

Intercultural Philosophy from a Latin American Perspective

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Introduction

This article explores two basic questions duly exploring its title, viz. “Intercultural philosophy from a Latin American philosophy”.

These questions, dealt with separately in the next two sections, are (1) What has the emergence of the intercultural proposal within the international philosophical discourse meant to the development of philosophy in Latin American and what have been its theoretical consequences? (2) What can Latin American philosophy mean to intercultural philosophy or what could the Latin American experience contribute to the development of the intercultural philosophical discourse as an experiment in truly universal philosophical dialogue?

In our discussion of both questions we will start from a wide concept of intercultural philosophy, i.e. rather than highlight the differences between the various lines of thought currently discernable,¹ we will trace the underlying common theoretical orientation that gives them their own profile as a philosophical movement. It is this broad approach to intercultural philosophy that should be taken as the backdrop against which to consider the arguments we present in discussing the two questions outlined above as the subject of this article. For this reason, we include here a brief explanatory note.

As said, we start our discussion from a concept of intercultural philosophy that underlines the programmatic perspective of promoting, through open dialogue (and

¹ On the historical development of intercultural philosophy and its process of internal differentiation into various currents – a subject that falls outside the scope of this article – cf.: Michelle Becka, *Anerkennung im Kontext interkultureller Philosophie*, IKO-verlag, Frankfurt/M. 2004, particularly, pp. 45–107; Diana de Vallescar, *Cultura, multiculturalismo e interculturalidad. Hacia una racionalidad intercultural*, SP editorial, Madrid 2000, particularly, pp. 181–333; Heinz Kimmerle, *Interkulturelle Philosophie zur Einführung*, Janus Verlag, Hamburg 2002; Hamid Reza Yousefi/Ram Adhar Mall, *Grundpositionen der interkulturellen Philosophie*, Bautz Verlag, Nordhausen 2005, particularly, pp. 41–75; Franz Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Geschichte und Theorie*, Passage Edition, Vienna 1990; and our study entitled “Supuestos, límites y alcances de la filosofía intercultural”, in *Diálogo Filosófico* 51 (2001) 411–426.

on equal material and theoretical terms!) between different cultural traditions, a radical transformation of the way of thinking, knowing and naming – in short, of articulating – and of generating more knowledge and communicating or transmitting that corpus of knowledge which we usually call ‘philosophy’. We understand that such a programme, aimed at the transformation of philosophy, is greatly dependent on a growing awareness of the epistemological consequences of the as yet inconclusive history of Western colonialism. In other words, it is a programmatic view of intercultural dialogue not presented within an abstract framework void of historical memory but rather stemming from the reminiscences of cultures whose cognitive dignity has been hurt. The aim of this approach is to incorporate into today’s philosophical debate the task of transforming philosophy, but in the radical sense of a transformation whose renewing dynamics also encompass the traditions that have so far been accumulated (and endorsed as classical!) under the pressure of Western thought’s overweight.

In other words, the programmatic perspective shared by the movement of intercultural philosophy aims not only at ensuring the inclusion of so far largely ignored cultural traditions or at their recognition by Western-made philosophy, because it is not its sole purpose to add to the ‘treasure’ of the traditions transmitted over time as a paradigmatic line defining what should or should not be accepted under the heading of philosophy. The perspective of a transformation of intercultural philosophy takes us further than that. Its first and foremost challenge is to achieve that any tradition accepted as philosophy as a result of intertraditional and intercultural dialogue be actually recognised as a ‘treasure’ in its own right. For this to become reality, the discipline we call ‘philosophy’ will have to be renamed and redefined through collaboration amongst all the world’s cultural traditions.

Intercultural philosophy therefore wants to initiate a process of exchange that brings together widely varying philosophical experiences and recognises them as legitimate references for the naming of philosophy.²

As envisaged above, intercultural philosophy should therefore also be a dialogue that leaves behind any persistent prejudice against other ways of thinking and knowing that are now excluded from philosophy for supposedly being ‘irrational’, ‘mythological’ or ‘religious’.

In line with this, intercultural philosophy as a movement wants to stop the current process of generating philosophical knowledge from failing to benefit from alternative philosophical experiences. A respectful approach of the knowledge of all cultural traditions is key to bringing about a radical transformation of philosophy for the following two reasons.

