Introduction

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Although there is increasing intellectual curiosity about Latin American philosophy, in the English-speaking world there is no easy access to comprehensive, yet up-to-date, materials on its developments — whether topical, historical, or disciplinary. We believe that the volume that we have put together will remedy this problem by making available to English-speaking readers, for the first time, a comprehensive collection of previously unpublished writings by leading experts in the field exploring such developments. Some of its chapters are designed to offer in-depth overviews representing current Latin American perspectives on topics such as globalization, human rights, women’s rights, language, race, and ethnic identity. Others aim at providing accurate discussions of either topics in the history of the discipline that are of interest today, or metaphilosophical questions about the sub-disciplines of philosophy that have flourished in Latin America. Each chapter has been newly commissioned on the basis of expertise in the philosophical tradition most appropriate to its content, independently of whether the scholar is working in one or another Latin American country, or elsewhere. The final product is a coherent volume addressing the central issues and arguments of Latin American philosophy, while preserving its diversity of voices and approaches.

The book is divided in four parts. Although there is unavoidable overlapping among the chapters that make these up, each part contains precisely those chapters that we have judged more relevant to its subject: namely, the history of Latin American philosophy and its movements (Part I), philosophical topics of special interest in the discipline now (Part II), recent developments in the sub-disciplines of philosophy in Latin America (Part III), and biographical information about some of Latin American philosophy's great figures. For each of these parts, we envisioned chapters that would not only be illustrative of major lines of work but also qualify for being state-of-the-art, rigorous yet accessible to those unfamiliar with the discipline.

A close look at the volume would reveal that some chapters bear on philosophy in Latin America, others on a philosophy that is distinctively Latin American. But arguably, these two (not at all uncommon) construals are in fact compatible. And even when the expression 'Latin American philosophy' is ambiguous in at least these two ways, for most cases that semantic shortcoming can be eliminated by appealing to context. We expect that attentive readers will do so to avoid equivocation of the sort that often plagues debates about what, exactly, is Latin American philosophy. Readers interested
in a distinctive Latin American philosophy are more likely to find that construal in Part II, some of whose chapters reflect on it explicitly. Those curious about philosophy in Latin America could more easily detect this construal in the chapters of Parts I and III.

As editors of this Companion, we have adopted a pluralistic view of the discipline also in some other ways. For example, besides philosophy itself, disciplines such as literature, history, politics, and the social sciences in Latin America are represented in the collection whenever there is evidence of their contribution to philosophical topics within the scope of this collection. In addition, we commissioned chapters written from a number of philosophical traditions such as continental philosophy, analytic philosophy, feminist theory, and liberation philosophy.

These remarks, together with the table of contents, make clear our criteria for organizing the chapters: historical in Part I (in chronological sequence), topical in Part II, metaphilosophical in Part III, and biographical in Part IV. In designing Part I, we faced one of the most pressing questions concerning the history of Latin American philosophy: When did it begin? Some have it that it was not until the so-called fundadores (founders) of the early twentieth century, often credited with initiating a “normal” period of academic philosophy in the subcontinent. Others hold that philosophy began with the boom of nineteenth-century Latin American positivism. But such cuts, if not biased, seem at best arbitrary. After all, there is evidence pointing to scholastic philosophy devoted to topics raised during the Conquest and three centuries of colonial ruling that followed—which qualifies, at least topically, for being Latin American. Moreover, the Maya and other pre-Columbian peoples left well-preserved texts that attest their philosophical concern—which can also be found in the writings of early travelers and missionaries. Thus, we decided to include discussions of these periods in Part I. The reader of these chapters, however, will find that historical issues there go beyond mere exegesis or history of ideas to enter into philosophical argumentation. In doing so, we expect that they will contribute to a deeper understanding not only of the history of the discipline but also of debates at the center of recent scholarship on topics such as whether the philosophical concerns of pre-Columbian cultures or the writings by Spanish philosophers about the morality of the Conquest could be considered part of Latin American philosophy at all.

Part II offers a range of diverse contributions to topics of current interest in Latin American philosophy. Some topics such as identity, colonization, and mestizaje have had a long trajectory of recognition in philosophical discussions, while others such as the nature of ethnic group terms, the impact of postmodern thought, and the thoughts of Latina/o philosophers on race and ethnicity have a more recent trajectory. In all cases these chapters provide current approaches to the analysis, interpretation, or critical evaluation of the selected topics. While they help to define certain logical or philosophical features of the topics in question, the arguments offered should be taken as open ended in terms of their potential for opening up further discussion and debate.

Colonization is most often studied and debated in historical, cultural, economic, or political terms. Less often, as our topics chapter does here, it considered in terms of the emergence of new linguistic practices. What role did the Spanish language play in the context of colonization, it may be asked. What insights may the socio-linguistic features of such contemporary phenomena as Spanglish offer as a way of understanding the processes of colonization in the sixteenth century? The argument presented holds that there is still much to be known and assessed regarding indigenous speakers' resistance to the official imposition of Spanish as the language of empire in the Americas.

With regard to identity, a major topic throughout the twentieth century and up to our own times has been what constitutes the identity of Latin American philosophy. The historiographical approach included here explains the central role the concept of identity has played in constituting the very notion of a Latin American philosophy. In addition to the traditional categories used in classifying how the identity of Latin American philosophy should be construed—that is, whether it should be regarded from a universalist, culturalist, or critical position, the more recent concept of Latin American philosophy as the philosophy of an ethnos is presented. In this view, what belongs to an ethnos should be understood in historical, not essentialist, terms and as subject to changing conditions.

