN AMERICA: NATIONAL VERSUS CONTINENTAL APPROACHES

The selections included in Section A of Part IV deal with the problem of determining what it means to speak of "Latin America" and "Latin Americans" and the peculiar problems facing thinkers who analyze Latin American social reality, both within the countries of Latin America and in the United States. The nations and the people of the region that has become known as Latin America are not homogenous, as the umbrella term might lead some to think. The countries that constitute Latin America have different political systems, different currencies, different languages, and significantly different histories. Simón Bolívar was "the Liberator" of most of the countries of South America, including Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru (and British Guiana), but he did not liberate Mexico or Argentina from the clutches of Spain, for example. Obviously, each of the nations of Latin America shares a common past of colonization and an ensuing struggle for independence, but Brazil's relation to Portugal was quite unlike the relation that the Spanish colonies had to Spain. The nations of Latin America did not deal with the condition of colonization in identical ways, nor were they colonized in the same way.

Nevertheless, there are common themes that tie the philosophers of the region together at particular times. In dealing with the problem of defining the identity of Latin American philosophy, some philosophers favor what can be called a national approach whereas others favor a continental approach. For example, Sarmiento deals in particular with Argentina and the special problems besetting that nation. Likewise, Mar-

iátegui addresses Peruvian reality, not Latin American reality, and Ramos turns his attention to the problem facing Mexicans. In contrast, Martí addresses issues of *nuestra América* (our America), emphasizing what is common to all the nations that compose Latin America, and Vasconcelos speaks of a *raza cósmica* (a cosmic race), not of a Mexican race.

Which approach makes more sense? Certainly, if the main question facing Latin American philosophers is that of cultural identity, given the fact that there is great variety among the populations of different countries within Latin America, answers to the question might be substantially different from country to country or even within the same country, and so national or regional approaches might be more appropriate to capture the identity of these peoples. Consider, for example, the Mayan population of Chiapas, Mexico, and the Náhuatl-speaking weavers of Guerrero, as compared to the cosmopolitan population of Mexico City. (The radical differences between the lifestyles of the *criollos* or American-born Spaniards, the *mestizos*, or peoples of mixed indigenous and Spanish heritage, and the *indios* are still evident today.) Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay have large indigenous populations, whereas countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela, for example, do not.

So, one may ask whether this difference might not give rise to a substantially different response to the question: Who are we? Is it not the case that a Peruvian philosopher concerned with capturing or attempting to provide an analysis of Peruvian social reality has to take the Amerindian culture into consideration, whereas a philosopher in Argentina with the same philosophical task might legitimately be more concerned with the ways in which various waves of European immigration have influenced the social reality of Argentina? The popular and rather humorous saying that "The Mexicans descend from the Aztecs, the Peruvians from the Incas, the Argentinians from the ships, and the Venezuelans from the oil" has some truth in it insofar as it points to the unique historical circumstances of each of these nations. And this truth might be overlooked when we approach the issue of cultural identity by attending merely to Latin America.

The issue of identity has also a political dimension, for it is clear that the nations of Latin America have varied political pasts. Therefore, something important is lost when we generalize in our philosophical investigation of identity and speak of the identity of all Latin Americans as if it were the same, whether one is concerned with a Náhuatl-speaking weaver in Mexico or a cattle rancher in Argentina.

In order to arrive at a definition of Latin American identity, we would do well to pay close attention to both the national and the continental approaches to this problem. There is something like *nuestra América* that is worthy of philosophical attention and, therefore, it behooves philoso-

phers to go beyond national boundaries and to take something like a *raza cósmica* seriously. It does indeed make sense to speak of a Hispanic/Latino identity, yet this must be done with the awareness that the *gauchos* are particularly Argentine and an important element in understanding the particular breed of Latin American reality that is not only Latin American but also Argentine. Likewise, the problems of the indigenous populations in Peru and in Mexico are particular to those nations and are not representative of any continental problems besetting the entire region. In short, to capture accurately the social reality of Latin America, we must adopt both a continental and a national approach, for when we deal with the problem of the nations and the peoples of Latin America, certain aspects of social reality can best be addressed continentally and others are best dealt with via a national or regional approach. We uncover certain aspects of the social reality of the nations of Latin America if we approach the reality of postcolonial Latin American countries one by one, giving each their proper place of cultural, historical, and political significance, which otherwise would be missed.

A NEW DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY: HISPANICS/LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES

The problems facing philosophers as they grapple with the issue of the identity of Latin American nations and peoples become even more complicated for philosophers who deal with these issues in the context of the United States. What happens to the identity of Mexicans (whether of European, indigenous, or *mestizo* descent), Cubans (of Spanish, African, or mixed race descent), Colombians, Dominicans, etc., who immigrate to the United States? Can we speak meaningfully of these groups with one single term? If so, what term would capture the identity of this group? Or is the group so diverse that no single term can adequately capture its identity?

