PHILOSOPHY IN LATIN AMERICA IN THE 20TH CENTURY

(PROBLEMS AND CURRENTS)

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In this extremely short work, the exposition will be organized according to the most significant currents of Latin American Philosophy in the 20th century. I will analyse the central problems and main philosophers of each current, knowing that I will have to leave out many names. At the end of the work, we submit a minimal and indicative general bibliography, according to countries – even though we did not treat the theme from a national perspective – and of philosophical currents. The chronology can be useful for the reader who is a beginner to the theme.

#1. General Panorama[1]

The process of philosophy in Latin America in the 20th century begins with the presence of a positivist philosophy (of Comtean inspiration, but posteriorly Spencerian or Haeckelian) articulated for hegemonic minorities of political society who established the liberal state in the second half of the 19th century. The antipositivist reaction (#2), vitalist (inspired by Henry Bergson), sometimes even anti-rationalist (departing from Schopenhauer or Pascal), historicist (José Ortega y Gasset) or traditional (Third Scolastic with influences from the universities of Louvain or Freiburg) established Latin American university philosophy. It is the "founders", in the sense of Francisco Romero[2], that in some fashion articulated themselves in the nascent national and industrial bourgeoisie (in countries such as Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, etc.) or the populist movements (such as the

[1] See at the end bibliography 1.

[2] Romero, 1952. It is recommended, in the case of Latin American philosophers named in the text, to verify the complete name, nationality, date of birth and death (if it has taken place), and their principal works, at the end of this work in the *Minimal Chronology* or in the *Bibliography*.

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Mexican revolution of 1910 or Cárdenas from 1934 on, that of the radical party of Hipólito Irigoyen in Argentina in 1918, or that of Perón from 1946 on, or Getulio Vargas' nationalism in Brazil from 1930 on, etc.).

Their consciousness were sundered by a "lack of focus" – in Miró Quesada's[3] expression:

> Latin Americans who gave themselves to the activity of philosophizing could understand what they read. But they could not give a complete account *of what they did not comprehend.*[4]

They lived in a non-European world, but they reflected out of a philosophy for which reality was what was European. This "lack of focus" made philosophical reflection ambiguous.[5]

The process deepened in what Francisco Miró Quesada[6] denominated a "second generation", or the "normalization", which begins a "bifurcation" between a current (#3.a) rather inspired in Heideggerian ontology (i.e., Carlos Astrada or Wagner de Reyna) and another rather oriented by Husserlian phenomenology (i.e., Miguel Reale, Miguel Angel Virasoro or Luis Juan Guerrero). This last one attained a certain impact and began a school. Among its developers there were also axiologists, personalist anthropologists, metaphysicians, and other points of view.

From the beginning of the 20th century, until its end, there exists a current of philosophers (#4) who use neo-scholasticism at the beginning, through a revalorisation of Thomas of Aquinas; in the thirties it turns nationalistic in political philosophy; divides itself in the fifties because of the personalist movement (inspired by Maritain or Mounier); some became earnest collaborators in the military dictatorships; others opened themselves up to new creative Latin American philosophical currents.

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[3] Miró Quesada, 1974, pp. 30 ff.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[5] It is with respect to the "professorial style" of this concrete generation that Salazar Bondy (and I myself) indicated that philosophy was "imitative or inauthentic" and not with respect to the totality of Latin American thought that affirmed itself as existing and as historical reflection (which in no way is negated. See my article: "Leopoldo Zea's project of a Philosophy of Latin American History" in Amaryll Chanady, ed., *Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1994, pp. 26-42.

[6] Miró Quesada, 1974. They are the ones who institutionalize ("normalize") for a second time university philosophy since the first "normalization" took place from 1553 on with the foundation of the first universities in Mexico and Lima and philosophical studies within the renovated second Scholastic cultivated with precision by some great creative Latin American philosophers.

Since the 19th century, because of the anarco-syndicalist movements and in contact with the First and Second Internationals, socialist thinking, and later Marxist (#5), made itself present with Juan B. Justo. José Carlos Mariátegui meant the most creative in the twenties; shortly thereafter it was known of Guardia Mayorga; frontism and the War of 39 weakened the movement; the Cuban revolution impacted all of Latin American philosophy in the sixties. Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez gave it its own stature of problematic, during a period in which Althusserianism reigned (in the seventies); and today is embattled in the crisis produced by the events of 1989.

From within Husserlian phenomenological or ontological thinking (Leopoldo Zea) there originated a problematization of the Latin American as history that must be reconstructed with sense (Arturo Ardao or Arturo Roig) and as a problematic that has to be defined and developed (Abelardo Villegas). It is the birth of a strong current that formulates the theme "Latin America" as object of philosophical reflection (#6). It is the "third generation", pressed to reach the authenticity and the affirmation of a Latin American identity that formed a school and extended vigorously throughout the entire continent.

Facing the methodological difficulty of the prior current, epistemological studies, after World War II and under Anglo-Saxon influence (Miró Quesada, Gregorio Klimovsky or Mario Bunge), and the philosophical "analysis" in search of "strict rigor" (Luis Villoro, Fernando Salmerón or Alejandro Rossi) (#7), are undertaken. This current achieved new contributions in universal philosophical thinking and elevated in general the level of philosophical precision in the continent.

Having diverse tributaries (from phenomenological ontology, the Latinamericanist currents, to the Frankfurt School) the philosophy of liberation is born coinciding with the diagnostic of the a) lack of "rigor" in addition to the lack of "authenticity" (this is Augusto Salazar Bondy's position). But, in addition, b) consciousness was taken of the need for "militancy" (Osvaldo Ardiles) as articulation of the dialectic theory-praxis; and, lastly, c) the misery of the great majorities, popular, student, political, social, ecological, anti-racist, etc. Movements are defined as theme and context from the end of the decade of the sixties on, and before the military dictatorships – from 1964 on in Brazil – (#8). The movement elaborated its own discourse (Enrique Dussel, Juan C. Scannone), although it divided itself into different points of view. Latin American feminist philosophy meanwhile produced its own discourse of liberation (i.e. Graciela Hierro).



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