

Mexican Philosophy and the Trope of Authenticity

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“From the answer that we give to these question, as concrete peoples and as members of an American community, *will our yearned for philosophy arise, which in reality begins from these kinds of interrogations.*”—Francisco Miró Quesada¹

Prelude: Questions and Concepts

Twentieth century Mexican philosophy can best be characterized as a philosophy of authenticity motivated by a cultural and historical desire for self-affirmation whose best representatives toiled under the banner of la filosofía de lo mexicano.

This statement is not without controversy. The very idea of a “Mexican” philosophy appears offensive to some, who see the qualifier “Mexican” as degrading their philosophical efforts, as calling into question their philosophy, which, they insist is *just philosophy* and nothing besides²; but, for others, calling it “Mexican” is a necessity, as it affirms an effort to contribute a unique cultural and historical difference to the otherwise undifferentiated totality which is the history of philosophy.³ Thus, some will see in the statement above a gross caricature of an uneventful philosophical history where something like a “Mexican philosophy” cannot realize itself without contradiction, while others will read the statement as accurately reflecting a complex philosophical tradition that, perhaps, has been misunderstood.⁴ I read the statement as representing the latter and believe that the reason why the statement is as controversial as it is has to do with history—specifically, with the way in which Mexican philosophical history has been written and with the way it has been read. It has been written as the history of *Mexican* philosophy and read, on this basis, as having been written with an apparent cultural and historical bias that robs it of its objectivity; this, together with our own philosophical dogmas, will make it difficult, especially to non-Mexicans reading in translation, to determine whether that history is a history of a genuine, original, and autonomous Mexican *philosophy* or merely the history of the cultural adoption, reaction, and enthusiasm for philosophy *in* Mexico. So, my own suspicion is that the reason why this difficulty arises, has to do less with the way in which Mexican philosophy has been written, and more with the way in which Mexican philosophy has

¹Francisco Miró Quesada, *Despertar y proyecto del filosofar latinoamericano* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974), p. 221.

² See, for instance, Carlos Pereda, “Latin American Philosophy: Some Vices,” *Journal of Social Criticism*, 20:3 (2006): pp. 192-203. Here, Pereda argues that calling a philosophy “Mexican” or “Latin American” is nothing more than an expression of a certain desire to be more nationalist, to follow trends, or fads, or to express other colonial vices, such as a “craving for novelty.”

³ A good case is recently made by Guillermo Hurtado, *El buho y la serpiente: Ensayos sobre la filosofía mexicana en el siglo XX* (Mexico: UNAM, 2007).

⁴ This is the impetus of the forthcoming anthology, Carlos Alberto Sanchez & Robert Eli Sanchez (eds.), *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century: Essential Readings*. Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

been *read*, namely, *through* a conception of philosophy intolerant to contingency, to culture, and to history. A more pernicious suspicion is that Mexican philosophy and its history suffer as a result of being Mexican, and not as a result of lacking or rejecting all the other criteria. But I'll reserve that concern for another time and place.

Assuming that the less pernicious of my suspicions is valid, I'd like to pose a question regarding Mexican philosophical history, the answer to which might allow us to better understand the complexity of the above statement and, simultaneously, serve as an entry point into a reading of philosophical history that is more tolerant of contingency, culture, and historical uniqueness. The question is the following: in what way, and to what extent, is the writing of 20th century Mexican philosophical history influenced, shaped, or informed by the specifically philosophical search, concern, or obsession with cultural, historical, or national identity, that in the 20th century was understood as the philosophy of Mexicanness or *la filosofía de lo mexicano*? The answer to this question will also reveal, on the one hand, the limited, or better yet, the tropological nature of historical writing in general, and on the other, it will allow us to address the objection that this influence, shaping, or informing, contributes to the apparent non-existence of Mexican philosophy and the apparent non-philosophical character of Mexican philosophical history.

Operative in what follows, and deployed for the sake of this question, are two concepts borrowed from Hayden White's *Metahistory*: "emplotment" and "trope."⁵ *Emplotment* refers to the way in which historical data are organized and *plotted* into a specific sort of narrative—according to White, "every history will be emplotted in some way"⁶; the *trope* is, as its Greek root implies (τρόπος, "turn, direction, way"), a pre-figured manner of *looking at* the historical data (in our case, the philosophical texts that make up the history of Mexican philosophy in the 20th century). White defines tropes as "modes of thought" or "paradigms" by which "consciousness can prefigure areas of [historical] experience...in order to subsequently submit them to analysis and explanation."⁷ Elsewhere, I've called these modes of thought or paradigms, "*enfoques*."⁸ Herman Paul refers to a trope as the "moral and ontological presupposition underlying historical writing."⁹ According to this conceptual register, we can say that the emplotment of historical data will be determined by tropes to which the historian appeals in the writing of her histories. In the case of 20th century Mexican philosophical history, the history of philosophy in 20th century Mexico has been emplotted so as to be the story of philosophy's dialectical self-realization in a specific time-space, a journey of memory that is seen through the lens or trope of authenticity, itself conceived *as* the mark of legitimacy and ownership, *the lack of which* reveals thought as illegitimate and counterfeit.

1. La filosofía de lo mexicano

⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1973.

⁶ *Metahistory*, p. 8.

⁷ *Metahistory*, p. 36.

⁸ Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).

⁹ Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 1.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was a significant event in Mexican history. It pitted brother against brother, sister against sister, catholic against catholic, the poor against themselves, etc., in a bloody decade-long war that exposed a deep seated historical crisis of identity in Mexican culture. Mexicans, the Revolution revealed, didn't know who they were, what they were, or where they were going as individuals or as a culture. As the conflict ended, intellectuals and politicians alike saw this crisis, and the sense of fragmentation that this crisis revealed, as an opportunity for healing, a healing that would require a new sense of unity and commonality. Thus the question developed from a simple *who am I?* to a more philosophical *what does it mean to be what I am?* And, more specifically, *what does it mean to be Mexican?* This was a question that asked into *Mexicanidad*, *lo mexicano*, or *Mexicanness*. Politicians asked this question so as to find an angle into a meaningful political dialogue about nationality and citizenship; artists asked it so as to justify in themselves and in their artistic creations unique and characteristically Mexican qualities; and philosophers asked this questions first, because it was a historically, *culturally relevant question*, one motivated by a people's desire for self-knowledge, and second, and most importantly, because philosophers too observed that being Mexican was a different kind of being, a difference that a history of conquest, colonization, and violence had certainly helped to shape.

As such, the philosophical question into the being of the Mexican was question of identity—it asked into cultural, political, historical, aesthetic, and philosophical identity. This question was reformulated into a series of more specific inquiries that were taken up by philosophers, or by those who understood themselves as philosophers; the question was asked using philosophical language, and it asked into the meaning of *lo mexicano*, or of *Mexicanness*; it asked into the different ways in which history had constituted the *being* of the Mexican; and, finally, it asked about origins, originality, or what came to the same, about authenticity. Antonio Caso, Jose Vasconcelos, Samuel Ramos, Emilio Uranga, and Leopoldo Zea are some of the figures that engaged in an active dialogue into *lo mexicano* and authenticity in the decades after the Revolution. These dialogues, formulated as responses and criticisms of previously formulated positions, took as their starting point one or more of the following basic presuppositions that would come to define this period for philosophical historians:

1. that the question into Mexican identity is a culturally relevant question;
2. that the task of philosophy should not be restricted to the contemplation of pure forms or universal concepts,
3. that authenticity in philosophical practice has to do with the manner in which philosophical ideas are anchored on the circumstances out of which they emerge, and
4. that engaging in philosophical activity in an authentic way is to assume responsibility for one's history and one's circumstance--to commit oneself to one's world in acts of understanding and criticism.