These issues become particularly relevant when the question of rights is raised. In particular, do groups of immigrants from Latin America have special rights and should they receive special benefits because they belong to those groups? To shed light on this problem, we have included three selections from contemporary philosophers who have dealt with these issues. Selections from the work of Jorge Gracia, Linda Martín Alcoff, and Ofelia Schutte show that the discussion of the identity of Hispanics/Latinos in the United States is complicated precisely because the group comprises a variety of ethnic, religious, and racial strains. And it is no easy task to find a term that will do justice to this diversity, while capturing the underlying unity of the group.

Latin American philosophers have discussed and developed views of

the identity of the nations and peoples of Latin America, but their discussion of identity does not end there. They have also posed questions concerning the identity of Latin American thought and philosophy itself. There are many different approaches to this problem. Let us begin by considering the traditional ways in which this problem has been addressed by Latin American philosophers.

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICAN THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY: UNIVERSALISM, CULTURALISM, AND THE CRITICAL VIEW

In spite of the fact that Latin American philosophers have expressed many positions on the subject of what constitutes Latin American thought and philosophy, their opinions can be classified under three basic headings: universalist, culturalist, and critical. The first refers to a view inspired by a long tradition that goes back to the Greeks. According to this view, philosophy is a science (be it of concepts or of reality); as such, the principles it adopts and inferences it draws are meant to be universally valid and, consequently, it makes no sense to talk about a Latin American philosophy, just as it does not make any sense to talk about Latin American chemistry or physics. Philosophy, as a discipline of learning, cannot acquire idiosyncratic characteristics that may, in turn, make it Latin American, French, or Italian. Philosophy, strictly speaking, is simply philosophy, or philosophy "as such."¹ In spite of the fact that normally one may speak of "French" and "German" philosophy, this does not mean that philosophy as such is any different in the two cases. Categories like "French" and "German" are used as *historical* designations to refer to historical periods that include the thinking of the time or place one wishes to discuss. This does not mean that philosophy in a particular period is in itself any different from philosophy in another period. What may be considered idiosyncratic to the philosophy of a given period is not an essential part of philosophy, but simply the product of circumstances surrounding the development of the discipline at the time. As a result, then, such idiosyncrasies, which could also be called accidents, are not part of the discipline and are not included in its study; they are only part of historical studies concerning the period in question, just as a mathematical error is not part of mathematics, and just as the study of Egyptian physical theories is not part of physics. Philosophy, like mathematics and other disciplines of human learning, consists of a series of truths and methods of inquiry that have no spatiotemporal characteristics. Its application and validity are universal and therefore independent of the historical conditions in which they are discovered. The conclusion, for instance, that rationality is part of human nature is intended as a claim that is true or false anywhere and at any time.

Consequently, the answer to the question of whether there is a Latin American philosophy is, from this perspective, negative. Furthermore, this view not only denies that there is a Latin American philosophy, but it also rejects that there could be one, for it sees an intrinsic incompatibility between the nature of philosophy as a universal discipline of learning and such particular products as culture.

To this, the culturalist responds by contending that the universalist makes a serious mistake. Philosophy, as everything based on human experience, depends on specific spatiotemporal coordinates for its validity. There are no universal and absolute truths. Truth is always concrete and the product of a viewpoint, an individual perspective. This can be applied even to mathematical truths, as Ortega, a philosopher followed by many culturalists, suggests.²

Orteguian perspectivism, introduced in Latin America by many of Ortega's disciples, particularly José Gaos, is to a great extent responsible for the popularity of the culturalist view in Latin America. A philosophy that emphasizes the value of the particular and idiosyncratic lends itself quite easily to support the views of culturalist thinkers.³ Consequently, many of them adopted this view without hesitation, adapting it to their conceptual needs. This is how the idea of a Latin American philosophy as a philosophy peculiar to the continent came about, a philosophy different from that of other cultures and particularly opposed to Anglo-Saxon culture and philosophy. This philosophy is supposedly the product of Latin American culture, which is in turn the product of the perspective from which Latin Americans think. This view has given way to the search for an autochthonous philosophy that can unambiguously reflect the characteristics of Latin American culture.

From this perspective, it is not only possible to find a Latin American philosophy, it is actually the case that any genuine philosophy produced in Latin America *must* be Latin American. If it is not, then it is simply a copy of philosophies produced elsewhere, imported and imposed on the continent. As such, these alien ways of thinking do not constitute a genuine or authentic philosophy when they are adopted in Latin America, since they do not have any relation to Latin American culture, being as they are the product of perspectives and conditions completely foreign to those of the continent.