²As we will see, this perspective differs greatly from the views of Hegel or Heidegger, who trace back the origin of philosophy to one and only one very specific historical moment, viz. the Greek tradition. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, volume 18, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/M. 1971, p. 117 and ff.; and Martin Heidegger, *Was ist das – die Philosophie?*, Neske Verlag, Pfullingen 1956, particularly, p. 12 and ff.

One reason is that this will allow philosophy to benefit from all human cognitive experience, and not only from part of it; the other is that it will allow philosophers, both men and women, to finally erase a hateful self-image that calls to mind ancient (and modern!) colonial governors *residing* in Algeria, India or Peru but culturally *living* in their respective metropolises. Intercultural philosophy advocates a way of philosophy that is practised in and from a great number of places worldwide and that hence considers unauthentic any way of thinking that is out of context and would rather repeat ideas because they fit in well for being an expression of a particular reality.

Bearing in mind the above explanatory comments on what we have called the overall theoretical orientation common to the movement of intercultural philosophy we can now continue with the two fundamental questions, but only after having pointed out that this article is concluded by the section Conclusion containing some reflections on the meaning of intercultural philosophy at this particular moment in time.

What Has the Emergence of Intercultural Philosophy Meant to the Development of Philosophy in Latin American?

The question of whether intercultural philosophy has been meaningful to philosophy in Latin America can be answered with a resounding ‘yes’. This may sound overdone, but in our opinion it does reflect reality. Under the influence of intercultural philosophy, philosophy in Latin America is discovering the cultural diversity of its context and taking up the challenge of having to make a new start in order to speak plurally of the spiritual plurality of its context.

To understand that this is not a gratuitous statement, we will have to go back in time. I therefore suggest that we very briefly go over the history of philosophy in Latin America so as to show, if only in very general terms, that the above answer is historically justified.

An analysis of mainstream philosophical historiography in Latin America³ until well into the second half of the twentieth century shows that philosophy in Latin America is commonly – and without major problems or doubts being raised – said to have begun properly with the so-called ‘Discovery’ in 1492, i.e. with the arrival

³For general works, see for example: Alberto Caturelli, *La filosofía en Hispanoamérica*, Editora Nacional, Córdoba (Argentina) 1953; Ramón Insua, *Historia de la filosofía en Hispanoamérica*, Editora Universidad, Guayaquil 1945; Manfredo Kempf, *Historia de la filosofía en Latinoamérica*, Zig-Zag Ediciones, Santiago de Chile 1958; for more specific Works, see for example: Diego F. Pro, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico argentino*, Editora Universidad, Mendoza 1973; Guillermo Francovich, *La filosofía en Bolivia*, Editorial Lasada, Buenos Aires 1945; João Cruz Costa, *A filosofia no Brasil*, Editora UFRS, Porto Alegre 1950; Jaime Vélez, *Historia de la filosofía en Colombia*, Bogotá 1962; Constantino Lascaris, *Historia de las ideas en Centroamérica*, Editora studium, San José 1970; and Augusto Salazar Bondy, *La filosofía en el Perú. Panorama histórico*, Editora Nacional, Lima 1967.

of European culture, and more in particular, with the arrival of ‘the theoretical men that came from the West’.⁴ This view holds that there is no difference between philosophy in Europe and in Latin America, with philosophy on the American continent developing much like a transplanted organism growing in new soil. Philosophy simply moved from the Old to the New continent, where its evolution echoes that in the former.⁵

And it must be said – because it reflects the actual philosophical evolution in Latin America – that the philosophy that is known by that name in Latin America and develops as a philosophical corpus recognised as such, is nothing but its European counterpart. We should not forget that, together with the conquest and colonisation – which includes spiritual colonisation⁶ – European culture was imposed, with its university system and its methods of research. And philosophy, being a part of that culture, reproduced in Latin America the cultural model brought in from Europe. This ‘explains’ why the philosophical tradition that is (quite unjustly) called Latin American faithfully mirrors European philosophy in its evolution. Manuals on the history of Latin American philosophy are therefore wont to divide the philosophical development of Latin American countries into stages that correspond with the historical timeframes of the European movements, such as Scholasticism, Enlightenment, Positivism and Marxism.

