

# LESSONS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF RACE IN MEXICO

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Mexican philosophy has been an especially active site of thinking about race, leaving a considerable conceptual and terminological legacy in, e.g., the concepts of *'La raza cósmica'*, *'indigenismo'*, and the claim that *mestizaje* can eliminate racism. Despite this legacy, the precise conceptions of race deployed by Mexican philosophers in the first half of the twentieth century have often been poorly understood. Consequently, the specifically racial components in their work have been frequently dismissed on the grounds that it was unscientific, irresponsible, and/or sloppy. I hope to show that with a sufficiently rich understanding of at least the seminal works, many—though certainly not all—of these criticisms can be blunted.

Historically, race has generally been understood as a somatological category identifiable by morphological differences. That is, race was thought to be something that picks out physical features that mark off distinctive natural kinds. Although the word "race" can be traced back to 1580, the twentieth century's conceptual heritage is more closely tied to the developments of nineteenth century anthropology and biology. In particular, racial differences have often been thought to reflect underlying biological differences.<sup>1</sup> It is hardly necessary to point out that current scholarly conceptions of race usually treat the biological concept as "artifactual" or "error-theoretic," that is, a socially constructed category that falsely purports to have biological underpinnings. Understanding race as artifactual has been a useful tool for illuminating how perceptions about membership in a racial group are and have been subject to numerous factors entirely disconnected from the ostensive source of racial classification, and how the categories themselves have been subject to variable, oftentimes pernicious human interests. Our interest, however, is in earlier biological concep-

tions of race. In the case of Mexican philosophers, their work was frequently influenced by the state of French Biology. The science of genetics, which has provided much of the purported foundation for thinking about race, was not unified until well into the twentieth century. Consequently, tremendous variations can be found in the biological conceptions that funded various philosophical treatments of race. Attention to this fact can go a long way towards removing the apparently embarrassing or contradictory race-based claims of various Mexican philosophers.

Although our primary focus will be on two of the more unusual theories of race in Mexico, Bulnes, those of the positivist Francisco Bulnes and the anti-positivist José Vasconcelos, the instability of biological conceptions of race had more far-reaching consequences for the kinds of explanations of social theories proposed by subsequent generations of Mexican philosophers. I will briefly remark on some of these consequences for later figures like Samuel Ramos and Leopoldo Zea. As a group, these four figures represent the core of Mexican philosophical thought on race in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Bulnes and the Agrarian Races

Like so many things in Mexican philosophy, the history of philosophical racial discourse has a natural starting point in the late nineteenth century. Racial discourse among Mexican intellectuals was tied to the rise of positivism, the adoption of Spencerian Social Darwinism, and in some interpretations, to class interests.<sup>2</sup> An excellent example of racial thinking fully embedded in the intellectual currents of the day is the book *El porvenir de las naciones hispanoamericanas*, written by Francisco Bulnes (1849–1924). Published in 1899, it gives us a convenient place to begin

our reflections on race in Mexican philosophical thought.

Perhaps best known for being one of the original five *científicos* during the *Porfiriato*, Bulnes was in many ways typical of Mexican intellectuals at the turn of the century. A contemporary of Justo Sierra's, Bulnes believed that science ought to be applied to the problems of governance. It is therefore not surprising that *Porvenir* is a work laden with political, economic, and sociological analysis, exhibiting its positivist pedigree throughout. Bulnes' specific conception of race is very distinctive, and some commentators have thought that this makes Bulnes unrepresentative of Mexican thinking about race.<sup>3</sup> But Bulnes' preoccupations and approach exemplify many of the major currents in social, cultural, and racial thinking during the positivist period in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> More to the point, if Bulnes' views on race can be rescued from their apparent absurdity, it will say a great deal about how much Mexican philosophy of race could have been badly misunderstood.