Many of the thinkers who adopt this view conclude that, at present, there is no Latin American philosophy because the only philosophy that has been practiced in the region is imported. But at the same time, while accepting this, they trust in a different future. Others, on the contrary, point out that there are some Latin American philosophical perspectives that can be classified as Latin American, and although they may be few, they are sufficient to justify the use of the term "Latin American philosophy" with a culturalist connotation.

A third view adopted by Latin American philosophers in relation to this problem may be described as critical; it has been put forward as a reaction against both universalism and culturalism, although it takes some elements from both. This view, like universalism, rejects the existence of a Latin American philosophy not because the term "Latin American" is incompatible with the term "philosophy," but rather because until now philosophy in Latin America has had an ideological character, that is, it has not been a free pursuit. Philosophy has been used and continues to be used, *pace* the adherents of the critical view, to support ideas conducive to both the continuation of a status quo and the benefit of certain groups. To support this charge, those who adhere to the critical view point to scholasticism and positivism as philosophical developments that thwarted the development and progress of Latin American philosophy.

With regard to scholasticism, these critics point out that the Spanish Crown made use of scholastic philosophy to maintain its political and economic control over the New World. Scholastic philosophy, they suggest, became an instrument to sustain an otherwise ideologically untenable position.

In the case of positivism, they emphasize how certain Latin American governments used this philosophical school to justify both their notion of social order and supremacy of a ruling elite. The most frequently cited case is that of Porfirio Díaz's government in Mexico, which adopted positivism as the official doctrine of his dictatorship. The inference drawn, on the basis of this and other examples, is that until now there has not been, and in the future there cannot be, a genuine and authentic Latin American philosophy so long as present social and economic conditions prevail. Only when this situation changes and philosophy is no longer used ideologically to justify the *modus vivendi* can there be an opportunity for a genuine and authentic Latin American philosophy to develop. Some of those who defend this view think that this Latin American philosophy will be the product of a particular Latin American perspective, adopting therefore a culturalist view with respect to the future. Others, on the contrary, take a universalist position and suggest that this nonideological philosophy will be universally valid and not relative to the particular circumstances of Latin America. They all coincide, however, in viewing the role of philosophy in Latin America in a critical light.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Explicit questions about the existence of a Latin American philosophy were first explored in the writings of Leopoldo Zea and Risieri Frondizi in the 1940s. The growth of philosophical literature until then seemed to jus-

tify and perhaps even require an investigation into the nature, themes, and limits of the philosophical activity. The proliferation of specialized journals, the creation of philosophy departments in various universities, and the foundation of international associations that had started to coordinate philosophical activity in the continent made possible the raising of an issue that continues to concern Latin American philosophers until today.⁴

Even before Zea and Frondizi, however, the Argentine Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884) had raised the problem of the character and future of Latin American philosophy.⁵ An outstanding member of the thriving liberal movement of his time, Alberdi put forth his ideas under the influence of a liberalism very closely related to the philosophical rationalism, the anticlericalism, and the optimism about industrialization that were so characteristic of nineteenth-century Latin America. His view of philosophy, consequently, is not alien to the basic tenets of this movement. Alberdi, however, had a high degree of awareness with respect to the connection between philosophy and cultural identity that, for good reasons, has drawn the attention of many philosophers who have subsequently focused on the theme of Latin American philosophy.

According to Alberdi, a Latin American philosophy must have a social and political character intimately related to the most vital needs of the continent. Philosophy is an instrument that can help to introduce an awareness of the social, political, and economic needs of Latin American nations. This is why Alberdi categorically rejected metaphysics and other "pure and abstract" philosophical fields, for he viewed them as alien to urgent national needs.⁶

As the selections from Part A indicate, since the independence of the Latin American territories from the Spanish and Portuguese colonial yoke in the nineteenth century, the issue of the identity of the nations and peoples of Latin America has been explored in great depth by a wide variety of philosophers. This search to define the nations and the peoples of this vast and variegated region continued to shape the history of ideas in the twentieth century. The more rigorous philosophical discussion of identity took longer to be developed and sustained.