Consequently, the philosophy of *lo mexicano* became a means to contemplate culture, history, ideology, and one's role in the larger human community; moreover, what was sought was not universality in the ideas contemplated, but authenticity, that is, what was sought was a manner of being and thinking that could express groundedness, an ownmost possibility, and the sort of affirmation sufficient to validate claims to the humanity of situated historical peoples.

However, this manner of speaking about the relationship between philosophy and its circumstances (and history and culture) raises doubts about whether philosophy as conceived by the philosophers of *lo mexicano* was *actually* philosophy, when the latter is understood, as Richard

Rorty once put it, “the transcendence of contingency.”¹⁰ After all, if philosophy is the transcendence of contingency, then the circumstance is precisely what is being transcended.

Deciding on the philosophical worth of the philosophy of *lo mexicano* turns out to be a problem for philosophical historians, who in writing their histories of Mexican philosophy must decide, on philosophical grounds, whether the philosophy of *lo mexicano* was transcendent in the relevant sense demanded by “philosophy.” The question for us is whether Mexican philosophical history has done its job, that is, whether philosophical historians have challenged Mexican philosophers on philosophical grounds and not merely set up, or emplot, that history as merely a record of past intellectual events. The suspicion is that Mexican philosophical history has not been done philosophically due to the fact that its object, the aforementioned philosophy of *lo mexicano*, limited itself as philosophy due to the fact that it was a response to, or was *caused by*, a *cultural desire for authenticity after the Mexican Revolution*; it is suspected that this relationship to culture, what I’d like to call generally as the *cultural remainder*, somehow prevents the necessary kind of detached, pure evaluation and analysis of *transcendent* propositions and insights characteristic of *real philosophical* history.

In what remains, my aim is twofold: one, to show that the cultural remainder does not prevent proper philosophical evaluation and interpretation and, two, that Mexican philosophical history is indeed philosophical. I show how this is so through a closer examination into the philosophy of *lo mexicano*, and at an exemplary case of philosophical history, i.e., that of Abelardo Villegas.

For now, I want to think about what is meant by authenticity and why it has influenced Mexican philosophy and its history in the way that it has.

2. The Trope of Authenticity

At stake in the analysis of Mexican philosophical history is the notion that that history accurately reflects an affirmative philosophical project meant to reveal an identity both original and authentic. In simpler terms, at stake are affirmative responses to skeptical attitudes that declare, in regards to Mexican philosophy, “that’s not philosophy” or, questions that ask, “what’s Mexican about it?” What’s not at stake is that there is a history and that it is a history of philosophy. About this, we can say in general that Mexican philosophical history means to recover a memory of philosophy, a tradition of questions and answers, and the manner of their asking, which is the history of philosophy in its living reality. This recovery recovers authenticity as the guiding principle, or trope, of both philosophical investigation and, consequently, of its history. Where there’s issue, however, is when we ask whether or not the history and the philosophy are *philosophical* in a relevant sense. The relevant sense here being that it engages philosophical history on the level of concepts, seeking coherence and clarity, and does not approach philosophical history merely as a disputation of historical and cultural facts. Addressing the issue of its philosophical relevance, finally, is significant because at stake is also the inclusion of the Mexican philosophical tradition into a more global and inclusive philosophical narrative.

Philosophical history in general is meant to faithfully, or accurately, represent the occurrence of past philosophical events; it means to record those events in, and as, the intellectual memory of a people. In 20th century Mexican philosophical history, those philosophical events

¹⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 25.

are the figures and texts that aimed to rationally deal with Mexican historical, cultural, and national identity as well as with the meaning of philosophy itself as related to the specific past, present, and future of Mexico as nation and historical project. These concerns lead to and culminate with what comes to be called *la filosofía de lo mexicano*, or the philosophy of Mexicanness. For *la filosofía de lo mexicano* the framing issue is authenticity. Authenticity is the trope framing the philosophical project as a project of self-affirmation. Because those historical events--figures, texts, and movements-- that constitute intellectual memory reveal themselves as framed by the desire for self-affirmation, historians, in turn, trace, or *emplot* the movement of these events so as to highlight authenticity as the unifying theme. As such, authenticity is the trope, or the *enfóque*, that guides the writing of philosophical history in 20th century Mexico.

What do we mean by authenticity? Martin Heidegger gives us, arguably, the most notable philosophical account of authenticity in his *Being and Time* of 1927. For Heidegger, authenticity has to do with fully being oneself at any one time, with, he says, “taking hold” of oneself in spite of the temptation to *not* be oneself, despite always being called on by necessity (historical, social, economic, or existential necessity) to “lose” oneself in something or someone else, to become something or someone else.¹¹ In an existential sense, *taking hold of oneself* applies to human beings in their particularity, but we can also apply this insight to culture, to philosophy as such, to thinking in general. Similarly, Charles Taylor refers to authenticity in terms of “being true to my own originality” or “realizing a potentiality that is properly my own.”¹² Authenticity thus refers to being what one is and not what one is not, i.e., to being *true* to oneself, which implies a *knowing* what one is and a knowing what one is not, or realizing what is *not* properly one’s own. Thus, the Peruvian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy says that authentic is whatever “gives itself as it is in itself and not as a falsity, an equivocation, or a distortion.”¹³ In these ways is the logic of authenticity ultimately tangled up with the logic of truth.

This preoccupation with being what one is and knowing what one is not, or with authenticity as truth, may be seen as representing a negative desire to be unique in the specific sense that not only differentiates but also excludes all other possibilities of being (being an authentic Picasso, for instance, means that there is a criteria to being an authentic Picasso and whatever does not meet that criteria is not an authentic Picasso). However, the authenticity sought in Mexican philosophy is one rooted in a desire not for uniqueness of the exclusionary kind but in a desire for recognition, that, coupled with a hope for inclusion, allows Mexicans the right to affirm themselves before and within the Anglo and Continental philosophical traditions.¹⁴ More importantly, what is overcome in becoming authentic is a colonial narrative that insists that what is Mexican is not original or genuine but imitation, reproduction, and repetition of an *old world*. Thus, for Mexican philosophers such as Luis Villoro becoming authentic is becoming original in the sense of achieving “autonomy of reason...congruent with

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) pp. 68, 167, 463.

¹² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 29.

¹³ Augusto Salazar Bondy. 1968. *Existe una filosofía en nuestra América?* (Mexico. Siglo XXI Editores), p. 72

¹⁴ Thus, Carlos Pereda, for instance, criticizes the desire for authenticity as a desire for a closed totality. The “discourse of authenticity” must be “dismantled,” especially when seeks to “defend precise limits, ideals of homogeneity and consensus, fantasies of stability” (2008; 119). In Carlos Pereda (2008). *Los aprendizajes del exilio*. Mexico: Siglo XXI.

concrete life...”,¹⁵ while for Leopoldo Zea to be authentic is nothing more than to be fully human, or as he says, to “aspire to human plenitude [or what] makes it possible.”¹⁶ Both of these affirmations come in the context of that colonial narrative that denies originality and autonomy, and so both Villoro’s and Zea’s conceptions of authenticity are culturally rooted *of necessity*—in other words, the claim here is that they would not hold them if their situation were different. A philosophical history will thus consider these dimensions of authenticity in its evaluations and interpretations without losing that cultural connection, that concrete memory, or what is properly *mexicano*.

But the question remains: is a philosophy of authenticity, what the philosophy of *lo mexicano* ultimately boils down to, and one that is grounded on cultural desires for affirmation and self-knowledge, *philosophical* in the relevant sense that its insights and ideas are objective, rigorous, clear and capable of transcending experience and contingency?

