

Mexican Philosophy

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ABSTRACT | To speak of “Mexican Philosophy” in the 21st century is more complex than referring to a national philosophy or a philosophy of the Mexican state, because Mexican Philosophy is, in fact, a critical vision of the philosophy that this state sought to build. In this essay we will briefly address the difference between Mexican Philosophy or New Mexican Philosophy and Philosophy in Mexico. We will also make a brief survey throughout significant moments and authors in the history of Mexican Philosophy to show the long journey it has gone through (from Mesoamerican philosophies to the 21st century), and how it has formed a grounded critical, rigorous, and contextualized tradition of thought.

KEYWORDS | Mexican Philosophy; Philosophical Tradition; Critique of the State; History of Philosophy; Cultural Diversity

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1 Delimitation of the Concept

The idea of Mexican Philosophy is much more complex than the study of the philosophy created in the Mexican state.

Mexico as a state has consolidated its own style of statehood, nation, culture, values, and philosophy since 1867, when President Benito Juárez shot Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg for his invasion of Mexico. However, Juárez's conception of state philosophy implied a universalist, univocal, and racist vision, and since the 1950s it has been criticized by some Mexican intellectuals and by the same philosophers who once defended that vision of the state. In the 21st century, the group of specialists who founded the Permanent Seminar of Mexican Philosophy in 2008 (López 2012, 362) were extremely critical of that idea of philosophy promoted by the Mexican state. They proposed new readings of Mexican Philosophy based on Carmen Rovira's methodology, which forces the researcher (of ideas or the history of philosophy) to start from the reading and interpretation of the direct sources of knowledge (books, articles, codices, magazines, monuments) in order to later contextualize them in their specific timeframes and in the political, intellectual, and cultural environments of the author who created that direct source. This method allows us to avoid over-interpreting philosophical sources with concepts external to the work itself or to the author who created it.

Therefore, we will say that Mexican Philosophy, or New Mexican Philosophy, performs a critical study of the philosophical, political, and cultural endeavor of the Mexican state and its philosophy (hereafter "state philosophy" when it refers specifically to the philosophy of the state). Mexican Philosophy and state philosophy also differ in the following four points:

- 1) **Temporality.** State Philosophy covers only the 19th century and a large part of the 20th century. Mexican Philosophy alternatively covers not only the period from the Conquest of Mexico (1521) and the establishment of Mexico as a Spanish colony (1521–1810) to the present day, but also extends to the ancient original peoples and the Mesoamerican period beginning around 2,500 BCE. The Mexican nation can only be understood when we comprehend the *Mexica* empire and its antecedents with the emergence of mathematics, calendars, astronomical measurements, medicine, writing, politics, etc., features, which it usually shares with other Mesoamerican cultures.
- 2) **The Position on the Spanish Antecedents of Mexico.** While for the Mexican state the two great columns of Mexican culture are the Spanish nation and the indigenous people, Mexican Philosophy maintains that the government of Spain was not interested in creating a nation in America. It created colonies where

there were two main vice-royalties: Peru and New Spain (although in 1739 it created New Granada and in 1776 Rio de la Plata). These colonies, of course, had been ruled under a different legality from the various kingdoms that made up the Crown of Castile (the Spanish nation), in which the native peoples were considered, at best, as minors who could not govern themselves and who needed guardianship. In addition, Creoles (Spaniards born in Mexico) could only occupy low and a few middle positions in the government and the church. Therefore, it is particularly important to study the Conquest, the injustice of the war, the plundering, the racism, as well as the “civilizing and evangelizing” mission that Spain and the Mexican state have propagated.¹

- 3) **Questions about a Generalized National Sentiment.** While the state has been developing a deep-rooted nationalism for more than a century and a half, Mexican Philosophy criticizes the fact that the Spanish crown did not consider the original people as citizens or as deserving of respect for their lands and their persons. In colonial times, their books were burned and their wise men and rulers assassinated; they were forced to abandon their language and speak Spanish, and compelled to despise and spit on their own gods (Portilla 1986, 133). With the arrival of the Mexican state, the indigenous predicament did not improve, and in an attempt to “civilize” them, the state expropriated the few lands that still remained while commencing new attacks against their culture. From the point of view of the modern state, “all men were equal and citizens of Mexico”; everyone ostensibly had to have the same rights, speak the same language, and have the same opportunities to be educated (that is, civilized in the case of the indigenous people). However, many of the original people resisted both the Colony and the Mexican state, and they have survived to this day with their own languages, culture, ethics, and customs.

While Spaniards and Creoles could have had some kind of nationalist sentiments (towards the Spanish nation), some Creoles developed such feelings towards the Mexican nation; in fact, the main Mexican philosophers are recognized as having some kind of national feeling, either because they considered themselves Mexicans or because they decided to rescue the culture of the native people as part of the universal culture and saw it as valuable as any other. However, even today there is still a lively discussion, on which intellectuals have not agreed, between those who advocate for the preservation of ethnicity and the promotion of the modern nation.

- 4) **Homogenization versus Cultural Diversity.** The Mexican state has imposed a

¹ Luciano Pereña (1992), and José Vasconcelos (1920).

process of political, linguistic, and cultural homogenization since its establishment in 1867, a process which has continued to the present,² based on the idea of “civilizing the native ‘savage’” of the “savage native people” and the disregard of their customs, medicine, and forms of political and cultural relations. On the other hand, Mexican Philosophy has fought for the linguistic, ontological, epistemological, and political recognition of the original peoples (ancient and contemporary), as well as for the defense of the diversity of cultures within Mexico.