Our discussion of Alberdi's early comments attests to one of the intellectually rich ways in which this search for Latin American identity was carried out. Yet, in spite of Alberdi's reflections on the character of Latin American philosophy, it was not until the fifth decade of the twentieth century that the problem of the philosophical identity of Latin America was explicitly formulated and fully explored. The decade of the 1940s was a period in which intellectuals looked back on Latin American culture and attempted to use it as the basis for philosophical thinking. A generation of Mexican authors inspired in Ortega y Gasset's perspectivism, introduced in Latin America by the *transferrados*, or Spanish exiles, and particularly by José Gaos, sug-

gested that the cultural "circumstances" of the continent provided the basis for the development of an original Latin American philosophy? Leopoldo Zea, the leader of these intellectuals, asserted that any type of philosophical reflection emerging on the continent could be classified as "Latin American philosophy" by virtue of the intimate relationship between philosophy and culture.⁸ He also suggested that this philosophy had a historical foundation, owing to the fact that Latin Americans had always, in Zea's judgment, thought of their situation from a vitally Latin American perspective.⁹ Zea categorically affirms the existence of a Latin American philosophy which springs from the unique historical circumstances of Latin American social reality. Following Ortega, Zea has a conception of philosophy as a historical product, emerging from particular perspectives, but not ending there. As he claims in the selection included below, "The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America": "When we attempt to resolve the problems of man in any spatiotemporal situation whatever, we will necessarily have to start with ourselves because we are men; we will have to start with our own circumstances, our limitations, and our being Latin Americans, just as the Greeks started with their own circumstance called Greece. But, just like them, we cannot limit ourselves to our own circumstances. . . . [We] must also be aware of our capacities as members of the cultural community called humanity." The problem that remains is how to bridge the gap between the particular cultural circumstances from which we begin and the universal circumstance of humanity toward which we strive.

Zea's culturalist perspective has won many adherents. His supporters find in his approach to defining philosophy a way of opening space for contributions that do not fall under the umbrella of the European and Anglo-American philosophical traditions and hence tend to remain marginalized. Abelardo Villegas, Diego Domínguez Caballero, and Guillermo Francovich are just a few of the philosophers who support Zea's view.¹⁰

A common criticism of this way of defining philosophy is that it amounts to a kind of philosophical nationalism, and that moreover, it leaves out of the group of Latin American philosophers those who work in logic, theory of action, ethics, and similar traditional, philosophical fields. A philosopher who does not specifically address the Latin American circumstance is not a *true* Latin American philosopher. Risieri Frondizi was a leading critic of Zea's way of conceiving Latin American philosophy. According to Frondizi, philosophy must be distinguished from cultural nationalism and should be considered independently of geographical boundaries. One should speak of philosophy *in* Latin America rather than of a philosophy *of* Latin America.¹¹ Philosophy, as Francisco Romero pointed out, has no last names, that is, it must be understood as a discipline with universal characteristics.¹²

Even Vasconcelos, whose work exerted a strong influence on Zea,

while sympathetic to a culturalist perspective, adopted a universalist position when discussing the nature of philosophical activity. Vasconcelos went so far as to deny explicitly the existence of a peculiarly Latin American philosophy on the grounds that the discipline was universal in character, although he conceded that it was the prerogative of each culture to reconsider the great themes of universal philosophy. Philosophical nationalism had no place in his thought.¹³

The polemic that suddenly surrounded the question of the existence of a Latin American philosophy in the 1940s had the effect, in many cases, of undermining the focus on identity in general that had characterized Latin American philosophical thought prior to the dispute, and which in many respects had prompted it. The controversy set a precedent for discussions of culture that became increasingly separated from the actual analysis of cultural phenomena. The culturalists themselves, who based their conception of a Latin American philosophy on a cultural perspective, have left few detailed accounts of the continent's cultural *ethos*, and frequently refer to culture in very general terms.

The controversy continued to grow and attracted much attention among members of practically every philosophical tradition, with the exception of philosophical analysis. Existentialists, phenomenologists, Thomists, Kantians, Ortegaians, etc., all felt compelled to explore this issue. But since none of the different interpretations of the cultural identity of the continent has become widely accepted, it became impossible in turn to establish a consensus on the notion of Latin American philosophy. This is the reason why during the 1960s a number of authors re-addressed this problem, although this time not in terms of universalism and culturalism. It was at this time that the critical position took shape. Augusto Salazar Bondy, for example, argued for the view that philosophy in Latin America is the province of intellectual elites. These elites borrowed European cultural forms uncritically, and they lacked an identifiable and rigorous method and awareness of other social groups. Viewed in this light, the problems of culture and philosophy have been the problems of only a small minority of intellectuals alienated from the rest of society, and from the economic, social, and political problems of the continent.¹⁴ This position, which has also been shared by Juan Rivano and others, suggests that the history of the controversy concerning the existence and nature of Latin American philosophy epitomizes the lack of concern with the most urgent problems of their respective communities on the part of the region's intellectuals.¹⁵