3. The Cultural Remainder

That there is a trope at work in the writing of Mexican philosophical history raises the issue of objectivity, since in looking at history through a determinate trope suggests a certain myopia or perspectival prejudice. For Mexican philosophical historians this is not a vice, but a virtue. The Mexican philosopher of history Leopoldo Zea called the objectivist demand a demand rooted in an “imperial passion” (Interview), one imposed on Mexican historians and philosophers by the Eurocentric refusal of the subjective point of view. Given this denial of the imperialist demand, the question is whether the tropological reading reduces Mexican philosophical history to a mere emplotting or laying out of culturally informed articulations lacking any semblance of objectivity, coherence, or universal value. That is, is Mexican philosophical history really a history of philosophy, or rather, is it merely the history of culturally conditioned, subjective interpretations of Western philosophies *in Mexico*?

If Mexican philosophical history is merely a re-telling of culturally conditioned interpretations of Western philosophies from a given historical moment then it certainly does not contribute to an objective historical account and much less to a philosophical one; what we get, at best, is an interpretation of a philosophical idea told from a particular perspective and with a certain aim. This would help explain, moreover, why Mexican philosophical history has, up to now, been excluded from those “official” philosophical histories with which we are all familiar—when it is translated, read, and shared, this philosophical history, it seems, doesn’t seem to add or contribute to what we already know.

Thus, a reading of the history of philosophy, where, as Leopoldo Zea writes, solutions to “issues appropriate for everyman [i.e., being, God, etc.]...will be given from a Latin American standpoint,”¹⁷ reads philosophical events as culturally implicated, as necessarily interpretable through or with a cultural standpoint, or cultural remainder. The problem with this, what will be called the *culturalist* approach to the history of philosophy, is that it risks conflating the histories

¹⁵ Luis Villoro, *El concepto de la ideología* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007), p. 162.

¹⁶ Leopoldo Zea, *La filosofía Americana como filosofía sin mas* (Mexico: Siglo XX Editores, 1969), p. 114. See also, Ofelia Schutte, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Leopoldo Zea, “The actual function of philosophy in Latin America,” in *Latin American Philosophy in the 20th century*, edited by Jorge J.E. Gracia (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 226.

of cultural perspectives with philosophical history, when these should clearly be kept apart. Critics point out that the culturalist approach to the history of philosophy may, in the best-case scenario, merely *explain* who adopted a certain Western philosophical method or approach, how it was adopted, and why it was adopted in a specific time, in a specific culture, and by specific individuals. The Uruguayan philosopher Carlos Pereda suggests that this kind of emphasis on explaining rather than evaluating leads philosophical historians to produce “groundness ethnographical sketches, little pieces of information that blur the philosophical relevance of the text and do not make clear why they should be of any interest to the reader,” ultimately, effecting “the development of philosophy itself.”¹⁸ The development of philosophy, that is, cannot rest on the history of figures who practiced it, but on the evaluation of those ideas that were practiced; an evaluation free of biography and the eclipsing influence of cultural remnants.

This sort of criticism is motivated by the notion that for there to be a genuine, authentic philosophy in the present and *for the future*, philosophical history must be philosophical and not be merely a culturalist re-telling of philosophy’s appearance in a particular historical moment. A pillar in the study of Latin American philosophy in the US, Jorge Gracia, questions the possibility of an original and autonomous Latin American philosophy on the grounds that Latin American philosophical history has failed with its philosophical emplotments. That is, the tropological nature of laying out Mexican (or Latin American) philosophical history, i.e., emplotted as the search for authenticity, will privilege the cultural contribution and the sort of interpretation that *reads* authenticity into philosophical texts over objective evaluation and interpretation of concepts or ideas; Mexican philosophical history will be written, that is, through the prism of particular interests, with the weight of its cultural entanglements, and within the limits of personal ideological biases. For this reason, Gracia suggests that rather than an interpretive, evaluative, and critical reading of philosophical ideas themselves, culturalist will *focus* on the “complex cultural matrix” in which so-called philosophical ideas are found and then seek--through that cultural trope--to connect those ideas back into the matrix, interpreting those ideas as *products* of the culture.¹⁹ Gracia calls this the *culturalist* approach, the adoption of which has delayed the arrival of a proper philosophical tradition in Latin America. He formulates his critique as follows:

The cultural analysis helps us to understand what the thinkers of a particular culture have in mind, or had in mind if they belong to the past, and the cultural reasons why they do, or did, so. But that kind of analysis does not make clear the philosophical reasons they consider to be the foundations of those ideas, and therefore, it does not help, and in fact it may be an obstacle to the philosophical evaluation of those ideas. The kind of causal explanation favored by culturalists, then, separates them from those who take a philosophical approach to the history of philosophy.²⁰

¹⁸ Carlos Pereda, “Explanatory and Argumentative History of Philosophy,” *The Role of History in Latin American Philosophy*, edited by Arleen Salles & Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 53.

¹⁹ Jorge J.E. Gracia, *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 226.

²⁰ Jorge J.E. Gracia, “The History of Philosophy in Latin American Philosophy,” in *The Role of History in Latin American Philosophy: Contemporary Perspectives*, Arleen Salles and Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, Editors (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 22.

In the background of this critique is the standard/official view of philosophy and of what it means for something to be philosophical in the relevant sense. Gracia himself says that philosophy as a view of the world consists in *propositions* that describe, interpret, and evaluate that world.²¹ Or, more bluntly: “Philosophy, like mathematics and other disciplines of human knowledge, consists of a series of truths and methods of inquiry that have no spatialtemporal characteristics.”²² Genuine philosophical propositions, truths, and methods then refuse something like the cultural remainder on principle. So for a history to be a *philosophical* history of philosophy, it must be a story that along with describing the way in which certain methods or truths made their appearance at any particular time also evaluates and interprets them stripped of their spatial-temporal characteristics, of their context, and of any trace of the cultural environment in which the historian finds them—otherwise, it is a *nonphilosophical* history.

It is true that in general, in writing the history of philosophy, Mexican philosophical historians do not pay much attention to the manner in which the desired distancing of truths from their context or the required disentangling of philosophy from culture has taken place. What philosophical historians focus on when looking at their philosophical past is the manner in which philosophical truths and methods are appropriated by their predecessors, the manner in which the colonial influence is confronted and either overcome or assimilated, and the influence of those truths and methods on the times or the influence of the times on those truths and methods. In every case, what I’m calling the cultural remainder remains. We see an example of this in Leopoldo Zea’s influential text from 1942, *En torno a una filosofía Americana*, where he famously postulates that an authentic, genuine, original Latin American philosophy is one that addresses the circumstantial reality of Latin America.²³ This *address* requires, he continues, by the appropriation of Western philosophy, by the desire to confront the colonial past, and by the cultural crises that, at that time, grip the old and the new world alike. In a more historical work, his history of positivism in Mexico, *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México*, Zea again ties philosophy to its cultural emergence.²⁴ There, he aims to show how Mexican cultural elites promoted French positivism as a means to exert power and influence over social, economic, and educational policy in Mexico. In this sense, Zea’s historical account is a description of how philosophy (positivism) appears as a result of, or as an expression of, cultural anxieties. In Gracia’s view, this non-philosophical approach is, he says, “dominated by one concern: the understanding of past philosophical views as expressions of the complex cultural matrix from which those views arose.”²⁵ As such, Zea’s history of positivism disqualifies itself as philosophical, since it “views philosophical ideas as parts and products of a culture, as representative phenomena of an age or period.”²⁶

Again, the specific fear with the culturalist approach is that it is detrimental to the possibilities of any *future* philosophy. Would be philosophers of today, that is, finding no inspiration or direction in the philosophical work of yesterday, will either repeat the mistakes of

²¹ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 57.