Contemporary states are framed by those black lines that mark the borders one sees in school maps, those artificial borders that were drawn and agreed upon through wars and bloodshed so that that the state can recognize its territory. But the philosophy that is situated only within the territory of the country called Mexico (and which refers to any philosophical conception, regardless of its area of knowledge or specific tradition, thought of as “national” only because it has been written in Mexico or by Mexicans) is called in our country: *Philosophy in Mexico*. It is a type of philosophy that may not even refer to the country itself, may be foreign and created in other places, or which may come from traditions completely alien to the Mexican philosophical tradition. Philosophy in Mexico was what the “academic” philosophy of the 1940s called all the philosophy that was done in the country, because from the point of view of Samuel Ramos, the first creator of that titular chair at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexicans did not have their own culture and the only way to create one was to copy European culture, to make it “properly ours” (Ramos 1990, 146).

It is important to point out that throughout the 20th century Philosophy in Mexico was discussed as if it the only way to do philosophy, but in the first decade of the 21st century there was a substantial change in the self-perception of Mexican Philosophy in which almost all specialists in this area agreed: Mexican Philosophy should not be “a universal philosophy made ours,” as Ramos declared in 1934, but rather should become a philosophy of its own. This was because it arises from a specific tradition of thought that can be known and recognized as a philosophy that emanates from a specific historical, political, cultural circumstance, and because it wants to respond to the pressing problems of its time. This change in perception arose thanks to the following three important circumstances:

² Even the current Mexican government has more than a 70% approval rating after four years in office and after the crisis caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, in addition to the energy and economic crisis caused by the recent war between Russia and Ukraine. Despite having a greater sensitivity for multiculturalism and the development of indigenous peoples, it is very difficult to change the perspective of the univocal, universalist, and racist nation-state with its taxation system that functioned in Mexico until just four years ago.

- 1) Finally, after the arduous individual and collective work of more than half a century, different specialists in the area completed (in general terms) the History of Mexican Philosophy of all periods: Pre-Hispanic (Nahuatl and Mayan), Colonial, Novo-Hispanic, 19th century, and 20th century.
- 2) Carmen Rovira³ created important research groups and became the figure around which Mexican Philosophy studies are developed. After long and deep discussions within Rovira's team, it was decided to start calling the work we were doing "Mexican Philosophy," replacing the "philosophy IN Mexico" that had been imposed by the creators of the State Philosophy.
- 3) Several philosophers and intellectuals paid attention to the Zapatista movement of 1994 with its slogan of "never again a Mexico without us," leaving behind an absolute speculation to turn their gaze to the problems of the real Mexico: poverty, inequality, lack of freedom and democracy, lack of opportunities, state violence, and injustice.

2 Mexican Philosophy as a Tradition

Mexican Philosophy is a tradition of thought that has developed throughout history. It exists mainly to challenge the multiple ontological, epistemological, and cultural claims made mostly by Europeans, but also by Mexicans themselves since the consolidation of the State. Thus, our philosophy is also interested in the study of the circumstances in which it arose something that is decisive for the understanding of philosophy itself.

We can note that Mexican Philosophy can be distinguished by a serious concern for the recognition, study, and defense of *what is properly Mexican* which has been expressed in different ways from the different approaches of the various authors who have identified themselves with what is Mexican. Therefore, we are absolutely aware that this "Mexicanness" is in a process of changing according to the social, political, and cultural circumstances of the different times in which

³ Carmen Rovira Gaspar became the pillar of Mexican Philosophy studies. Her academic life and philosophical work now have exceptional significance not only in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and in UNAM itself, but also in Mexican Philosophy and Iberoamerican philosophy. Thanks to her fruitful and exceptional work of more than half a century, the studies on Mexican Philosophy took on new life, and new generations were formed with her work. Her task opened new and hopeful horizons to recover and develop an authentic, critical, and emancipatory philosophical tradition in open confrontation with the pretensions of political and intellectual colonization. Her exceptional work dedicated to Mexican and Latin American philosophy has earned the recognition of the national and international philosophical community.

people have recognized themselves as “Mexican.” However, an important common thread is that those who identify themselves as Mexican do so in order to respond to issues raised by the European colonizers in view of the identity of the Mexican or the natives of the Americas.

The study of the history of Mexican Philosophy gained importance when Samuel Ramos, José Gaos, Leopoldo Zea, Carmen Rovira, and Mauricio Beuchot, among others, put their efforts and much of their work into its development, agreeing that knowing our own tradition, and therefore making the history of the philosophy of our country, is an indispensable aspect of philosophizing.⁴

Thanks to the elaboration of the History of Mexican Philosophy that began professionally with Samuel Ramos in 1941, and which continues to this day with the Permanent Seminar of Mexican Philosophy and many other experts in philosophy, we now understand that Mexican Philosophy is the study, search, valuation, and defense of the thought of Mexico *about* Mexico and which has been carried out in our region since the ancient period of the native peoples (also called pre-Hispanic or Mesoamerican) until the present. This allows us to speak without a doubt of the existence of a philosophical tradition that is recognized as our own, and that, with its different changes and nuances, is here to stay. As we will see below, this has allowed us to integrate philosophers from very different periods and traditions.

3 A Brief Journey through the History of Mexican Philosophy

It is important to point out that, in our culture, the concepts of “Mexico” or “Mexican” do not come from the 19th century. That is, the term “Mexico,” as a name for this region and its culture, was not invented with the emergence of the Mexican state; on the contrary, it dates to the Mesoamerican cultures themselves that recognized the Mexica (Mexicans) as an important political, economic, and cultural people.

⁴ To clarify the use of the term “philosophy,” and in order to break existing prejudices, we want to underline that the Mesoamerican indigenous people had a vast knowledge of nature, the cosmos, architecture, mathematics, politics, etc., and that all this knowledge was expressed and preserved in their books (codices) in the respective language and writing system of their culture. The ancient indigenous peoples had scribes (*tlacuilokeh*) and wise men (*tlamatinime*) who wondered about the world, the universe, and human beings in a similar way like men and women from other regions of the world. For this reason, we affirm the existence of philosophy within the context of the Mesoamerican indigenous peoples. The controversial debates on this topic exceed the objectives of this text.

