

GUTTROM FLØISTAD, ed. *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey: Volume 8: Philosophy of Latin America*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 2003. Pp. viii + 316. \$138.00 (Cloth: ISBN 1-4020-1476-7).

This book is the eighth volume of a series that aims to “give a survey of significant trends in contemporary philosophy” (vii). This volume focuses on philosophy in Latin America. It is made up of thirteen essays by philosophers born in that region, with a preface and introduction by the editor. Many of the essays offer surveys of different aspects of in Latin America, though some are simply reviews of an author’s own work or short biographies of regional figures. Some essays focus on Latin America as a whole others focus on a particular country; Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador receive their own essays. A handful of essays focus on particular movements, including analytic philosophy and the philosophy of liberation. Three essays offer substantive pieces of philosophical work on specific topics.

For the purposes of acquainting oneself to the main currents of recent Latin American thought, the most useful essay is Dussel’s “Philosophy in Latin American in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” It provides a useful overview of the main developments and traditions in Latin America, and it is accompanied with bibliographies for each of the countries or regions discussed in the essay. Also useful is Salmerón’s essay on analytic philosophy in Latin America. He discusses the arrival and adoption of analytic philosophy in various regions of Latin America, and he relates that many philosophers in the first generation of Latin American analytic philosophers adopted the topics and methods of analytic philosophy only after years of training and activity within a phenomenological tradition principally influenced by Husserl, Hartmann, Scheler, and Heidegger. As both Salmerón and Dussel suggest, acceptance or rejection of German phenomenology has played an important role in the construction of the intellectual terrain in Latin America. This phenomenon suggests that some comparative history might be illuminating, given the similarly divisive role phenomenology played in the European intellectual tradition, leading to the split in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century analytic and Continental philosophy.

Essays of special interest to Anglophone analytic philosophers include Olivé’s discussion of the relationship of truth to knowledge, especially in the context of Villoro’s work in epistemology, and Da Costa and Doria’s “On Some Recent Undecidability and Incompleteness Results in the Axiomatized Sciences.” Continental philosophers and literary critics will be more interested in Sanjinés’ “A Phenomenological Reading of the Andes” and Mayz’s “Meta-Technics as the Philosophical Expression of the New World.”

Though the chapters are diverse in approach, aims, and even genres, two themes recur with enough frequency to deserve merit repeating here. First, several of these essays remind us that the practice of philosophy — regardless of its form — is susceptible to the exigencies of local politics, history, and economics. Political coups, exile-hood, the influence and history of Catholicism, and the pervasiveness of Latin American poverty have all exercised enormous influence on the practice and content of Latin American thought, and not always in the ways one might expect. For instance, the expulsion of a group of philosophers from Argentina in the 1970s did more to spread the philosophy of liberation than its opponents might have hoped. And, the often unhappy grip that Catholic philosophical thought had for so long on Latin American universities seems to be partly responsible for the casual disregard with which it is treated by many (though not all) of the volume’s contributors, now that it has been relaxed. Second, though the volume mentions it more frequently than it displays it, the impressive diversity of

philosophical camps in Latin America makes it obvious that the analytic/Continental distinction that has so much currency in the U.S. is woefully inadequate as a taxonomical tool in most of Latin America.

Despite its rewards, there is much that is puzzling about this volume. Consider that there are at least two possible aims this volume might hope to achieve. First, it might acquaint its readers with the philosophical scene in Latin America. That is, it could offer some sense of the problems and methodologies of philosophy throughout Latin America. Second, the volume could be a survey by demonstration, offering a representative sample of substantive philosophical work in Latin America. Fløistad has assembled a volume that appears to aim, if somewhat unevenly, at the first. However, volumes of this sort are not philosophically unproblematic in the Latin American context. First, a comparatively large part of the history of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American philosophy has been concerned with how to define and pursue philosophy in Latin America. What counts as philosophy, what counts as national or Latin American philosophy, and what tasks are proper to philosophers are topics on which Latin American philosophers have spilled considerable ink and on which disagreements remain vituperous. Second, the notion of Latin American philosophy, as a regional grouping of philosophical pursuits, concerns, traditions, or methods is not unproblematic, either. For example, Jorge Gracia has recently argued that Latin American philosophy can be understood properly only within a broadly Hispanic philosophical tradition, one that includes the Iberian peninsula. Naturally, others have disagreed. And, the role of the Caribbean and Caribbean philosophers to Latin American philosophy is similarly complex and contentious. For example, Franz Fanon is rarely thought of as a Latin American philosopher, though he was born in the Caribbean nation of Martinique. Additionally, the status of philosophers who work on topics in “Latin American philosophy” but who are located primarily in or even born in the United States raises further questions about how to conceive of Latin American philosophy. Thus, we might say that both the *Latin American*, as well as the *philosophy* parts of a book on Latin American Philosophy require taking a stand—even if only implicitly—on substantive questions that have been the subject of considerable investigation by philosophers we might recognize as working within a broadly Latin American tradition.

Though some of the authors (Dussel, Vález) show sensitivity to these issues, neither the essays nor the scattered editorial introduction provide the unformed reader with any systematic resources to understand what the stakes have been, what the positions are, and why any of this was thought to matter. This shortcoming is not the only one of the volume. There is no obvious reason why some movements (analytic philosophy and the philosophy of liberation) receive chapter-length treatments but other important movements (Thomism, Marxism, Latin Americanist philosophy) are addressed only in passing or in a brief section of an overview essay. Similarly, there is little rhyme or reason why some countries or regions (Argentina, Chile, Ecuador) receive survey essays while other obvious candidates (Mexico, Brazil, the Caribbean) do not. And although eight of the essays as well as the preface and introduction have been written or translated into English, other essays are divided between French (four) and Spanish (one). No essays are in Portuguese. The editorial motivation for this motley goes unexplained.

There are virtues to this collection, but its vices are significant. Notably, the price of the volume makes it unsuitable for classroom use, and an unlikely purchase for anyone other than research libraries with a specialized interest in Latin American thought. The fact that it requires trilinguality from its readers makes it unwieldy for many researchers and students. Finally, the spotty proofreading (e.g., ‘Salmerón’ is rendered ‘Salméron’ in the table of contents, ‘Tomists’

for 'Thomists' (68) 'Schick' for 'Schlick' (62)) impedes the intelligibility of various passages. When coupled with the aforementioned difficulties concerning its aims and organization, the volume leaves something to be desired.

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