²² *Latin American Philosophy for the 20th century*, p. 210.

²³ Leopoldo Zea, *En torno a una filosofía Americana* (México: El colegio de México, 1945). He writes: “Philosophy ought not be the result of *being able to do it*, but rather, of a *having a necessity to do it*” (p. 22).

²⁴ Leopoldo Zea, *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México* (México: El Colegio de México, 1944).

²⁵ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 226.

²⁶ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 226.

the past or give up on philosophy all together. But the fact that today there are Mexican philosophers shows that yesterday's philosophy, and the history that presents it, is inspirational and aspirational. Consider the work of Mario Teodoro Ramírez, who in his historiographical work on post-Revolutionary Mexican philosophy not only evaluates and criticizes the humanism of Caso and Vasconcelos, but also applauds them for their *teaching*. Ramírez writes: "Philosophy teaches us—as we were taught by the philosophers from the *Ateneo*—that existence...is more than necessity, interest, weakness, coexistence, transaction, cold objectivity...That we can think otherwise. They illuminated, tentatively or intensely, a space to which perhaps we should return so as to locate our thinking, our uneasiness."²⁷ Mexican philosophical historians are doing something right when the teachers of the past can teach *us*, today, to "think otherwise." But those observations that Mexican philosophy is instructive, that what was taught was to think otherwise, that Mexicans have other spaces to locate their anxieties, are not philosophically insignificant; these are transcendent insights and notions derived from critical, active, and evaluative readings of Mexican philosophical history. In this case, Mexican philosophical history has opened, rather than closed, the possibilities for future philosophizing.

It is not difficult to see, in both Ramírez and Zea, that Mexican philosophical history must and does challenge (through interpretation) the relation amongst ideas with other ideas while weighing their worth against those ideas considered context-free (e.g., "Mexican existence" vs. "existence" itself); critical abilities inherited from their own studies, their teachers, and from the presence of their own philosophical histories. It is only by engaging in this kind of evaluation and comparison that Ramírez can conclude with the general observation that "the social and human task of philosophy is to understand and project our own cultural dimensions."²⁸

A "culturalist" approach to the history of philosophy thus assumes philosophy to be related in some intimate way to culture and its crises—with how to address these or how to overcome them or deal with them; the culturalist *critique*, on the other hand, sees this relation to be a causal relation, and philosophy to be a product of the different configurations that make a cultural context. For the critic, this results in philosophical analyses that are weighed down, so to speak, by the cultural remainder. Pereda is more unwavering in his critique of the culturalist approach, finding its roots in "that arrogance of collective identities [to] conform to 'nationalist enthusiasms.'"²⁹ Thus, whether it's merely confusion or arrogance, the idea is that in either case the philosophical historian is doing a disservice to all future philosophers in the region who in reading that history will fail to understand what philosophy is suppose to be simply because the history itself fails to challenge the apparent relativism of grounding philosophy on some historically determinate ground.

Aside from the criticism that says that the culturalist approach gets in the way of conceptual evaluation or that it overburdens interpretation thereby making a future philosophy impossible, there is also the critique that the cultural remainder prohibits originality and authenticity. Augusto Salazar Bondy is the most famous of these critics in Latin America.³⁰ In

²⁷ Mario Teodoro Ramírez, "La filosofía Mexicana en la época de la Revolución," in *Filosofía de la cultura en México*, edited by Mario Teodoro Ramírez (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdez, 1997), p.170.

²⁸ *Filosofía de la cultura*, p.170.

²⁹ "Latin American Philosophy: Some Vices," p. 195.

³⁰ See, Augusto Salazar Bondy, *Existe una filosofía en Nuestra América?* (México: Siglo XXI Editores,1968).

the English speaking world, we have Jorge Gracia: “One important reason why Latin American philosophy is not as original as it could be,” he declares in “The History of Philosophy and Latin American Philosophy,” “is that Latin American philosophers use the history of philosophy in their philosophizing...in a nonphilosophical way and, therefore, suppress rather than develop genuine philosophical activity and originality.”³¹ The question is *how* the history of philosophy is *used* in a nonphilosophical way? The answer is that it the history of philosophy is used in a nonphilosophical way when it is emplotted so as to describe what and how people at a certain time thought about their world; for it to be *used* in a philosophical way would be to subject those same thoughts to rigorous examination, to judge their value against other thoughts, to evaluate those thoughts on the basis of their conceptual and logical coherence. When this does not happen, Gracia warns that philosophical originality is suppressed.

The suppression that Gracia alludes to is due to what I’ve been calling the cultural remainder, which, again, burdens evaluation and interpretation problematizing the articulation of those kinds of thoughts and propositions that apply to all at all times in an original and authentic way. The *real* philosophy, it is thought, get’s lost in the cultural accounting. However, as Ramírez makes evident, Mexican philosophical historians are clearly cognizant of this cultural remainder, and find it unproblematic, seeing it as an opportunity to teach and project (rather than suppress) an original and authentic cultural difference. But, perhaps Ramírez and Zea are blind to their own blindness; thus, Gracia tell us that, for the most part, Latin American philosophers “think...poorly of their own philosophers.”³²

4. Thinking “poorly of their own philosophers”—and their own philosophies

But rather than blame them for being bad philosophers, one could instead justify the lack of a proper philosophical history in Mexico by appealing to those inherited and colonizing ideological prisms through which philosophical historians necessarily see and interpret their past. Thus we could say that the reason why, as Gracia puts it, Latin Americans tend to “think poorly” of their philosophical contributions has to do with those dialectical tropes of inferiority and superiority inherited from colonialism and operative in the cultural narrative in which European intellectual history sets the standard of normalcy and correctness and in which Latin American philosophical history is usually insufficient both to European/North American philosophers and to Latin American philosophers themselves. Thus, on this line of thinking, they may think poorly of their own philosophical history because *they have to*. A quick glance at their own intellectual history will reveal their colonial entrapments and lead them to the conclusion that their philosophy has been poorly executed, since philosophy is philosophy and its job is precisely to transcend, via its universal pretentions, “the spirit of the times,”³³ something their past philosophies do not do.

However, a philosophy of authenticity would seem to betray this excuse, namely, the excuse that the reason behind the lack of a proper philosophical history is the presence of a

³¹ Jorge J.E. Gracia. 2005. “The History of Philosophy in Latin American Philosophy,” in *The Role of History in Latin American Philosophy: Contemporary Perspectives*, Edited by Arleen Salles and Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert,(Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 22.

³² “The History of Philosophy in Latin American Philosophy,” p. 22.

³³ “The History of Philosophy in Latin American Philosophy,” p. 25.

certain kind of intellectual colonialism. After all, the search for authenticity represents a conscious effort to fully affirm oneself where one stands, which means being conscious of one's historical condition in its intricate totality. With this in mind, it is also easier to see how the trope of authenticity motivating both Latin American philosophy and its history might have something to do with the predominance of the culturalist approach, especially when one considers that an account of consciousness and existence that is non-derivative, affirmative, and genuinely human would seem to gain in justification the more robust that it is, and be more robust the more that it assumes the peculiarities of the cultural context on which that consciousness and that existence is grounded.

For my part, I do not believe the dominion of philosophy to be limited to the world of propositions and concepts, but is, in fact, robust in this complex way. Thus I believe that the incursion of culture into philosophy is not a limitation on philosophical evaluation or interpretation. This means, of course, that I cannot hold the view of philosophy as a kind of reflection operating at the level of pure, universal ideas where evaluation and interpretation takes place at a higher plane and without the influence of history, culture, or circumstance.