It is in this context that the (so-called) philosophy of liberation appears. For philosophers like Enrique Dussel, Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, and Arturo Andrés Roig, the fundamental task of philosophy in Latin America consists in the social and national liberation from the unjust relations such as that of dominater-dominated which have traditionally char-

acterized it. For Roig in particular, this implies the integration of the Latin American peoples based on the consciousness of the historicity of the American "man" and of the history of philosophy in Latin America. He rejects the formalism and ontologism characteristic of traditional academic philosophy, favoring instead a philosophy of commitment that seeks integrating concepts in Latin America. This area of philosophy is rooted in the political discourse of the marginal and exploited segments of society, and given the enduring political and economic instability that plagues the countries of Latin America, liberation philosophy continues to be of great social relevance.

In spite of the strong disagreement voiced by the various authors discussed and in the works included below, most of them would agree that philosophy has historically provided one of the most important vehicles for the expression of cultural concerns in Latin American society. Not always listened to, and at times suppressed by regimes of the Right or the Left, philosophy in many ways reflects the very situation of Latin American society today. And given that the region does not enjoy the stability of its Northern neighbor, its philosophy will continue to reflect the general turmoil of the region, a place where the *caudillo* is not a ghost of the past, where tanks still roll onto the streets when problems become too threatening, and, in short, a place where the philosophers have no ivory tower in which they can hide from the distractions of the world.

NOTES

1. Risieri Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (March 1949): 355. See also a slightly different use of the expression in Fernando Salmerón, "Los problemas de la cultura mexicana desde el punto de vista de la filosofía," in *Cuestiones educativas y páginas sobre México*, p. 137; originally published in *La palabra y el hombre* 6 (1958).
2. José Ortega y Gasset, *El hombre y la gente*, chap. 13, in *Obras completas*, 3:115.
3. See Samuel Ramos, *Historia de la filosofía mexicana* (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1943), p. 149.
4. One of the most useful bibliographical tools for the study of Latin American philosophy is the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, which has been publishing a section on philosophy since 1939. The Web site maintained by José Luis Gómez-Martínez, *Repertorio Americano*, is also an excellent resource, with contributions from leading scholars on major Latin American philosophers. Gómez-Martínez's *Anuario Bibliográfico de Historia del Pensamiento Ibero e Iberoamericano* (published in five volumes, 1989-1993) is also a good resource.
5. A prolific writer and one of the outstanding members of the generation of Argentinean intellectuals who criticized the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas,

Alberdi spent many years in exile in Uruguay, Chile, and Europe. The piece of writing that most specifically addresses our subject of concerns here is "ideas para presidir la confección del curso de filosofía contemporánea," in *Escritos póstumos de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, vol. 15 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Europea, Moreno y Defensa, 1895-1901). This essay was originally published in 1842.

6. Alberdi, "Ideas," p. 613.
7. José Gaos, *En torno a la filosofía mexicana* (Mexico City: Porrúa y Obregón, 1952), 53-54, 88. An excellent study of the impact and importance of the Spanish contributions to Latin American philosophy is provided by José Luis Abellán's *Filosofía española en América* (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1967) and José Luis Abellán and Antonio Monclús, eds., *El pensamiento español contemporáneo y la idea de América*, especially vol. 2, *El pensamiento en el exilio* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1983).
8. Zea, *Ensayos*, p. 166.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
10. Abelardo Villegas, *Panorama de la filosofía iberoamericana actual* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1963); Diego Domínguez Caballero, "Motivo y sentido de una investigación de lo panameño," in Zea, *Antología*, 157-69; Guillermo Francovich, *El pensamiento boliviano en el siglo 20* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956), and "Pachamama," in Zea, *Antología*, pp. 79-87.
11. Frondizi, "Hay una filosofía iberoamericana?" p. 166.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
13. Vasconcelos, *Indología: Una interpretación de la cultura iberoamericana* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1926), pp. 109-10.
14. Augusto Salazar Bondy, *Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1968), sec. 8, "Una interpretación."
15. Juan Rivano was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1926 and taught philosophy at the University of Chile until the Chilean military regime imprisoned him in 1975 and forced him into exile in 1976. Trained in logic, he has written mostly on the subjects of theory of knowledge and philosophy of science. Rivano addressed the problem of Latin American philosophy in his *El punto de vista de la miseria* (Santiago: Facultad de Filosofía y Educación, Universidad de Chile, 1965), pp. 145-72. Some of his publications include *Entre Hegel y Marx: Una meditación ante los nuevos horizontes del humanismo* (1962), *Lógica elemental* (1970), and *Introducción al pensamiento dialéctico* (1972).