3.1 The Tlamatinime (Wise Nahuas) and the Debates about Religion

It is known that *Tlacaelel*, one of the main Mexica *tlamatinime* (wise men), promoted the myth of Aztlan that narrates how the Aztecs leave Aztlan towards the place where they will find an eagle devouring a snake standing on a cactus: Mexico Tenochtitlan. In this way, several codices known as the group of the pilgrimage strip (Anonymous 2015) are generated, with the aim of creating a grandiose past and an identity for the Mexica culture that, despite their long journey and multiple wars against the various Nahua cultures, managed to settle in the Valley of Mexico where they found the place that *Hutzilopochtli* (the God of war) had indicated to them. There the Mexica tradition would gloriously flourish and would spread through different Nahua and Mayan empires.

In its consequence, the questions of *Nezahualcoyotl* (one of the greatest Nahua sages) about life and truth was finally settled in the Colloquy of the 12 of 1524 (Portilla 1986); the work of *Tlacaelel* was to build a glorious identity and to firmly reject the Nahua *tlamatinime* and the Christian religion and culture that was to be imposed on them. With the Colloquy of the 12 we can prove the existence of an own philosophy within the Mesoamerican cultures. The defense of the ontological, epistemic and cultural validity of what is Mexican. This genealogical reconstruction produces an alternative history from the moment when Europe began to impose its religion, politics, and culture as “the only truth,” first and foremost to the Mexica people, then to their Nahua allies, until reaching many others including the Mayan, Mixe, Chichimeca people, etc., and all their descendants.

3.2 Human Ontology of the Indigenous American

From the beginning of the Conquest of Mexico and the rest of the 16th century, Spanish Imperial Thought assumed that the Americans were “quasi-monkeys,” as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda points out in his *Demócrates Alter* (1996, 101), under the argument that since they did not have the same politics, religion, and customs as the Spaniards they therefore did not have intelligence and were slaves by nature. In this way, *logos* was taken away from the Mexican indigenous people and the defense of their culture and rationality was left in the hands of other Spaniards who were recognized for their wisdom and expressive capacity. Against this presumption, for example, Alonso de la Veracruz and Bartolomé de las Casas, among others, defended the rationality of the American Indian, as well as their human, political, and cultural capacities. Given that the Christianity and humanism of Spaniards led them to think of the Native Americans as equal and free, and to thereby see them as children of the same God, they inaugurated the defense of Mexican peo-

ple by those who felt that the injustices done to the Americans were injustices of humanity.

It is important to point out that to all the friars who came to evangelize and bring the word of God to what they called *New Spain*, it was clear that *Mexican* was the language spoken by the Mexica people when they were integrated into the Nahuatl cultures of the Valley of Mexico. This was the case to the extent that Antonio Rubio was accused by the general of his Jesuit order for “having an aversion to the treatment of the Mexican language,” to which Rubio responded that he worked better in Mexican lands “to serve with it to the ministry of the language and its natives” than he could by serving in Spain or Rome. It is therefore significant that in his philosophical studies, published in many European editions that were brought to light while he was still alive, Rubio decided to publish his logical treatise under the title of *Mexican Logic*. Although it is true that the first printings of his logic were not published under this title, the editions from 1610 onwards already bear the title *Mexican Logic*, and it is precisely those editions that were consulted as textbooks (by order of the king) in the Jesuit colleges of Europe. It is understood that philosophers such as Descartes and Leibniz studied Father Rubio’s *Mexican Logic* (Beuchot 2006, 66).

3.3 Rationality of the Mexican in the 17th Century

Rubio’s *Mexican Logic*, as quoted by Descartes, already shows us a sign of identity from the 17th century that we can also find in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (2005) herself in her *Loa al auto sacramental del Divino Narciso* (*The Loa for the Auto Sacramental of The Divine Narcissus*), which was performed for the first time in Madrid in 1689. Since the 16th century, the sacramentals were performed on the day of Corpus Christi and were intended to make the spectators reflect on themselves, examine their conscience, and change their behavior. The *Loa al Divino Narciso* dramatizes the Conquest of America and defends the conversion, but only if it is given through reason. It also shows the Mexica religion as true, as the one that worshipped the great God of seeds, whose people were threatened to be defeated by both corporal and intellectual weapons with terrible violence. What is interesting is that the Hieronymite nun rescues the God of the three traditions (Hebrew, Greco-Latin, and Mexica) as a God for all of them (Cruz 2005, 383).

Sor Juana’s friend, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, is recognized as a great man of science and words. He was so interested in Mexican antiquities (Mexica culture) that he became a defender of the heirs of the emperor Moctezuma. But it was Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren (1696–1763) who published his *Bibliotheca Mexicana* in Latin in 1755 in order to refute the dean of Alicante, Manuel Martí, who claimed

that “in Mexico everything was ignorance.” Enguira’s *Mexican Library* (1986) integrated a great number of works and thinkers of the time with which he wanted to refute both the ignorance of the dean of Alicante, as well as that of many others who did not know how much had been written and studied in Mexico. Eguira’s indignation also makes it clear that, both in the case of the Spanish philosophers of the 16th century and, like Eguira, the Spanish born in Mexico (Creoles), their philosophy began to be generated as a response to the ontological and epistemic disqualifications of Mexico and Mexicans by Europe such as the “Inferiority of the Natives.” It is important to point out that from here on we can already see radical differences between what was conceived as Mexican.