In my readings of Mexican philosophical history, philosophy is always a critical engagement with ideas and proposition that arise out of, are influenced by, or relate back to a determinate historical ground. On this reading, the concern with being authentic is understood *not* as an idiosyncratic worry of some to highlight their own uniqueness, but is understood rather as a philosophical concern with historical origins, one that plays itself out in cultural discourses in time, and responds to colonial master narratives of inferiority-superiority, power, and truth. This *philosophical* concern seeks its own truths, and finds methodological validation in philosophical historicism and phenomenology. With these motivations and these methods, Mexican philosophical history is much more than a mere recounting of how philosophy has been understood and adopted by *thinkers* at any one time; rather, it is in most cases an original and penetrating investigation into a situated consciousness, and into the conceptual, categorical, and ideological matrices that shape it and inform it and how these are related in dialogical ways to people, events, and, of necessity, the abstract universality that Western philosophy promotes. Certainly, there are histories that are a mere recounting of Western philosophy's journey through Mexico, for instance, Samuel Ramos' *Historia de la filosofía en México* from the early 1940s. In that work, we see how Western philosophy made its way into Mexican culture through readings and lectures by prominent teachers. But even there, Ramos offers evaluations and interpretations that reveal the shortcomings of those readings and those teachings, an undertaking that would be impossible without a dialogical relationship to the history of Western philosophy. My point is that from Ramos' own history, to recent histories by Abelardo Villegas, Guillermo Hurtado and Mario Teodoro Ramirez, the writing of philosophical history has aimed at being properly philosophical by problematizing the relationship between history and philosophy without abandoning history or culture as ground or horizon. Simply put, Mexican philosophical historians aim to be robust by being inclusive of cultural anxieties without forgetting their own philosophical education; without forgetting, that is, the pretensions to universality that define the properly philosophical. We can thus give a preliminary answer to the question of this essay that asks into whether or not the search for Mexican identity influenced the writing of Mexican philosophical history. The answer is that it certainly did influence it, since in both actual philosophical practice and its written history culture and authenticity frame the horizon of possible philosophical investigation.

Inherent in the culturalist critique is the notion that philosophical history will be too wrapped up in cultural influences—what I’ve been calling the cultural remainder—to be properly evaluative or interpretative of *philosophical ideas* as such. While this could certainly be the case—a historian could forget to be properly philosophical and, sticking faithfully to the facts, unknowingly enter the realm of anthropological or sociological history—this verdict assumes that these particular philosophical historians did not care enough about their own subject to judge it against an entire history of philosophy of which they were certainly familiar—or else why write a *philosophical history*? In a sense, there is something to the view that Latin American philosophers *don’t think highly enough of their own philosophies*, but this attitude doesn’t manifest itself as apathy or dismissal. Instead, this view motivates evaluation, interpretation, and criticism of the highest levels. Rather than thinking *poorly* of their own philosophies, Mexican philosophers are merely dissatisfied with them, but only because in spite of their greatness their predecessors allowed themselves to fall into this or that intellectual vice, to follow this or that philosophical fad, to leave their projects incomplete or unsatisfactorily argued. This is another way of saying that Mexican philosophical historians—whether or not they are philosophers themselves—do not think poorly of their philosophers, a fact evidenced by the presence of a continual, and always critical and evolving, philosophical conversation about Mexican cultural identity, one that begins with Gabino Barreda in the late 19th century, is taken up by Justo Sierra, Antonio Caso, and Jose Vasconcelos at the turn of the 20th century, continues with Samuel Ramos, Emilio Uranga, and Jose Revueltas in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, and is recovered once again in the 21st century by Roger Bartra, Christopher Dominguez Michael, and Guillermo Hurtado. While each generation criticizes the one that came before it, dissatisfied with the arguments proposed or with obvious, and unquestioned, presuppositions, they think highly enough about them to continue the discussion.

Consider the work of the Mexican philosopher Abelardo Villegas, whom Gracia mentions in a footnote of the aforementioned article,³⁴ wherein we find Gracia’s observation that Latin American philosophers think poorly of their own philosophies. Although Villegas is hastily abandoned in the footnote, Gracia’s overall indictment of Latin American historiography applies to him as well, namely, that as a historian of philosophy he, Villegas, is guilty by association and must ultimately regard his philosophical tradition “as lacking originality” and simply does not take seriously the ideas of his philosophical predecessors.

In what remains, I will like to defend Villegas (and Mexican philosophical history more generally) from this possible charge, and in the process highlight the manner in which Villegas approaches the history of Mexican philosophy *philosophically* through the trope/*enfoque* of authenticity. While the connection between particular cultural and historical desire to seem authentic and the philosophical articulation of that desire might be easy to make, thus validating the charge of culturalism, philosophical historians like Villegas consider the cultural or historical desire as one more idea among many that was, in fact, articulated philosophically and is part of a coherent set of propositions deployed for the sake of justifying the Mexican’s affirmation of their place in the cosmos.

5. Villegas on the Imperative of Mexican Philosophy

³⁴ “The History of Philosophy in Latin American Philosophy,” p. 22fn8.

Abelardo Villegas sums up what he calls “the imperative” of the Mexican philosophical project in the following way:

In what we have of the century, thinkers occupied themselves with a vast variety of themes, but more than anything, *as a true obsession*, the theme of Mexico. The *imperative* to know Mexico is urged in philosophy...the imperative to know ourselves implies a knowing what we are, and that we exist. Mexican thought in this century displays a task of self-knowledge...Many themes that apparently are far removed from those of *lo mexicano* demonstrate, at their foundation, an organic relation with that obsession.³⁵

What’s more stereotypically philosophical than the imperative to know *what we are* and *that we exist*? That these questions are tied to an “obsession” with the “theme of Mexico” doesn’t necessarily make them “representative phenomena of an age”³⁶ as the culturalist critique has it, but rather makes them representative phenomena of all humankind, who in their search for self-knowledge must begin from the most familiar, namely, their concrete, social and historical, identities.

Ultimately, the obsession to know *what one is* and *that one is* turns out to be more than a narcissistic urge to proclaim one’s Mexican uniqueness, it is an obsession rooted in the belief that one is not living and thinking as one should, i.e., authentically, as an autonomous human being capable of self-affirmation before the eyes of the larger human community. The problem, as we’ve seen, is telling the story of this obsession in a philosophical way without conflating it with the story of the historical development of Mexican culture itself, a conflation that can only result in more cultural history. The problem is urgent for the simple reason that if philosophy is to be done in Mexico, now and in the future, the history of what has come before must itself be evaluated on philosophical, and not on merely historical, grounds.

To this end, Villegas warns that philosophical history should not restrict itself to a mere objective re-telling of past events, to a mere “making” history, but be an active, and critical, engagement with what came before. The case has been, he writes, that “philosophers who do the history of thought focus more on understanding [history] rather than on criticizing it, more on making [history] rather than unmaking it [*deshacerla*].”³⁷ The key word here is *deshacer*—to unmake or to undo, which he associates with criticizing history, as opposed to understanding it. So one goes about unmaking history by criticizing it, by criticizing its emplotments and its chosen tropes, or by deconstructing its narrative. Once unmade, or deconstructed, the historical narrative lends itself to the type of evaluation that looks at those conceptual and categorical relations that make it up; but more than a conceptual analysis, the historical event itself will guide the re-making of the narrative, the interpretation that puts it back together. The process of re-making philosophical history will thus consider that the historical event itself is a philosophical event (a philosophical idea or articulation instantiated in time) and will try to make sense of it in the context of other philosophical events, which means evaluating the merits of the philosophical event on the basis of its philosophical underpinnings, concepts, etc. In this sense,

³⁵ Abelardo Villegas. *Autognosis. El pensamiento mexicano en el siglo XX* (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1985), p. 7.

³⁶ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 226.

³⁷ Abelardo Villegas, *La filosofía de lo mexicano* (México, D.F.: UNAM, 1979), p. 214.