In *El porvenir* Bulnes claims that there are three great human races, distinguished by their diets. These are the wheat, corn, and rice races. Wheat-eaters get the appropriate nutrients for optimal development, making them the "only truly progressive" race, i.e., it the only race evolving for the better (12). The other two races suffer from diet-influenced shortcomings (the rice race worse than the corn race) and these differences are readily manifest in their war-making capacities. History has shown that only the wheat race is capable of killing its enemies in sufficiently large numbers. The capacity is not a function, Bulnes thinks, of population size but rather of the consequences of the racial difference. The wheat race is superior both in wealth and military science precisely because their intellectual capacities are sustained and developed by the right diet (14–15). These benefits are available to corn and rice people only with wheat leadership or with the long-term adoption of a wheat diet. History makes all this clear, Bulnes thinks; from the conquest of the Americas (wheat over corn) to

the successful bid for independence (wheat, i.e., *criollos*, leading corn armies), down to the culturally subservient position of Latin America to Europe—all of this is a consequence of diet.<sup>5</sup>

Even in broad outline, Bulnes' view must strike the modern reader as impressively bizarre. What is less bizarre is the fairly orthodox stereotyping and racism manifest in his discussions of the Indian, the mestizo, and the Spaniard. For instance, "Indians," a racial subgroup of the corn race, love only four things: idols, the earth, personal liberty, and alcohol (26). Of the common mestizo, a half-breed offshoot of corn and wheat, Bulnes claims that he has the misfortune of having inherited the "rapacity" of the Spanish while possessing no other aspiration than to be "very manly" [*ser muy hombre*] (27).<sup>6</sup> Despite his shortcomings, though, the mestizo has good intellectual faculties. In Bulnes' lights, the mestizo would have already greatly "progressed" (or "evolved") if he had not been so given over to alcohol as was the Indian.

The mestizos, in light of inheriting a bit of wheat race legacy, have greater intelligence and potential to build a civilization if given the right opportunities. But this raises a puzzling question about the mechanics of inheritance—how can one inherit traits created by diet? Or more directly, how can racial traits be ultimately dietary? The answer Bulnes offers is this: Diet affects the material of the brain, which in turn affects intelligence, creativity, willpower, and character. Changes in nutrition affect races over time, Bulnes thinks, so that the affected races either perish or adapt to their new diet. The idea seems to be that races can acquire attributes (like greater and lesser intelligence) in light of diet, and that these differences, acquired during an individual's lifetime, can in turn be passed down.

Given the current understanding of biological inheritance, this idea is plainly mistaken. Adaptation does not come about because of habituation to some activity. Bulnes, however, suggests precisely this. For instance, he thinks that Indians, despite being a "weaker" race,

can become biologically habituated to hard work (19). But we know that adaptation over time is a result of a mutation or change at the genetic level and its subsequent benefits in the propagation of the species. Under our current understanding of inheritance, simply eating certain foods or doing certain kinds of activities does not by itself change one's genetic material. So the idea that diet-based changes in intelligence or strength could be biologically inherited is nonsense. Given that Bulnes was writing this around 1900, decades after the publication of Darwin's work (which was in Bulnes' time already very influential in Mexico), it might seem puzzling that he would hold such a view of races and racial change. What then, are we to make of Bulnes' views?

The first thing to note is that Mexicans were primarily working out of a French scientific tradition which held very different views about biology than we now believe.<sup>9</sup> The orthodox view in Latin America was not a Mendelian-Darwinian story about inheritance and racial change but a Lamarckian one. According to the French naturalist Lamarck, traits acquired throughout the life of an organism could be passed to one's offspring. Giraffes were famously explained to have long necks because they had to stretch to eat the leaves off tall trees. In contrast, Mendelian-Darwinian natural selection claims that the giraffe got its neck not from frequent stretching, but by genetic mutations that favored longer-necked giraffes over shorter-necked giraffes in the environment under which giraffe evolution occurred. Both theories were available to Bulnes, but at the time he wrote *El porvenir*, the key evidence in favor of Mendelian-Darwinian theories was just being discovered (or recovered) and so a Lamarckian view of heredity would have been the justifiably orthodox view. Mendelian-Darwinian pictures of race and racial change were simply not yet a part of the scientific consensus. Although Darwinian ideas were already part of the intellectual landscape, many biologists were unclear about the incompatibility between the two views of inheritance and ra-

cial change. To get a sense of the depths of the confusion, we need only note that Lamarckian views of heredity still had currency in Latin American science as late as the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the answer to our earlier question is simple: Bulnes' views are Lamarckian.