As said, this approach to Latin American philosophy does not reveal any major theoretical differences with European philosophy. It is the outcome of an artificial transplantation to a context imposed and created by the expansion of European culture. That is why this Latin American philosophy started off without any links whatsoever to the traditions of such native cultures as Nahuatl, Maya, Kuna, Guaraní or those of the Andes region. Indeed, it set out and developed at odds with these indigenous traditions of thought, because according to the Eurocentric point of view they had not yet taken the crucial step needed for the advent of philosophical reflection proper, viz. the step from *mitos* to *logos*, so that these indigenous traditions have traditionally been relegated to the realm of mythology or cosmogony.

The history of the development of *that* – so-called – Latin American philosophy is therefore a history of negation of plurality and, more specifically, a history of cognitive devaluation of Latin America’s indigenous traditions.

This history of tragic epistemological violence – it is obviously a violent history in many regards,⁷ but we will here highlight the epistemological violence for its

⁴Agustín Basave Fernández del Valle, “Posibilidad y límites de una filosofía latinoamericana”, in Sociedad Venezolana de Filosofía (ed.), *La filosofía en América. Trabajos presentados en el IX Congreso Interamericano de Filosofía*, volume I, Caracas 1979, p. 193.

⁵The reader will remember Hegel’s famously disdainful dismissal of American culture saying that what had taken place in America so far was a mere echo of the Old World, and the expression of an alien vitality. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, volume 12, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/M. 1971, p. 114.

⁶Cf. Enrique Dussel, 1492. *El encubrimiento del otro*, Ediciones Utafaia, Madrid 1992; Fernando Mires, *La colonización de las almas*, San José 1991; Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of México*, Los Angeles 1996; and Luis Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y violencia. La conquista de América*, Editorial DEI, San Editorial DEI, Juan 1991.

⁷See for instance Eduardo Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, Siglo XXI, Mexico 1971.

relevance to the field of philosophy – began to take a different course from the second half of the nineteenth century largely thanks to two historical events of great significance to the reorientation of cultural life and particularly to the renewal of philosophy in Latin America.

The first of these was the explicit articulation of a widespread indigenist movement claiming social and cultural justice for the indigenous peoples,⁸ and the second was the launch of a programme intended to elaborate a Latin American philosophy that truly responded to the specific challenges that Latin American societies were faced with regarding the social, political and educational organisation of the newly gained national independence.⁹

Under the influence of these two occurrences, which we cannot analyse now, philosophy in Latin America initiated a process of contextualisation of its considerations which, despite its limitations, was undoubtedly positive, because it helped to bridge the gap between philosophy and own culture in Latin America.

Another highly relevant event in this respect took place almost a century later, i.e. by the middle of the twentieth century, when Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004) embarked on a project to recover the history of philosophical ideas in Latin America with a view to contributing to the mental emancipation and providing a starting point for the elaboration of a philosophical history of the American peoples.¹⁰ Following further radicalisation, this project brought about a liberation philosophy in reply to the neocolonial reality of Latin American countries.¹¹

With this new constellation, the Latin American philosophical tradition did start to differentiate itself substantially from its European legacy. Why? Because by focussing its reflections on the history of Latin America from a liberation point of view, Latin American philosophy set out to look for its own sources, drawing on documents containing the narratives of the memories of the Latin American peoples, and beginning to see itself differently, no longer as the distant echo of European thinking, but as the expression in its own right of a way of thinking on the decentral situation of the peoples of Latin America and their traditions.

⁸ Among many others, see José Tamayo Herrera, *Historia del indigenismo cuzqueño. Siglos XVI–XX*, Lima 1980; and Luis Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México*, FCE, Mexico 1950.

⁹ The onset of this Project is associated with the name of the Argentine intellectual Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–1884) and his famous course in Montevideo in 1842: *Ideas para presidir a la confección del curso de filosofía contemporánea*. About the context and influence of his proposal, see my essay: “Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–1884) y la cuestión de la filosofía latinoamericana”, in *Cuadernos Salmantinos de Filosofía* XII (1985) 317–333.