Mexican philosophical history will be more than what Carlos Pereda calls “explanatory history”³⁸ which is a mere explanation of events, and more involved still than a simple culturalist interpretation to which Gracia alludes.

The text in which Villegas seeks to remedy the previous lack of historical criticism is his *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, first published in 1960. The *filosofía de lo mexicano*, or the philosophy of Mexicanness, is, first, a historical account of the philosophical obsession with identity and authenticity that marked the first half of the 20th century. Second, and most importantly, it is a *philosophical* history in that Villegas challenges the philosophers of *lo mexicano* to provide the basic *philosophical* rationality of their project. Villegas’ history here is not content with simple exegesis, chronologies, doxographies, or causal explanations. He aims to *unmake* this history so as to rid Mexican philosophical history of its apparent non-philosophical limitations. Previously, “We have limited ourselves to a historical understanding, that is, in finding the vital causes or circumstances that *induced* our philosophers to maintain their [philosophical] positions” (my emphasis), but now we must try, he says, to “*inquire into the universal validity of its concepts.*”³⁹

La filosofía de lo mexicano is a history of 20th century Mexican philosophy that in addition to pursuing the origins and the development of the obsession with self-knowledge, with what comes to be known as “lo mexicano,” also problematizes its philosophical presuppositions. “Lo mexicano” is subjected to critique and challenged on the basis of its logic (Villegas says that the approach violates the law of non-contradiction by seeking universal characteristics of historical beings). By being deconstructive and critical in this way, Villegas’s is an effort to do more than *unmake history*, as it also seeks to *make philosophy*. Thus, *La filosofía de lo mexicano* is more than an attempt at understanding; it is interpretation, analysis, and logical critique, or, as Villegas refers to, *un deshacer*.

Let us turn to the text: From the start, Villegas suggest that his “history” will not be objective and unbiased: “the motive for this investigation was a difference of opinion I had with its main proponents,”⁴⁰ so that “more than a history, we want to solve a problem,”⁴¹ namely, the problem of how to reconcile philosophical universality with the needs of concrete life.⁴²

Villegas takes up the trope of authenticity early on in his philosophical history. While suggesting that the positivist philosophies of figures like Gabino Barreda and Justo Sierra, the anti-positivists philosophies of Caso and Vasconcellos, and the *filosofía de lo mexicano* of Emilio Uranga were internally contradictory and fundamentally flawed, he nonetheless acknowledges their affirmative character, manifested in a willingness to articulate a “patriotic philosophy,”⁴³ something that might be seen as oxymoronic and contradictory in the history of philosophy traditionally considered. However, Villegas doesn’t find his predecessors’ efforts to articulate a *patriotic philosophy* in poor taste, or careless of philosophy’s understood rules and edicts, or just poor philosophy—he *doesn’t think poorly about it*—because, he says, a *homeland* like philosophy are

³⁸ Cf., “Explanatory and “Argumentative” History of Philosophy”

³⁹ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 179; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁰ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 8.

⁴¹ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p.13.

⁴² *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 12.

⁴³ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 7.

not passing fads but fundamental realities of human life and thought that transcend contingency; as he puts it, “neither philosophy nor *patria* go out of fashion.”⁴⁴

That Villegas, as a philosophical historian, allows “la patria” to exist on par with philosophy as a transcendent idea reflects a certain respect for the verdicts of Mexican philosophical history. This respect shows up again as Villegas echoes that verdict when he insists that Mexico’s “historical personality,” is, in fact, “peculiar and distinct,”⁴⁵ a fact that rightly justifies the search for authenticity, for *lo mexicano*, and for Mexican philosophy. Thus, in Villegas’ critical engagement the question is not whether or not there is a Mexican philosophy because, “in fact” there is, and there has been, at least since Gabino Barreda first proposed Mexico as problem in 1867, rather, he says, the challenge is directed at “those suppositions of the analysis regarding *lo mexicano* by which these analyses affirm themselves as philosophy.”⁴⁶ Villegas’ problem with the history of Mexican philosophy has to do with its execution, not with its intent. He points out that while we’re sure that Barreda, Vasconcelos, and Uranga *philosophized*, we are not quite sure that their concepts, methods and presuppositions sufficiently justified themselves as philosophical. While some approaches and revelations were clearly philosophical, or at least possessed the sort of universal intent that would count as philosophical, for instance, the general theme of authenticity-as-ideal, others were clearly problematic, or possessing the opposite of what would count as traditionally philosophical, for instance, the thesis of historicism.

Villegas finds unproblematic the supposition, or hypothesis, which states that cultural, historical, and personal authenticity is desired for its own sake but also for the sake of self-affirmation before the greater human community. Villegas rightly assumes this to be the philosophical hypothesis that grounds the apparent patriotism of Mexican philosophers. From the beginning, with such figures as Barreda in the late 19th century, these philosophers understood “the necessity of investigating our Mexican reality,”⁴⁷ not for the sake of understanding the particularities of the *nation* or *patria*, which is certainly distinct and historically unique; this necessity arose from a historically revealed consciousness of lack or absence of self-identity, from the consciousness that being Mexican is a different kind of being, a difference until now deferred and suppressed by explicit and implicit colonial forces. This was a recognition that Mexicans were not yet, but should definitely be, autonomous, free, self-determining and resolute in their commitments to themselves and each other—that is, it was a recognition that Mexicans were not yet authentic (in the ideal sense). The possibility to be properly authentic is brought about by the event of the Mexican Revolution, which brings with it a resolve for “self-affirmation,”⁴⁸ because, Villegas writes, in “complete violence” Mexican reality finally came to “full maturity,” finding amidst the death and destruction the will to “self-determination.”⁴⁹

However, that philosophers find historical events such as the Revolution as grounding and making possible the philosophical articulation of Mexican identity, of *lo mexicano*, reveals a

⁴⁴ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 19.

dependence on a philosophically problematic thesis that could ultimately be blamed for the non-philosophical nature of Mexican philosophical history in general. What Villegas finds problematic lies in the methods of historicism, which served as grounding supposition of the entire philosophical enterprise—as we see in the “basic presuppositions” I outlined above.⁵⁰ Villegas formulates the problem in the following way:

Lo mexicano...is that which is historical, but they could not situate it within the bounds of universal concepts, since they had negated those [in the appeal to historicism]; thus, their philosophy of *lo mexicano* particularizes itself on a comprehension or conscious awareness of Mexican history. However, this approach which has as its ground a circumstantialist conception of philosophical truth has delivered them to a fundamental aporia: the sterility and impracticality of pure self-contemplation.⁵¹

Here, Villegas challenges the philosophical tradition of historicism that informs Mexican philosophy. Historicism, as does the culturalist approach, says that truth is historical, that it is related to the space-time of its emergence, while rejecting the traditional conception of truth as a-historical and a priori. If the task of the philosophers of *lo mexicano* was to grasp the truth of Mexican identity, then any found truth is a historical, not universal or transcendent, truth. However, Mexican philosophers, according to Villegas, wanted more than historical truth, they also wanted universalizable essences that could *set the definition* of what it *mean to be* Mexican. “Lo mexicano” was conceived as referring to the *essence* of Mexican being. And here we find the logical contradiction to which Villegas refers, which he calls the “aporia” of Mexican philosophy: Mexican philosophers sought for both historical and a priori truth simultaneously, something Villegas finds philosophically problematic, and which he blames on that allegiance to historicism.