Years later, in the 18th century, we find the philosophy of the Mexican Creole Jesuits who elaborated a humanism that proposed the dignification of the human race and the respect for others without violence or the imposition of values on them. It is a humanism that has a critical vision of the reality of the Americas in whose lands it has its feet firmly planted, and which embraces all human beings, whatever their race, culture, and creed. Francisco Javier Alegre argues: “what should be said of the innumerable multitude of Ethiopian slaves who during these five hundred years have been taken to the Spanish colonies [...] and who are still being taken [...] [T]hese Ethiopians are neither slaves by birth nor by themselves [and] it follows that this slavery is altogether unjust and iniquitous” (Rovira and Ponce 2007, 58). Andres Cavo in turn expresses that the “lesser evil” would be “that no inhabitant of the New World converts to our Holy Religion and that the dominion of the king is lost forever,” rather than “to force those people to the one or the other with slavery” (Rovira and Ponce 2007, 58). For Pedro José Márquez, “the true philosopher is cosmopolitan (or citizen of the world); he has all men as compatriots, and knows that any language, however exotic it may seem, by virtue of culture can be as wise as a Greek. With respect to culture, true philosophy does not recognize incapacity in any man, either because he was born white or black, or because he was educated in the poles or in the torrid zone.” (Rovira and Ponce 2007, 58)

Among the writings of these Jesuits, we will highlight Francisco Javier Clavijero who published a very extensive *Ancient History of Mexico* in 1781 in which he demonstrates the greatness of the Mexica culture. He elaborates on its architecture, its knowledge of mathematics and the calendar, the complexity of its language and poetry, and the historical and political development of different indigenous cultures until reaching the Mexica and its confrontation with the Spaniards. (Clavijero 2005, 601) He focuses specifically on the climate and the animals of America during this time. The creation of Clavijero’s enormous work and the other works of the Jesuits have antecedents that are necessary to highlight, because

within their exile in Italy, which took place in 1767 when Charles III expelled them from the Spanish territory, the Jesuits found that the diverse criticisms which the European naturalists were making of America had spread throughout Europe.

In his *Natural History*, The Count of Buffon (Georges Louis Leclerc, 1707–88) used the same method as almost all Europeans, however instead of relying on observation, he did research starting with a comparison between the animals existing in the Old World and those of the New World. He found that the species of quadrupedal animals were less numerous in America than in Europe; while the American ones numbered only 70 species, in Europe there were more than 130 (including the “endemic” elephants and giraffes). He also argued that while the indigenous animals were few and of small stature, the imported ones had become smaller and less robust because of the environment. According to Buffon, the American climate was hostile to the development of animals due to a number of factors: the quality of the soil, the degrees of heat and humidity, the elevation of the mountains, the extent of the forests, and above all, what Buffon perceives as the brutal state in which nature is found in the Americas. In addition to this, the American man had done nothing to dominate it, because “The savage is weak and has small organs of generation, he has no hair or beard and no desire for his female, although he is lighter than the European because he has the habit of running, he is, however, less strong bodily [...] possessing no liveliness and activity in the soul, the activity of the body constitutes less an exercise or voluntary movement than a need for action caused by natural appetites.” (Buffon 1826, 443).⁵ This passage compares the Indian to the cold-blooded animals that only move to satisfy their instincts and who live in a rotting aquatic context. We also observe here how Buffon explains the weakness in men, by justifying a weakness in the American soil itself, that breeds such inferior men and, in short, to justifying the inferiority of the indigenous by appealing to (a dubious notion of) nature.

Only a few years after Buffon, Corneille de Paw writes in his *Philosophical Investigations on the Americans or Interesting Memoirs to Serve the History of the Human Species* (1768) that Buffon was wrong to think that the Americans were small and child-like in comparison to Europeans. In reality, for De Paw, what was happening to the indigenous people, as to so many other species of American animals, is that they are completely degraded, due sometimes to the climate or to other natural factors such as floods that have led the continent to such degener-

⁵ “Le sauvage est foible et petite par les organes de la génération; il n’a ni poil ni barbe, et null ardeur par sa femelle: quoique plus léger que l’Européen, parcequ’il a plus d’habitude à occurrir, il est cependant moins fort de corps [...] il n’a null vivacité, null activité dans l’âme; celle du corps est moins un exercice, un mouvement volontaire, qu’une nécessité d’action causée par le besoin.” (Buffon 1826, 443)

ation in which even its human inhabitants have been affected. For “on a continent where even the dogs have lost their tails and the crocodiles have become lazy and bastards, it is natural that its inhabitants should have less sensibility, less humanity, less taste, less instinct, less heart, less intelligence, in a word, less of everything with respect to the Europeans” (De Paw 1777, 347). From this perspective, the problem with America was not only that those who were born were inferior subjects to the Europeans, but so were the individuals who spent years inhabiting it. It was for this reason that the rulers of the new world born in Europe would have to return from time to time to purify their body and soul, since the effluvia given off by the American soil could reduce their intellectual abilities.

A major problem was that De Paw’s ideas had a great influence at the time because he was the one who wrote the concept *Amerique* within the new edition of the Encyclopedia published by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alambert in 1777. As a result, authors like Immanuel Kant, GWF Hegel, and Karl Marx had distorted ideas about America offered by the French naturalists, with which they dared to speak of the inability of the American man to become an autonomous and free one and to thereby integrate himself within the full development of history.

The great influence of the Encyclopedia and its ideas about the inferiority of the Americans can even be found in German-speaking intellectuals and merchants in the 19th century, who, despite having short or long stays in Mexico, continued to spread ideas about the inferiority of the continent and its inhabitants. This was the case with Alexander Humboldt in his *New Spain Political Essay* (1822), and later with Carl Christian Sartorius who published *Mexiko* in German in 1855, which was quickly translated into English as *Mexico Landscapes and Popular Sketches* (1858). In this text, Sartorius affirms that the Indians “are incapable of acquiring a degree of intellectual development like that of the white race” (1990, 139). This was mainly because, he argues, they do not foresee the future, and like American birds, due to the very mild climate in which they develop, they fail to build nests as perfect as those of European birds. The ease with which life is lived in Mexico has led Mexicans to seek fun and pleasures without worrying about what will happen tomorrow. Thus, Sartorius sees the rural population (mainly made up of indigenous people and castes) as communitarian, backward, degenerate, indolent, and non-producers of goods, or worse, as non-consumers of goods, which makes them “a threat to civilization.” (1990, 158) Of course, these ideas would have an impact on the discourse of the Mexicans who created the Mexican state in the second half of the 19th century, but we will begin with its antecedents in the beginning of the formation of the Mexican nation at the time of independence.