¹⁰ Cf. Leopoldo Zea, *Ensayos sobre filosofía en la historia*, FCE, Mexico 1948; id., *La filosofía como compromiso y otros ensayos*, Mexico 1952; id., *América en la conciencia de Europa*, FCE, Mexico 1955; id., *Esquema para una historia de las ideas en Iberoamérica*, FCE, Mexico 1956; id., *Filosofía de la historia americana*, Mexico 1978; and *Discurso de la marginación y la barbarie*, Anthropos Ediciones, Barcelona 1988.

¹¹ On the complex route leading from ‘Latin American philosophy’ to the ‘philosophy of liberation’, see Arturo Ardao’s introduction to the anthology of texts by Leopoldo Zea published by Biblioteca Ayacucho under the title of: *La filosofía como compromiso de liberación*, Biblioteca Ayacucho, Caracas 1991; also see our essay ‘Latin American philosophy in the 20th century’, in: *Satya Nilayam* 4 (2003) 87–112.

From that moment, which can be situated in the 1970s, we can quite rightfully speak of what we previously called a substantial difference between Latin American and European philosophy, and what we will now more specifically refer to as a contextual difference. For, by becoming aware of its context and redefining itself as contextual thinking, Latin American philosophy assumed its peripheral condition and ‘discovered’ that European philosophy evolved within a different condition, viz. the condition of centre of the world determined by colonialism.

For Latin American philosophy, this ‘discovery’ implied a questioning of the idea of philosophical universality received from the European tradition, a subject that merits separate analysis. What we wish to point out here is the fact that this questioning of European philosophy’s claim to universality may well represent the most critical moment in the contextual differentiation thus far. We emphasise this aspect because, following our brief review, it should be noted that Latin American philosophy nonetheless relativises this contextual difference or does not draw all the conclusions that it should draw from it.

As we see it, there are two major factors that help explain this inconsistency. Firstly, Latin American philosophy, despite its genuine attempt at contextualisation, is not completely liberated from its European legacy and keeps its eyes still too much turned on Europe; it still preserves many of its habitual ways of thinking and research methods of colonised philosophy, which urges it to keep turning to Europe as its preferred interlocutor. Secondly, as a consequence of the first cause, its relation with Latin American culture is still unfulfilled in the sense that it fails to recognise the full extent of its cultural diversity, preferring to relate with *a part* of Latin American culture, which is moreover the part that is considered representative of all Latin American culture.

To comprehend this unfulfilled relationship whereby one part is taken to cover all other cultural expressions of Latin America, we should bear in mind the influence – both past and present – of the category of ‘cultural mixture’ (*mestizaje cultural*) in the understanding and self-understanding of cultural development of Latin America. Many commentators are convinced that cultural mixture is key to explaining Latin American culture. It is considered so important that it has been used to characterise all Latin America, holding that it is a *cultura mestiza*, a mixed culture.

This approach to understanding the development of Latin American culture is, as we have said, the background that explains why Latin American philosophy has traditionally looked for its roots in the mixed culture of the continent, supposing, moreover, that in doing so it does justice to all the cultural complexity of its context.

But this is a fallacy. A mixed Latin American culture undoubtedly exists, but it would not be right to assert that it represents all existing culture in Latin America. Side by side with this America, there is a whole range of native (and Afro-) Americas whose cultures evolve under names of their own, including Kuna, Guaraní, Mapuche and a great many more. This makes Latin American culturally more plural than the term *mixed culture* suggests. Any Latin American

philosophy that relates only to that mixed culture has not yet begun to dialogue with all the variety of cultures of the Latin American peoples. And since this is exactly what happened, we are referring here to a deficient or partial relationship with the cultural plurality of Latin America as one of the factors that slowed down or impeded a radicalised affirmation of the contextual difference by Latin American philosophy in the era of reference, viz. more or less the years between 1970 and 1990.

It is at this evolutionary stage of Latin American philosophy as an explicit form of contextual philosophy that the impact of intercultural thinking was felt. (We prefer to use the term ‘intercultural thinking’ in general to ‘intercultural philosophy’ in a strict sense, because the first influences came from such areas as political theory reflecting on the fight for recognition of minority cultures in societies with a majority culture or the pedagogics of its bilingual and intercultural programmes.) But before going on, we should point out the following.