For an example of this contradictory thinking, Villegas points to Emilio Uranga’s “ontology” of Mexican being. Aiming to overcome the psychological, and hence, non-philosophical diagnosis of Samuel Ramos that said that Mexicans were culturally debilitated by an inferiority complex, Uranga laid the cause of that cultural weakness on a historical and ontological sense of insufficiency before the substantial or totalizing being of the European colonizer. From a Mexican perspective, that is, Europeans represented substance and permanence, while Mexicans represented accident and contingency. In fact, Mexicans being *is accident*. But Villegas points out that this ontological description is an instance where the philosopher’s reliance on historicism leads him to an aporia: if the Mexican is a historical, thus, non-essential being, then does not this ontological description essentialize him and place him outside of history?

Uranga’s problem was not Uranga’s alone. Mexican philosophy of the 20th century in general comes to find itself in a *double bind*: either affirm an authentic philosophical identity aligned with the particularity of Mexican difference, and thus firmly within the bounds of Mexican history as a source of meaning and value, or insist on contemporaneity with philosophy as an expression of a human sameness, requiring the transcendence of that history and those circumstances and thus a transcendence of their difference. For this reason, Villegas concludes

⁵⁰ Especially, presupposition #3, that authenticity in philosophical practice had to do with the manner in which philosophical ideas were anchored on the circumstances out of which they emerged.

⁵¹ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 180.

that historicism, understood as the view that history itself can ground truth, is also that which makes it problematic as a method of self-affirmation.

Ultimately, Villegas is particularly critical of philosophers who, in their enthusiasm to affirm the Mexican difference and thus justify a *Mexican* philosophy, confused historically informed characteristics of historically and culturally situated persons for essential aspects of a universal Mexican being—the term “Universal Mexican” here lending voice to the aporia sketched above. Villegas is particularly critical of Emilio Uranga’s attempt to talk about a “Mexican ontology.” For Villegas, a “Mexican” ontology, which implies the unlikely intuition of a universal Mexican essence, can ultimately be reduced to certain historical particularities that constitute the national consciousness, in which case it makes little sense to refer to it as “ontology.” After rigorously examining Uranga’s case for a Mexican ontology, Villegas concludes that Uranga’s approach to the project of “lo mexicano” is logically inconsistent (he says it is “circular” [cf. 1979, 183]) and, ultimately, an impossible project that “dissolves into pure history in maintaining a contradictory formula of a temporal Mexican being.”⁵²

But this does not mean that Mexican philosophy is indefensible. Villegas ends his historical deconstruction with a proposal for overcoming the shortcomings of the philosophy of *lo mexicano*. That is, there *can be* a philosophy of Mexicanness, or better yet, a Mexican philosophy, but this one must refuse the entrapments of historicism and narcissistic self-reference and look to find solutions not only applicable to itself but also to the human community as a whole. Villegas proposes that “the philosophy of lo mexicano will consist in a type of analysis that will inform us as to the peculiarity that the Mexican possesses in relation with other peoples...with what we have in common with other peoples...but this only so that we may be able to formulate what we can give other peoples, [namely], a historical experience and a culture that perhaps they do not have.”⁵³ So while it must reject historicism, it does not deny the cultural remainder. In practice, this type of culturally-sensitive analysis traffics in ideas, descriptions, propositions, all of which must be evaluated against always more general ideas and propositions, e.g., authenticity rooted in history vs. authenticity in general—that is, it traffics in transcendent, a-temporal ideas. Mexican philosophy can thus be philosophical in the traditional sense. However, it remains “Mexican” in the sense that it holds on to its difference so as to have something of its own to contribute to the human conversation; we can say that it seeks to gift an experience, aspects of its authentic self, that others “do not have.” Truth is thus both culturally implicated and transcendent.

Holding on to the Mexican difference so as to offer it as a moment of enrichment to a much larger human conversation is, ultimately, what motivates the project of a Mexican philosophy. Philosophy, in its garb of universality and totality, is seen as the appropriate medium to broadcast that difference. And so the desire for affirmation and recognition, or for authenticity, is motivated by purposes larger and more encompassing than mere narcissism or nationalistic enthusiasm. The task for the historian of Mexican philosophy lies in sorting out, highlighting, and analyzing that motivation, of disentangling the apparent obsession with the theme Mexico from its philosophical presumptions and, once individual and cultural motives are seen and separated from their philosophical underpinnings, to evaluate the conceptions of

⁵² *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 186.

⁵³ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 231.

philosophy that serve as the starting point before putting the whole thing back together without losing the cultural remainder motivating the individual or the affirmative force of the project. But this means that philosophy will retain the cultural remainder that so bothers the culturalist critique. Villegas does not have a problem with this in the end. "To return to the individual," he concludes, "to the most particular that we possess is not to fall once again into narcissism, into solipsism or a closed nationalism; on the contrary, it is to appeal to human experience. Only he who attaches himself to what is familiar, who does not invent, reduces his own humanity."⁵⁴ Consequently, what Villegas proposes is a re-thinking of the project of "lo mexicano," one that begins with the Mexican experience as its ground but quickly moves outward, detaches itself from the familiar, and launches into the inter-national, inter-human realm where the Mexican experience might have some use to others without losing its claim to being Mexican.

Ultimately, Villegas reads in the attempt to write the history of Mexican philosophy (Zea's and Uranga's for instance) the desire to express a historical uniqueness that could itself be transcribed into an authentic philosophical consciousness; the problem, as he sees it, is that this effort of affirmation was one that trapped itself in the ecstasy of self-revelation. Here, the obsession with authentic identity clearly influenced philosophy and, as a result, its history, but not, as the culturalist might suggest, in a negative, prohibitive way.

6. Authenticity, Redoux

Having laid out some key features in Villegas' philosophical history of philosophy, let's return to the theme of authenticity, especially as it relates to the culturalist critique of Mexican philosophy.

When we talk about the trope or *enfoque* of authenticity that prefigures the writing of the history of 20th century Mexican philosophy, what we mean is that writing that history is conditioned by a desire to reveal an originality of thought that presents philosophy in Mexico as grounded on the Mexican circumstance and as affirmative in its articulation of a Mexican difference. Leopoldo Zea tells us that given the binding ties between the history of philosophy and the history of the culture from which it emerges, the authenticity of that culture (in the sense of authenticity sketched above) will be necessarily reflected in the authenticity of its philosophy (namely, the philosophical propositions that reflect Mexican reality), and vice versa.⁵⁵

Thus, a negative answer to the question into the possibility of an authentic *Mexican philosophy* will insist that so long as Mexican philosophical *history* is itself inauthentic, or unphilosophical, then there can be no authentic Mexican *philosophy*. The idea here is that without a proper telling of the history of philosophy in Mexico, Mexican philosophers of today and tomorrow lack a firm ground upon which to stand. The same goes with yesterday's philosophers, who must have appealed to their own philosophical history in order to choose the appropriate themes and problems in their philosophizing. If that history was a mere re-telling of the existence of past philosophical works and figures, how they appeared and how they were understood, their own philosophical efforts would be limited to a mere understanding of those previous understandings. Interpretation and critical engagement would be discouraged for the sake of making things clear. On the other hand, if their history was more than a re-telling and a

⁵⁴ *La filosofía de lo mexicano*, p. 231.

⁵⁵ "La filosofía americana como filosofía sin mas," p. 10

rehashing, but interpretive, and evaluative, as well as descriptive—if it engaged what came before in a critical, interrogative, way—then philosophical work would be about more than understanding; it would be about interpreting, synthesizing, and, in general, critical engagement with the problems and arguments that preoccupied their predecessors. I believe this has been the case with Mexican philosophy and its history; rather than a mere expression of, what Pereda calls, “national enthusiasm,” Mexican philosophy has been an earnest attempt at transcendence.