One interesting feature of contemporary approaches to issues occupying a longstanding tradition in Latin American scholarship and philosophy is the incorporation of new perspectives resulting from recent debates in metaphysics and epistemology, for example, the critique of essentialism with regard to the positing of historical, cultural, ethnical, racial, and other forms of identification and identity. Although the critique of essentialism is often associated with postmodern approaches to the concept of identity, its influence has ranged well beyond postmodernism as shown in the featured topics of identity and mestizaje in Part II. What is clear is that some of the old designators of identity such as the concept of mestizaje are subject to re-signification, partly due to the introduction of women writers who no longer theorize this concept from a masculine position, but also due to the experiences of Latinas whose experience contrasts significantly from that of many Latin American women on the border. As the entry in this section shows, the sense of dislocation experienced by many U.S. Latinas/as with regard to any single racial identity undermines the essentialist nature of older concepts of mestizaje.

Among the more recent topics of debate in Latin American philosophy we find the conversation between North American philosophers and Latino/Latinx philosophers on the latter’s contrasting approaches to race and ethnicity, given that the topics of race and ethnicity have also drawn much recent attention among non-Latino/Latinx philosophers in the United States. Here we include one view, regretfully limited (due to the size constraints of the volume) specifically to the analysis of three important contemporary Latino/a philosophers. In particular, attention is given to the question of how to construe the meaning of race or ethnicity in view of claiming reparations for past (and present) discrimination, how to define the constitutive features of an ethnic group, and how to conceptualize the lived experiences of racialization in a racist society in such a way as to resist and transform the cultural and socioeconomic values undergirding racism.

Another central recent topic of philosophical debate addresses three sets of related questions: whether ethnic-group terms should be considered names or predicates; how and why the analyses by proponents of either view differ in defining the semantic properties of such terms; and the nature of some normative issues involved in the selection and use of ethnic-group terms. Yet another issue is the introduction and development by a group of Brazilian logicians of a new kind of logic called ‘paraconsistent logic.’
These approaches offer a clear formal framework to examine philosophical issues about science, but they tend to be highly idealized and pay very little or no attention to actual scientific practice. On the other hand, informal approaches, which tend to be very sensitive to the complexities of scientific practice, have also been devised. But they tend not to offer a formal framework to understand scientific reasoning, and have very little or no unity. Now, in Latin American philosophy of science, a combination of these two approaches has been articulated, integrating the expressive resources of a formal approach with the sensitivity to the details of scientific practice. A more unified approach has then emerged.

A similar sensitivity to practice is also found in certain approaches to philosophy of law in Latin America. In this case, rather than scientific practice, legal practice is the relevant focus. As opposed to traditional forms of legal positivism, some Latin American philosophers of law have argued that when legal officials, such as judges, justify decisions regarding legal rights their reasoning is often informed by moral considerations. Thus, the traditional conception of legal justification that emphasizes that this justification is established in court by invoking only legal norms and facts is rejected. Moral norms have a crucial role in legal justification, and on this anti-positivist conception, they inform the actual decision processes of legal officials.

When we consider the contributions to feminist philosophy in Latin America, we also find its distinctive character. Sensitivity to women’s concrete lives and their vulnerability to discrimination and oppression have been important features of feminist philosophy inside and outside Latin America. But in the case of Latin American women, both the debates on the relationship between theory and practice and the special complexities of race and ethnicity (e.g., the so-called mulata and Black population, and the original peoples) have transformed feminist theory in significant ways. The facts that some Latin American women have identified themselves as part of marginalized ethnic-racial groups and that this identification has motivated them in their search for social justice become significant features that inform Latin American feminist philosophy, with its sensitivity to the historical and cultural specifics in which the understanding of race and ethnicity occurs in Latin America.

These are merely a few illustrations of ways in which disciplinary developments in Latin American philosophy have a distinctive character. As will become clear to readers, several additional cases are examined in this part of the volume.

But let us now turn to Part IV, which contains two chapters that we believe will be of interest to those unfamiliar with the figures of Latin American philosophy. An entirely biographical chapter may help reduce unfamiliarity with the lives and work of philosophers (broadly construed as to include early philosophical thinkers), while a chapter on the philosophical development of a prominent Latin American philosopher of science (Mario Bunge) may help reduce unfamiliarity about the reception of an important philosophical tradition in the subcontinent.

Needless to say, the selection criteria adopted for the biographical entries are far from being optimal. But as usual, considerations of space and consistency conflicted with more permissive standards that could have allowed us to include biographies of many others who no doubt deserve a place in the discipline. Our criteria for inclusion in the biographical chapter are these: for all figures, having done notable work on some of the major issues, movements, and/or disciplines that make up Latin American
philosophy (in either of the above construals); second, for authors prior to 1900, being either philosophers or nonphilosopher essayists on philosophical topics; and third, for authors after 1900, being academic philosophers born prior to 1950 who either work in Latin America or write on Latin-American-related philosophical topics.

We hope that the volume contributes to the further development of Latin American philosophy among all those interested in this field.

Part I

Historical Perspectives