The theoretical impact of intercultural thinking in Latin American philosophy cannot be said to have been only the result of the reception of the multiculturalism versus communitarism debate or of UNESCO’S directives on intercultural education (these two examples are given only to follow up on the previous reference to political theory and pedagogics), because in its turn the reception of specific expressions of intercultural thinking sprang from a profound shift in sensibility, basically to the condition that enabled a radical approach to interculturality. This shift in sensibility was one of the great achievements of the reorganisation and mobilisation of the indigenous and Afro-American peoples in the context of the debate on the significance of the 500th anniversary of the so-called ‘discovery’ of America (1492–1992). This event led to the indigenous peoples’ irruption, so to speak, into the history of Latin America – as protagonists! – and their claim that the history of conquest finally be ended and give way to a new history recognising their cultures and religions as legitimate ways for humanity in Latin America.

This event in Latin America’s social history is at the root of the shift in sensibility towards the other. As a result of this change, philosophy too started looking for new methods that would fully account for the apparent cultural plurality of the continent’s reality.

It was not the first time that Latin American philosophy proved not to be up to the actual requirements of its time, but it could not help but to be influenced by the protagonistic irruption of the indigenous (and Afro-American) peoples into the continent’s history, feeling pressurised to radicalise its process of contextualisation by opening up to dialogue with the cultures and thought traditions that it had traditionally overlooked because of its focus on mixed culture. This was its moment of ‘conversion’ to cultural plurality, which, on a previous occasion, we analysed and characterised as the moment of intercultural change in Latin American philosophy.¹²

¹² Cf. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual*, Editorial Tratta, Madrid 2004.

So, under the pressure of historical events, in which the presence of protagonist differences was becoming more and more apparent (with the native peoples increasingly expressing themselves from their own cultures), Latin American philosophy began to make up for its inconsistency and radicalise its process of contextualisation, taking for its philosophical subject matter the cultural diversity of Latin America in all its plurality.

On this road towards interculturality, greatly influenced – as we have seen – by the fallout of the 500th anniversary of the ‘discovery’ of America, there is yet another milestone. The Zapatist rebellion in Chiapas in January 1994 sparked off wide debate on the peoples’ right to cultural self-determination. This indigenous revolt had a profound impact on Latin American philosophy, marking the moment when the more susceptible among Latin American philosophers truly set themselves to the task of helping to lay an ethical basis for the recognition of the other’s culture, setting out on the road towards interculturality.¹³

We think that the preceding contextual comments were necessary for a better understanding of the current stage of development of Latin American philosophy following the encounter with intercultural philosophy. At the very moment of this encounter, Latin American philosophy, impelled, as we have seen, by the sudden emergence of cultural plurality in its own environment, was looking out for the right instruments to recognise – and take on its responsibility for – this diversity, and redefine itself in this new context of plurality.

But when and how did the encounter between Latin American philosophy and intercultural philosophy take place? Obviously, due to the nature of this kind of cultural encounters, this question involves a complex underlying process that can hardly be pinpointed in time, as we already suggested when we pointed out that the main determining factor was intercultural thinking in general. Moreover, interculturality has traditionally formed a covert part of Latin American thinking itself, reflecting the continent’s diversity.¹⁴ However, if we take the question on its face value, i.e. strictly referring to when Latin American philosophy and intercultural philosophy first came into contact, we think that the answer can be said to be in 1995, the year the first conference on intercultural philosophy was held in Mexico. This conference constituted the forum where major representatives of Latin

¹³ We use the term ‘more susceptible’ philosophers because it must be said that the intercultural shift in Latin American philosophy, which we are here trying to situate historically, is a shift that unfortunately does not encompass all Latin American philosophy. In part, it remains focussed on the America of mixed culture, whilst another part, under the pressure of historical events, does look beyond this traditional horizon. This tension is illustrated by the respective positions of two of today’s exponents of Latin American philosophy, viz. Leopoldo Zea, representing the mixed-culture focus, and Luis Villoro, representing those open to the intercultural proposal. Cf. Leopoldo Zea, “El problema indígena”, in *Cuadernos Americanos* 52 (1996) 228–237; and his book *Fin de siglo XX, ¿una centuria perdida?*, Mexico 1996; particularly the essay “Chiapas, yunque de México para Latinoamérica”, pp. 101–137; Luis Villoro, “En torno al derecho de autonomía de los pueblos indígenas”, in *Cuadernos Americanos* 52 (1996) 211–227; and his book *Estado plural. Diversidad de culturas*, Editorial Paidós, Mexico 1998.