3.4 On the Right to Independence and Sovereignty

In the document *Posthumous memory of the trustee of the town hall... on which the right of sovereignty of the people is founded*, written in 1808 by Primo Verdad y Ramos (an illustrious Creole), the author mentions in a clear way the importance of the natives in his proposed board of representatives. Speaking of the indigenous folk, he says: "it will therefore be very fair that they equally have their representation in the general assemblies: and if the deputies are provided in reason of the persons they represent, and of their number, forming a very large part that of the Indians, it is clear that it should be tripled, with respect to the other bodies." (Verdad 1808, 162) Primo Verdad thus gives a preponderant role to the indigenous peoples in the proposed meeting. It is important to highlight that the author is one of the first to grant a role of such magnitude to the indigenous people and, not satisfied even with this, he proposes, in a progressive and daring way for his time, the American union and the abolition of castes. On including the indigenous population in the meeting, he declares: "How much would this not contribute to preserve the longed-for union of all Americans and how much would we not alleviate by this means the rivalry and jealousy of one another! Then, we would forget the hateful names of Indians, crossbreed, 'ladinos' that are so disastrous for us."⁶

However, in the pro-independence Fray Melchor de Talamantes, we can see a refusal to consider all the people in general as worthy of participating in the "Congress," since to carry out such an action would diminish the power that the Creoles exercised over the rest of the people. For this reason, he affirms: "The poor people, in no truly cultured nation do they enjoy the right of citizenship [to exercise national representation]; because of their rusticity, ignorance, coarseness, indigence and the necessary dependence in which they find themselves with respect to enlightened and powerful men, this makes them unworthy of such an excellent quality, which demands true freedom, incompatible with ignorance and beggary" (Talamantes 1808c, 383). And if "the ignorant people" lack the rights of citizens, then it cannot be entrusted with the government of the people, which must be left to "enlightened and powerful" men, that is, to the Creoles. Based on the above, Talamantes affirms that it "has always sustained and will always sustain national sovereignty, which is sometimes distinguished by the name of Sovereignty of the People, understanding by *People*, the embodiment of the whole nation; but in no way the rigorously popular sovereignty, subject to a thousand vices and errors" (Talamantes 1808d, 242).

Regarding Talamantes' remarks, it would be interesting to ask ourselves: Why would the indigenous folk not be part of the people? Is Talamantes not an enlight-

⁶ A "ladino/a" is an indigenous or Creole person who prefers to live and dress like the Spanish.

ened man who follows the teachings of Rousseau? The answer is not so simple: Talamantes is a friar who took up the enlightened ideas of popular sovereignty that began with St. Thomas, and which passed through the School of Salamanca – strengthened by the philosophy of the Jesuits, specifically of Francisco Suárez – before reaching the independence of the Americas. And we should note that this discovery, which greatly changes the Eurocentric vision, would have been impossible without the research methodology of Carmen Rovira.

3.5 Positivism and Liberalism in the 19th Century

After these first attempts to organize the Mexican nation, there were multiple confrontations between liberals and conservatives, and although the first Political Constitution of Mexico was signed in 1824, a clearer idea of how to shape the Mexican State was not really obtained until the second half of the 19th century.

After the French invasion from 1862 to 1867, in which Mexico suffered as an independent state and the Austrian Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg was imposed as the King for several years, the government of Mexican President Benito Juárez shared a clear objective with the philosopher Gabino Barreda: to reform the nation and lead it to progress along the path of freedom. However, it should be noted that – for the sake of that freedom and based on the principles of popular sovereignty and social equality, which he points out in his *Oración Cívica* (Civic Oration 1979) as the axioms of progress – Barreda and the liberals decided to forget their differences and to treat everyone as citizens, which meant “civilizing” the indigenous. However, it is also commendable that from that point on the indigenous were already (according to the law) part of the social core of the nation. An example of this is the paintings of Mexico of the late 19th century.⁷

Gabino Barreda’s leading role in the strongest and most extensive Mexican education project of the entire independence era was no secret. After listening to his *Civic Oration*, Benito Juárez commissioned Barreda to establish the foundation and proper functioning of the National Preparatory School, the one in which the country would be regenerated and the institutions and habits of the Mexican people would be radically changed (Barreda 1979, 14). While they had learned under the Spanish domination to resign themselves, with the education for independence they prepared themselves for the fight for revolution.

With a good and enlightened education, Barreda and Juárez incorporated the scientific, religious, and political emancipation of the population, for which Barreda began to promote positivism as a weapon of educational reform. In 1863 Barreda

⁷ Artworks like Carl Christian Sartorius: *Portada de Mexico and the Mexicans*, 1859; August Lohr: *Tacubaya*, 1897; José María Velasco: *Valle de México*, 1900.

published his work *De la Educación Moral* (On Moral Education), where he set the precedent for the ideas that later separated the liberals and the positivists. While in his *Civic Oration* he upholds the idea of “freedom, order and progress,” in the first document he tries to locate the moral impulses in the brain and maintains that all social welfare is due to a healthy development of the bodily organs of the altruistic instinct, to the detriment of those others favorable to the opposite instinct. Thus, the purpose of education is none other than to fulfill the noble mission of the development of the altruistic instincts where the individualist myths of “*laissez faire, laissez passer*” of liberalism must be removed to allow love to flourish. “Love, order and progress” combat the free will espoused by the liberals of the Enlightenment, because such freedom can only provoke disorder, anarchy, and conflict between different moral beliefs, thereby making the progress of all civilization impossible. The subjects to be taught in high school must be absolutely scientific in order to create the required mental emancipation.