This is an important point because to say that Mexican philosophy is an expression of a national enthusiasm is to assume that Mexican philosophers are incapable of the kind of transcendental insights that Rorty refers to when he defines philosophy, in opposition to poetry, as the transcendence of contingency. Just thinking with Villegas about the history of Mexican philosophy in the 20th century shows that that Mexican philosophers are in fact capable of this transcendence—that this capacity cannot (and should not) be denied even to those who begin their thinking with an obsession, from a specific place, and at toward the end of modern history.⁵⁶

5. What dogs have I in this fight?

Jorge Gracia sets the criteria for a proper *philosophical* historiography—that is, for histories which are, in fact and idea, philosophical—with what he calls “the framework approach,” which requires the historian of philosophy to settle upon a “carefully defined [set of] concepts, formulated problems, stated solutions, articulated argument and objections, and adopted principles of evaluation, all of which are related to the issues the historian proposes to explore in the history of philosophy.”⁵⁷ Right away, we can see that Villegas’ approach fails to

⁵⁶ Ultimately, it is a matter of describing, interpreting, and evaluating past ideas and doing this in a way that is even-handed and unbiased (as Gracia points out (1992, p. 39). That is, one must be careful not to overly focus on description at the cost of evaluation, interpretation at the cost of description, or evaluation at the cost of interpretation. In Gracia’s taxonomy, what we have been calling the “trope” that prefigures the reading of the historical data is to blame for the limitations or drawbacks of the philosophical history. If Mexican philosophical history is philosophical in any important sense, then what is that sense? Of the philosophical approaches laid out in Gracia’s taxonomy in his *Philosophy and Its History*, there is one that best describes the approach of 20th century Mexican philosophical historians. Because the search for identity has influenced the writing of that history, we can say that historiographers have followed what Gracia calls the “eschatological” approach. The virtue of the “eschatologist” is that past philosophical ideas are taken seriously and subjected to careful analysis and scrutiny, “their aim is fundamentally philosophical” (1992, p. 274). Moreover, and what makes eschatologist unique in Gracia’s taxonomy, is that they “see the history of philosophy as leading up to their own thought or the thought of an author they consider the culmination of a process of progressive enlightenment” (p. 274). Historians like Villegas or Ramos, for instance, consider the Mexican philosophical preoccupation with identity and self-affirmation as a slow progression that begins with Gabino Barreda, gaining clarity with Vasconcelos and Caso, and culminating with the *filosofía de lo mexicano* that defined the project of *los hiperiones*. But while progression is interpreted in the Hegelian sense as the progression of reason through time, it is not recalled by our philosophical historians as the mere movement of ideas one after another, without evaluation and interpretation; rather, the trope/enfoque or historical mode of looking at the history (eschatological) demands that these ideas are interpreted as *different from* European models of thought and evaluated as either affirming or rejecting that difference. We can justifiably say that this approach shows that their philosophers thought *highly* of their own philosophical histories. Gracia rightly notes: “The problem with [the eschatological] approach,” he says, “is that its emphasis on interpretation and evaluation is so strong that the description of the past may be distorted” (p. 276). But is this drawback significant enough that we are forced to conclude that the history is not philosophical in an important sense?

⁵⁷ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 279.

meet these criteria. Two reasons why Villegas, as well as Zea, Uranga, and myself, miss the mark are, 1. the intuition of a definite difference in Mexican culture, and 2. an unwillingness, so to speak, to imagine a truth that lacks spatiotemporal characteristics. Moreover, historians like Ramos do not focus on *carefully defining concepts* nor *formulated problems* or *stated solutions*, but rather go through the philosophical record in search of that affirmation of identity that lent and can lend Mexican philosophy its specific difference. There is, for instance, an attempt to *define lo mexicano*, to *formulate its problematic nature*, to *propose a solution to that problematic*, one that relies on an appeal to universality as the essence of philosophy; moreover, Villegas *articulates arguments and objections* regarding historicism and *lo mexicano*, but nowhere do we find a set of adopted principles of evaluation. Rather, what we find in Villegas, for instance, is an insistence that the logical problems inherent in the historicist approach to Mexican philosophy are merely a function of a passion for self-affirmation. But does the lack of a framework make these attempts less philosophical, so much so that, as Pereda argues, philosophy itself suffers as a result? Or that it leads others to think poorly of it? I insist that it does not.

Mexican philosophical historiography does not meet the strict demands of Gracia's framework approach. This does not mean, however, that these histories are not philosophical. Villegas' history of *la filosofía de lo mexicano* is certainly a case where we have those elements of a philosophical history that makes that history philosophical, namely, description, interpretation, and evaluation, although his historical reconstruction of 20th century Mexican philosophy is also focused on the philosophical search for authentic self-affirmation, or differently stated, that apparent narcissism that transformed philosophy into a search for that which makes a people, culture, or subjectivity, special and unique. In that historical re-telling, Villegas recounts the efforts of the Great 20th Century Mexican Philosophers—Caso, Vasconcelos, Uranga, Zea, O'Gorman—focusing only on the manner in which these contributed to Mexican philosophy's infatuation with its own possibility. While highly critical of the logical traps out of which Mexican historicism could not escape, he is nonetheless sympathetic to the desire of those who wanted to *stand out* of philosophy's awesome Eurocentric shadow.

Mexico is the name for socio-cultural circumstance, but more importantly, a conceptual space for negotiating an affirmation of a difference, or otherness, to Europe/North America. In my own readings, its philosophy likewise reflects an ongoing struggle and negotiation. Its histories of philosophies try to collect the various ways in which this is done. In this way my aim has been to capture the various critical irruptions appearing in 20th century Mexico and organize them under tropes or enfoques that affirm their authenticity and belonging. Moreover, while the Mexican philosophical historians were looking for a way to validate the authenticity of their own historical and cultural identity, my approach to the history of philosophy in Mexico is motivated by a more contemporary concern, namely, the inclusion of Mexican philosophy into the English-speaking philosophical cannon. So I can easily be accused of being an apologist in the sense employed by Gracia—in that I want to defend the right of Mexican philosophical history to exist amongst us, but I'd like to think that my approach to this history is problematical and eschatological but also evaluative and interpretative in some important sense. My *The Suspension of Seriousness: On the Phenomenology of Jorge Portilla* (2012) and *Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy* (2016) offer readings of pivotal texts in Mexican philosophical history, but my aim in those works is to go beyond mere interpretation of those texts and into an interpretation of the motivation for those texts and an evaluation of their

philosophical merits. But there is also a personal reason for my own approach to the interpretation and evaluation of those texts, namely, that *their* “obsession” with identity, commonality, or a unique tradition, serves as a model for my own existential reflections in which I, selfishly and narcissistically, struggle to stake a claim in the construction of my own intellectual identity before the levelling force of a crowded and hegemonic American philosophical landscape.

As interpretations go, none can be objective. The writer of the history of philosophy will always be moved by forces external to the subject of his study and influenced in his interpretative position by the texts themselves. Gracia recognizes these constraints to objective reading when he writes: “What is important is to realize the character of the text and how it imposes itself on us, to be aware of its independence from and, I am tempted to say, its ‘power’ over us.”⁵⁸ Moreover, “[m]ethodological requirements and constraints, therefore, are imposed by the text on *all* those who wish to understand it” (27); and, “[h]istorical texts impose on those who wish to understand them certain conditions that are not negotiable and therefore must be accepted by those who wish to deal with them.”⁵⁹ In this sense, then, interpretation forces itself upon us as a necessity. As Hayden White describes it: “the historical work represents an attempt to mediate among...[the] *the historical field*, the *unprocessed historical record*, other *historical accounts*, and an *audience*.”⁶⁰ With all of these restrictions, any written history of philosophy, Mexican or otherwise, is already a philosophical accomplishment.

⁵⁸ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 31.

⁶⁰ *Philosophy and Its History*, p. 5.