¹⁴ Cf. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad y filosofía en América Latina*, Mainz Verlag, Aachen 2003.

American philosophy (e.g. Leopoldo Zea, Enrique Dussel) and intercultural philosophy (e.g. Raimon Panikkar, Ram A. Mall, Franz Wimmer) came together, initiating a direct form of exchange¹⁵ that raised great expectations regarding the reorientation of philosophy in Latin America. Only two years later, in 1997, the second conference was held once again in Latin America, adding depth to the experience of direct contact between Latin American philosophy and intercultural philosophy.¹⁶

However, since it is not our intention here to chronicle this encounter but to point out its significance to the development of philosophy in Latin America, the above summary of events should suffice to outline the historical backdrop of what we have chosen to call Latin America's incorporation into the international discourse on intercultural philosophy. The continent's inclusion into intercultural philosophy as an international movement is the first outcome of the encounter for Latin American philosophy. But what does this exactly mean?

Again, an adequate answer to this question requires more time and space than we can offer here, because this would require analysing the process of transformation that a large part of Latin American philosophy has gone through in the last ten or more years.¹⁷ In other words, rather than discuss this process in depth, we will only touch on the theoretical implications of the encounter with intercultural philosophy for the development of philosophy in Latin America. Of course, I am referring here to the implications that, in our view, are not only the most relevant to its incorporation into the international dialogue on intercultural philosophy but also those that are key to the transformation of Latin American philosophy into a specific form of intercultural philosophy.

First of all, as a result of the encounter with intercultural philosophy, Latin American philosophy entered a new philosophical constellation that had no particular centre because it was dynamic and 'pro-gressed' through dialogue between various knowledge cultures.

Secondly, exposure to interculturality enabled Latin American philosophy to really leave behind its fixation on Europe, that is, to recognise as covertly prejudicious any remaining Eurocentrism, which had been responsible for slowing down the radicalisation of its process of contextualisation by pretending that European philosophy was its interlocutor par excellence and European philosophical methods were the only valid ones.

This meant that, thirdly, through its contacts with intercultural philosophy, Latin American philosophy discovered an epistemological plurality and methodology

¹⁵ See the full minutes of the conference at the Universidad Pontificia de México (ed.), *Actas del Primer Congreso Mundial de Filosofía Intercultural*, Editora UMP, Mexico 1999.

¹⁶ See the documentation of the conference in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (ed.), *Unterwegs zur interkulturellen Philosophie*, IKO Verlag, Frankfurt/M. 1998.

¹⁷ Cf. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, Desclée, Bilbao 2001; and *Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual* (ed.) cit.; but also Dina Picotti, "Voces interculturales en el pensamiento latinoamericano", in *Stromata* 3/4 (2004) 307–312; and José Santos, "Modalidades para un diálogo filosófico intercultural", in *Cuadernos Americanos* 114 (2005) 157–165.

that helped it revalue its own traditions. It rediscovered itself as a part of the world's philosophical plurality, overcoming its traditional self-image as a mere appendix to European philosophy. Its discovery of philosophical plurality therefore gave Latin American philosophy a decisive impulse to differentiate its history and find back its own hidden plurality.

The fourth outcome of the interaction with intercultural philosophy was that Latin American philosophy now had the tools to embark on a process of intercultural transformation from which – as a synthesis of the three previous aspects – it has emerged as a polyphonic philosophy bringing together all cultural voices of Latin America. This transformation is the road towards reconciliation between philosophy and cultural diversity in Latin America and hence also the road that leads to a new and specific form of intercultural philosophy. This takes us to the second question.

What Could Latin American Philosophy Mean to Intercultural Philosophy?

In line with the discussion in the previous section, the term 'Latin American philosophy' should from now on be understood to refer solely to that philosophy which, thanks to its own efforts of self-criticism in reply to the challenge posed by the great impact of cultural diversity on its context and to events in the field of intercultural philosophy, is redefining itself through dialogue with all cultures in Latin America, evolving as a specific variant of intercultural philosophy.¹⁸

With this new meaning in mind, we can see that the question we are examining here is in fact how intercultural philosophy in Latin America can contribute to the international movement of intercultural philosophy. Again, the answer will have to be a brief synthesis.