Of course, the liberals disagreed with Barreda’s rationalism. Although they accepted the ideology of Spanish and indigenous culture as the backbone of the homeland, as proposed by the national independence fighters and European naturalists, they refused to accept that love was superior to freedom. José María Vigil, for example, sought to strengthen patriotism through a universalist education on the one hand, and a *Mexicanist* education on the other. In his text *Necessity and Convenience of Studying the Country’s History* (1878), Vigil proposes that Greek and Latin should be studied at the same time as Nahuatl, in order to strengthen patriotism through what is authentic, what is proper, as the only way to avoid self-contempt. Only the promotion of the Hispanic-indigenous culture would allow Mexico to go from a country of anomalies to a normal country (Vigil 2001). Thus, just as the German liberal Sartorius announced in 1855, the crossbreed personality (combination of Spanish with indigenous, a *mestizo*) is what is properly Mexican; it is what, according to Vigil, will allow us to go from a Mexican person to a Mexican citizen.

3.6 Civilization, Education, and Integration of the Indigenous Folk

However, it is Ezequiel A. Chávez who, taking up the previous discussions, makes a more descriptive contribution to the Mexican character in his *Essay on the Distinctive Features of Sensitivity as a Factor of the Mexican Character* (1901). He also takes the indigenous and the Spanish as the foundation of the crossbreed Mexican culture, but he goes further by dividing the “mestizos” into vulgar and superior: the “vulgar” are those who do not know how to dominate their passions, and the “superior” are those who manage to intellectualize their feelings through ratio-

nality, thereby orienting themselves towards the future. What calls our attention in particular is the way Chávez characterizes the character of the indigenous: he is stoic, taciturn, the owner of an focused inertia that leads him to a control of emotional and impulsive behavior that brings him closer to civilization, because he is able to bear it all (Chávez 2004).

This is important because several decades later (1934), Samuel Ramos (1897–1959) tries to analyze the character of the Mexican and reconsiders the two traditions that made a Mexican culture possible when united. He affirms that a miscegenation between the indigenous (native) and the Spanish took place in Mexico, but from his perspective the indigenous culture as such disappeared and the Spanish culture has been transformed upon the American soil. Thus, if Mexican culture is neither purely indigenous nor purely Spanish, it is necessary to question the identity of the Mexican.

Ramos conceives the indigenous and the exaltation of their culture as a myth; despite admitting that a large part of the Mexican population is indigenous, he hardly takes them into account, instead arguing that the indigenous “plays a passive role in the current life of the country” (1990, 122). “The active point,” he explains, “is the other, that of the Metis who live in the city. It is to be supposed that the Indian has influenced the soul of the other Mexican group, of course, because he has mixed his blood with it. But his social and spiritual influence is reduced today to the mere fact of his presence.” It turns out then that the influence of the indigenous in Ramos’ contemporary Mexico is reduced to the biological inheritance transmitted by blood to their descendants, given that this blood now affects their character (109). Thus, in terms of the cultural question, the indigenous has a null influence because their culture, Ramos assures us, was subsumed within the European culture when it was conquered before finally disappearing altogether. In this respect, Ramos says that it “is true that there was a miscegenation, but not of cultures, because when the conquistadors came into contact with the natives, the latter’s culture was destroyed. It was – says Alfonso Reyes – the clash of the jug with the cauldron. The jar could be very fine and beautiful, but it was the most brittle” (102).

Ramos considers the indigenous person and analyzes his character only to make possible the foundation of his characterology of the Mexican. From the indigenous he only takes the characteristics used later as those that lead the Mexican to suffer a feeling of inferiority. For Ramos, the indigenous person has “[a] sober and dry rigidity whose base is an internal apathy and insensitivity to the deepest tremors of life” (108). “[T]he Mexican Indian,” he continues, “seems unasimilable to civilization.”

3.7 The Emerging Possibility of Philosophy in Mexico

It was in 1941 that Ramos founded the chair of History of Philosophy in Mexico, which has been taught at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) since its foundation. Intending to find a tradition of thought that “could fix a national sense,” Samuel Ramos wrote his text *Historia de la Filosofía en México* (History of Philosophy in Mexico) in 1943. He analyzes several traditions of thought: the Aztecs, the colonial period, the philosophy of New Spain, independent philosophy, positivism and the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the great educational and philosophical works of his teachers José Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso. However, and in spite of promoting the study of national philosophy, he affirms that

Mexico must have in the future a ‘Mexican’ culture; but we do not conceive of it as an original culture distinct from all others. We understand by Mexican culture the universal culture made ours, that lives with us, that is capable of expressing our soul. And it is curious that in order to form a ‘Mexican’ culture, the only path we have left is to continue learning European culture. Our race is an offshoot of the European race, our history has developed within European frameworks. (Ramos 1990, 92)

It is clear that Samuel Ramos is one of the greatest exponents of the State Philosophy that tries to eliminate the indigenous as part of Mexican culture, justifying his attitude with theoretical proposals of the intellectuals of the country.

In spite of the fact that in Mexico there was already a concern for finding a culture and a philosophy of its own, as we have seen in Ezequiel A. Chávez and Samuel Ramos, it was José Gaos (1900–1969) who starkly criticized the concept of a traditional history of philosophy, and proposed, in its place, a history of ideas arising from the time and circumstances themselves. This allowed him to search for a history of Mexican philosophy that goes beyond the simple history of philosophy IN Mexico. In addition, he trained several generations of thinkers in our country who inherited methodologies, and even the interest in certain problems, that allowed them to think on their own.