In our view, Latin American intercultural philosophy adds in the four following ways to the current debate on intercultural philosophy in general.

Firstly, and self-evidently, it expresses, without any reductionism, the philosophical plurality to be found in the Latin American context, communicating in the

¹⁸ See for documentation on this transformation, among many other publications: Consejo del saber Qulla (ed.), *Aportes al diálogo sobre cultura y filosofía andina*, SIWA-Publicaciones, La Paz 2001; Josef Estermann, *Filosofía andina. Estudio intercultural de la sabiduría andina*, Ediciones Abya Yala, Quito 1998; Carlos Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, FCE Mexico 1992; León Olivé, *Interculturalismo y justicia social*, UNAM México 2004; Carlos M. Pagano, *Un modelo de filosofía intercultural: Rodolfo Kusch (1922–1979)*, Mainz Verlag, Aachen 1999; Dina Picotti, *La presencia africana en nuestra identidad*, Ediciones del sol, Buenos Aires 1998; Ricardo Salas, *Ética intercultural*, Ediciones UCSH, Santiago de Chile 2004; Antonio Sidekum, *Ética e alteridade*, São Leopoldo 2002; Fidel Tubino, *Interculturalidad: un desafío*, Ediciones PUCL, Lima 1992; Diana de Vallescar, *Cultura, multiculturalismo e interculturalidad. Hacia una racionalidad intercultural*, PS ediciones, Madrid 2000; and Neusa Vaz/João M. Back (eds.), *Temas de filosofía intercultural*, Nova Harmonia, São Leopoldo 2004.

international fora the many names with which philosophical thinking in Latin America can be associated, such as Aymara, Guarani, Kuna or Maya. In its role of polyphonic mouthpiece of the continent's philosophical plurality, Latin American intercultural philosophy is contributing to the enrichment of intercultural philosophy and of humanity, returning to the world the page from the universal book that, as José Martí put it, the Europeans stole from it at the time of the conquest of America.¹⁹

Secondly, it conveys the experience that for intercultural exchange to transcend the mere abstract, it will have to root in the context of thinking in tangible historical processes, which in turn requires that philosophy be practised as a way of socially, politically and culturally committed thinking. This means that intercultural philosophy must also be a committed philosophy. This idea could be a contribution to intercultural philosophy from the reality of Latin America, it being a characteristic of Latin American intercultural philosophy to be grounded in the concrete struggles of marginalised cultures whose struggle is quite obviously not merely for formal recognition but for their right to economic, political and religious self-determination. One precondition for any culture to be realised – and whoever refers to the recognition of cultures, also refers to their right to realisation – is social justice, because if there is no social justice, cultures are deprived of a condition that is indispensable for their true realisation, i.e. the right to configure their respective worlds according to their values.

If we propose the idea of philosophy's political commitment as a potential contribution to be made by today's Latin America intercultural philosophy to the debate on intercultural philosophy in general, we do so because we are under the impression that the intercultural philosophy movement tends to prefer a concept of culture that does not sufficiently account for the relation between the cultures and the real conditions of economic and political power.²⁰ The Latin American experience of a philosophy that, as a result of its close link with the social–political reality, is committed to the struggle of cultures for the social justice they need to realise their identities, can indeed be a contribution to remedy this deficiency and to elaborate a more historical concept of culture in the intercultural philosophical dialogue.

Thirdly, and resulting from the above, another potential contribution by Latin American intercultural philosophy resides in the proposal to intertwine the paradigms of liberation and interculturality as mutually complementary and hence mutually enriching perspectives. There is no interculturality without liberation of the otherness nor can there be liberation without a dialogue about differences. Only a free culture can communicate its true identity and for a culture to be liberated, there must be open dialogue with the other cultures as the venue where, in a process of mutual support and rectification, new possibilities can be experienced.

¹⁹ Cf. José Martí, "El hombre antiguo de América y sus artes primitivas", in *Obras Completas*, volume 8, Ediciones Sociales, Havana 1975, p. 335.

²⁰ Cf. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (ed.), *Culturas y poder. Interacción y asimetría entre las culturas en el contexto de la globalización*, Desclee, Bilbao 2003.

And lastly, the Latin American contribution to the international debate on intercultural philosophy may well be that of showing – in line with the commitment of philosophy – that intercultural philosophy today faces an unprecedented challenge at worldwide level, viz. the recolonisation of the world through the expansion of a single civilisation model – neoliberal capitalism – which is incompatible with the project of a plural world in which the cultures and peoples of all humanity seek to live together respecting their differences and practising solidarity. One task to be taken on by intercultural philosophy is therefore to ‘interrupt’ the uniforming momentum of the currently prevailing civilisation and to show that interculturality is not a mere notion but a forceful alternative reality.

Conclusion

As said in our introduction, we will conclude this article with a number of brief considerations on the significance of intercultural philosophy in the world of today. To do so, we will return to philosophy’s historical commitment, outlined in the previous section, as a perspective shared by all and also serving as the starting point for our final considerations.

That is why we do not seek so much to emphasise the role that intercultural philosophy may play in improving the quality of philosophy as a particular form of human knowledge. Rather – and precisely – we want to give centre stage to what intercultural philosophy can mean to help improve the quality of life in the world in which we live today and thus to give a different quality to the history that we are forging from our historical present. So what we are referring to is the meaning of intercultural philosophy as a theoretical discourse with the power to help bring about a change for the better in the quality of human life and hence a change in the course of human history.

Starting from this perspective, we wish to point out in the first place that the meaning of intercultural philosophy today is closely linked up with its ability to propose answers to challenges that face humanity on its path through a history that is characterised by widening social and cultural gaps between peoples and cultures due to the all pervading ideology of a supposed ‘progress’, i.e. the dynamics of a capitalist civilisation that plunders nature and that, centred on anthropocentric individualism – aggressive towards cosmos and man alike – aggravates the inner conflict of human subjectivity.

The rhetoric of today’s globalisation, with its emphasis on worldwide processes that supposedly further the union of mankind, conceals the fact that the dynamics of its progress – although involving global expansion – do not correspond to growth in universality, i.e. genuine communication between the various cultures of man. It is therefore a meaningful task for intercultural philosophy in today’s world to denounce the fallacy of this Global Speak and show that reconciliation of mankind is not achieved by applying a single model worldwide but by following the road of a universality that sprouts from the free exchange of different cultures.

It is along this line that we should see the role that intercultural philosophy can play in, for instance, pluralising the ethos of human rights or the idea of democracy, promoting a pedagogics aimed at recognition of the other, or supporting universal criticism of fundamentalism, including the Western fundamentalist notions of market logic and money worship. Undoubtedly, its true significance in our times is greatly dependent on its continued commitment to such structural liberation efforts as those we have illustrated in this article.

However, it is equally important for intercultural philosophy to be meaningful in today's world by working towards an anthropological shift in our societies – as one dimension of the cultural and social shift we need to improve the quality of the world and, hence, the history we make. This is the second matter of importance we wish to underline in these conclusive comments.

We think intercultural philosophy can add to its significance in its current historical context by committing itself to correcting the image of the human being that the prevailing Western culture has scattered throughout the world, and by correcting it not only in terms of the consequences it has had for the way we structurally treat nature and other human beings – which we have already referred to – but more precisely regarding its implications for the very way of being, living and acting of each of us. One of its aims should be to help retrieve, through intercultural dialogue, memories of human dignity that will bring back a sense of measure, proportion and balance, and that reflect a way of being which regards as unworthy of mankind to participate, on the grounds of false needs, in the course of a world that excludes the other, because it is built on rules that enable the extravagance of some.

As the third and final point, intercultural philosophy will be historically significant in our days if it exploits the exchange between cultures to transmit mankind's still remaining reserves of meaning and, complementing the view given in the previous section, to propose the spiritual diversity of cultures as an alternative force to the cynicism and frivolity of societies that, having substituted so-called globalism for profoundness, live only by and for 'the show'.

Intercultural philosophy today would do well to follow – if only in part – Hegel's advice that philosophy should be edifying,²¹ and to make good use of the many traditions it draws on to encourage modern man to be not only a more knowledgeable but also a more ethical being.

²¹ Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Ulstein Verlag, Frankfurt /M 1970, p. 17.