The work of José Gaos and his disciples managed to mediate the impulse to make a history of philosophy of Hegelian influence in Mexico. Gaos recovers the historicist theory of Dilthey and Heidegger, which led him to warn that history is specifically limited to the human, and that the sciences and their methodology are inadequate to understand what is properly human. In his *Confessions* he admits to the influence of Ortega y Gasset, especially his ideas of perspectivism and

subjectivism in philosophy.

However, the problem was that many Mexicans denied the existence of philosophy and philosophers in the country, so Gaos saw the need to widen the concept of the philosopher, the category of thinker, which was opened even to those who were researchers in history, exact sciences, or literature; these are characterized by “a peculiar national magisterium” (Gaos 1980, 18). Once the existence of Mexican thinkers is justified, Gaos warns that the history of philosophy in Mexico is a subset of the history of thought in this country and this, in turn, belongs to the history of ideas in Mexico. Thus, in order to explain the history of Mexican philosophy, it will be necessary to begin by making a critical review of the history of ideas.

Gaos begins with an interesting analysis on the meaning of the concept of an “idea.” He argues that no idea is what it is by exclusive appearance, because every idea, despite being singular, is in the background of other ideas and such a relationship prevents it from having a purely “abstract” sense. In fact, an idea is always the “reaction of a man to a certain life situation [...] so the idea is an action that one performs in view of a certain circumstance and with a precise purpose” (Gaos 1980, 18). In this way, Gaos makes it clear that in order to carry out the history of ideas, we cannot do away with the circumstance that provoked the idea itself, nor the design that has inspired it, because to do without them would lead us to have only a vague and abstract profile, which in reality is an imprecise skeleton of the effective idea. Therefore, in order to make a history of ideas we must reconstruct the concrete situation and find out the function that the idea represented in that situation; otherwise, it will become an abstract and “dead idea, a mummy, and its content, the imprecise human allusion that the mummy holds” (Gaos 1980, 18).

3.8 Teaching Latin American and Mexican Philosophies

Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004) is recognized by Gaos as the best of his students. He takes up from his teacher the concern for making a history of his own philosophy in *The Positivism in Mexico*, published in 1943. However, he extends the problem of circumstantialism to all Latin America has thus influenced a great number of Latin American philosophers to carry out monographic studies based on their own thinkers. This work has led him to promote schools, centers, and magazines concerned with the history of Latin American ideas.

From Zea’s point of view, the consideration of the past was essential for American philosophy, and the elaboration of a history of the ideas of the American people could not be postponed because it was conceived as the foundation that would allow us to advance towards an authentic future. Authenticity was at stake in the

knowledge of the philosophical past, so the philosophers with whom Zea made contact throughout America (Arturo Ardao (Uruguay), Joao Cruz Costa (Brasil), Francisco Miró Quesada (Perú), Guillermo Francovich (Bolivia), José Luis Romero (Argentina), Arturo Andrés Roig (Argentina), José Antonio Portuondo (Cuba), Roberto Fernández Retamar (Cuba) y Darcy Ribeiro (Brasil)), took on the project and carried out monographic studies on philosophers of their own countries of origin. They discovered that originality in itself was not relevant, because what was at stake, according to Zea, was to find an authentic way to use and apply foreign ideas in their own circumstances. A great effort was then made to create a dialogue with their own context, without disturbing the balance between the circumstantial view and the universal perspective.

In the second half of the 20th century, when the studies of Latin American philosophy had developed and became normalized, several philosophers who established the histories of philosophy in Latin America began to question the Hegelian perspective and proposed in its place a situated history. Leopoldo Zea is a clear example of this. In his *Introduction to Philosophy*, published for the first time in 1953, he warns us: "So far, the universal, eternal and immutable value of his philosophy [European's philosophy] *has been affirmed*; now *we affirm* the circumstantial character of philosophy, of all philosophies. To one idea we oppose another. Now it will be necessary to expose the assumptions, the bases on which we rely to make such an affirmation" (1953, 15). Although this text seems to be, at first sight, a history of common philosophy that rescues the doctrines and systems of the "great thinkers," it is enough to examine the index carefully to notice the differences between the European and the Mexican philosophy. In chapter 2 "The Modern Era", we find the theme "America and Utopias." This leads us to read the text with different eyes and to notice how it was written from the perspective of circumstantialism. This circumstantialism leads Zea to deny the idea of philosophy as unique. Instead the study of philosophies, as a plurality, is proposed. Thanks to this critical reading, Zea also defends the existence of an original Latin American philosophy which arises not to create new and strange systems, but to respond to the problems of a specific reality that has originated in a specific time. Precisely in his text *American Philosophy as Philosophy Without More* (1969), Zea responds to Salazar Bondy and Luis Villoro, both of whom affirmed, from different traditions, that in America there is still no philosophy of its own.

Carmen Rovira (1923–2021) takes over the concern of her teacher Gaos to elaborate on the history of ideas from her own circumstance and, contrary to Zea who opened up to the Latin American tradition, Rovira focuses on the rescue of the Mexican tradition, which is why she has become the fundamental pillar of the studies of the history of Mexican ideas. Rovira reexamines the concerns of Ramos

and Gaos to find her own ideas in her own intellectual past: she elaborates on several monographic studies on Mexican philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries. She also coordinated an extensive research project on the history of philosophy in the 19th century from which emerged a monumental work called *An Approach to the History of Philosophical Ideas in Mexico: 19th and early 20th century* (Rovira 1997). In it she puts forward her own ideas on the correct way of doing the history of philosophy by elaborating and inheriting a methodology that is in fact observed in her texts. She herself states: "I have dedicated myself to a careful, detailed, critical and comparative analysis [of the author's work], situating it in its context and starting precisely from this work-context relationship, in order to arrive as objectively as possible at certain conclusions that can clarify the contradictions in the political and religious philosophical discourse..." (Rovira 2004, 13).

We can see how the foundation of Rovira's philosophical rigor is grounded in the access to the direct sources of the authors, and by direct sources we are not talking about translations of the work into Spanish; it is necessary to go to the work in the original language. Furthermore, a text must be analyzed from its own context and with the categories of its time, distancing itself, as far as possible, from contemporary categories that are foreign to the work of the author under study. Thus, starting from the authors' own texts and contexts, Rovira was aware that the categories that were classically used in the history of ideas did not always serve the purpose for a thorough interpretation of Mexican philosophy.

The uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in 1994, declaring "never again a Mexico without us," shook the hearts and consciences of all those who were sensitive to their call. It also made many of intellectuals in Mexico, America, and Europe become interested for the first time in the existence of the indigenous social group and to open their ears to their claims and their expressions. For the first time, the "I'd like a word, I want it in my own language" of the Mayan Quiché poet Humberto Ak'Abal, expressed in his minimal poems "*El Pregonero*" (The Town Crier), made sense.

After the Zapatista movement, Luis Villoro changed his analytical vision and began to make deep and detailed studies on the problem of justice by patiently analyzing the theories on the subject from Socrates to Rawls, Apel, and Habermas. His studies were published three years later in the book *El Poder y el Valor* (Power and Courage), where he begins to recognize in the indigenous communities their own conscience and to understand (together with Carlos Lenkersdorf) that "the true leaders receive all the respect because they know how to articulate the thought of the community and, in that sense, they obey the community" (Villoro 1997, 370). Likewise, he understands that in the indigenous community "the individual abides by the inherited rules, by the uses and customs of always; only

in them he (the indigenous) discovers himself” (371). Villoro admits that, in short, indigenous life takes place in its community and only in it does the native develop his being.

Villoro observes communitarian attitudes among the indigenous groups close to a participatory democracy. Further, he warns that although it is impossible for Western individualism to leave its tradition and to become an indigenous community, it is possible to think of a new Western community where the source of meaning would not be the whole or the individual element, but rather the integration of each part to a whole in which it discovers its own reality. Here, his idea of the integration of the individual to the community is striking, because it is in the community where a more complete expression of being takes place.

Following in the footsteps of Villoro and León Olivé, a consolidated and opinionated group of philosophers promoting multiculturalism in Mexico has been developing in the last decades, providing a strong critique of the ideas of modernity. However, to differentiate them from the Canadian proposal⁸ of which they are also critical, we will refer to the Mexican version as *intercultural philosophy*. Authors such as Raúl Alcalá criticize science and technoscience as instrumental knowledges controlled and applied by capitalist industries and closed to intercultural dialogue. Ambrosio Velasco has also worked along these lines, criticizing the traditional model of science (analytical and synthetic, rational and empirical, univocal, precise, formal and universal) in order to present a new model of fallibilist science. This model of science is without univocal language or method that guarantees universal truths, using rather dialogic and plural forms of rationality close to the model of knowledge that Alonso de la Veracruz exposed very well in his courses on logic in the 16th century. It contained rational argumentations with logic, rhetoric and dialectics, as well as the sensitivity to recognize cultural diversity. From this perspective, Ambrosio Velasco defends multiculturalism and epistemic equity, which imply valuing all cultural traditions and (intercultural) dialogues. The intercultural proposal questions all epistemological imperialism, recognizing that there are different types of knowledge validated by the criteria of diverse communities. More than a simple relativism, it implies an epistemic relativism based on good arguments and on a dialogue that requires responsible, democratic listening, with a *phronesis* that includes and understands diverse cultures.⁹

⁸ See Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, who consider indigenous people as minority cultural groups.

⁹ *Phronesis* in the Aristotelian style, as a virtuous attitude. “ §4 The remaining possibility, then, is that prudence is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being. Far production has its end in something other than itself, but action does not, since its end is acting well itself. §5 That is why Pericles and such people are the ones whom

4 Conclusions

After this brief overview of Mexican philosophy, its themes and problems, it is clear that we can speak of a philosophy of its own that shares the following characteristics:

- A search for and recognition of what is proper that generates a certain identity, although this “what is proper” changes according to the times, authors, and circumstances.
- The sense of its *ownness* happens in and from a place and circumstance that is conceived as Mexican by the philosopher who makes the proposal. A circumstance that we preferably call context (historical, political, cultural) today.
- There is a search for Mexican identity that inserts its own proposed philosophy in a tradition of thought, which is critical of the simple and univocal universalism of the West.
- Many of the specialists in Mexican philosophy of the second half of the 20th century chose to write histories of Mexican philosophy from different periods, in order to elaborate on a Mexican philosophy that can be considered generally completed.
- The history of Mexican philosophy is much more complex than the history of State Philosophy or the history of national philosophy, of which Mexican philosophy has elaborated important, critical studies.
- Mexican Philosophy differs from philosophy IN Mexico. The former is rooted in a tradition of its own that can be found throughout the history of Mexican ideas from Mesoamerica to the present day. The latter is centered only in the territory and can come from any position, with any philosophical tendency, and can speak about any subject with the only requirement that it be done IN Mexico or speak about what the State recognizes as Mexican.

we regard as prudent, because they are able to study what is good for themselves and far human beings; we think that household managers and politicians are such people. This is also how we come to give temperance (*sophrosune*) its name, because we think that it preserves prudence (*sozousan ten phronesin*)” Aristotle (1999). *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1140b between 4 and 6.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank my colleagues at the Permanent Seminar on Mexican Philosophy with whom I have discussed these issues for the last four years. Thank you for your insightful comments on this text: Victórico Muñoz, Pedro Montalvo, Laura Soto, Alejandro Sánchez, Monserrat Ríos, and Héctor Luna.

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