Once we recognize the Lamarckian strain in Bulnes' thinking, much of what he has to say about the different racial groups and racial mixtures, while nonetheless false, is at least intelligible and perhaps even reasonable. For instance, Bulnes is vehemently opposed to alcohol because, in his view, it can contaminate a race. The traits engendered by alcohol consumption are not temporary accidents of character that can be easily removed by giving up drinking. With enough exposure, the traits of heightened stupidity and diminished "character" become alcohol's endowment to a race's genetic legacy. In short, an acquired trait like boorishness can become part of the inheritance of later generations. For Bulnes, race is a category that picks out real clusters of biologically encoded traits. These traits are susceptible to various environmental influences, the most powerful of which is for Bulnes, diet. It therefore makes sense to speak of races distinguished by diets, for diets configure the life and genetic possibilities of various groups.<sup>10</sup>

If we abstract from the particulars of Bulnes' specific views, what we find is a biologically informed account of how race is the key element that structures the answer to the question of how Latin Americans came to be in their social, cultural, and historical position. In this respect, Bulnes' views are continuous with the work of other Latin American intellectuals and it shares with them the pervasive scientific racism of the time.<sup>11</sup> With the surge of anti-positivist thought among intellectuals at the end of the Porfirian dictatorship and the subsequent Mexican revolution, there was a move away from scientific racism among the philosophical elite of Mexico. But despite their opposition to scientism, the first generation of post-Porfirian, post-positivist philosophers undertook nationalistic and racialized ac-

counts of identity. The first major anti-positivist philosopher to do so was José Vasconcelos.

### From Mendel, with Teleology: Vasconcelos and Race

Between 1925 and 1927, José Vasconcelos published several major works concerning race, including *La raza cósmica* and *Indología*. Despite his other considerable accomplishments, if Vasconcelos is read today outside the context of intellectual history, it is mainly because of the great and ambiguous prologue to *La raza cósmica*, or *The Cosmic Race*. The prologue has commanded a great deal of attention and widespread misunderstanding, in no small part because of its tone. If one focuses exclusively on the philosophical and prophetic dimensions of the work, *La raza cósmica* can look discontinuous with the more empirically oriented work of positivists like Bulnes. The work is full of metaphysical speculation, bold pronouncements, and a strange mixture of prophecy and science. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, Vasconcelos' work on race clearly captured something of the period's zeitgeist. As Octavio Paz put it, "if the Revolution was a search and an immersion of ourselves in our own origins and being, no one embodied this fertile, desperate desire better than José Vasconcelos" (142).

In broad outlines, Vasconcelos' works on race are all committed to the view that there are four existing races (White, Yellow, Red, and Black), that each race has had its historical epoch, and that we are currently living in the epoch of the White race. Notably, he rejected the supremacy of any race over another and instead held that different races have distinctive attributes, whose significance for cultural and political domination depends on contingent historical circumstances. The great cultural and political struggle of this epoch is a battle for leadership of the White race. At stake is the mission of the white race and whether it will be dictated by Latins or Anglo-Saxons. For Vasconcelos, it is important that the Latin strand win, for this is the part of the White race

that is more inclined towards race-mixing. Race-mixing is of tantamount importance, for this is what will bring about the fifth and final race, a mixed race, the "Cosmic race," a race with the best qualities of all the other races. It is Vasconcelos' alternate hope and belief that Latin America will be the site of the development of this final race.<sup>12</sup>

I think that much can be done to rehabilitate the deeply troubling and deceptively complex work that Vasconcelos has done on race.<sup>13</sup> I will not attempt to do that here, at least not in any systematic fashion. Instead, I will settle for defending two claims, one, that Vasconcelos' theory of race is, like Bulnes', highly informed by distinctive views about biology and two, that to understand how, we must attend to his views about scientific explanations.

Vasconcelos explicitly tied his views of race mixing to the work of Mendel (*La raza*, 36-37), which he understood to show two things: that inheritance was fixed by genetic, not environmental factors, and what is more important, that crossbreeding or hybrids were stronger stock than "pure" stock. In short, Vasconcelos rejected Bulnes' entire framework.<sup>14</sup> A Mendelian conception of biology thus offered two innovations for Vasconcelos: a way out of the trap of cultural, racial, and geographic determinism imagined by the prior generation of Latin American intellectuals, and grounds to argue that even if the genetic stock of Latin America was in some important way impoverished during this historical period, that race-mixing provided a way to overcome the problem by creation of a better, stronger race.<sup>15</sup>

Despite his commitment to Mendelianism, Vasconcelos rejected the complementary account of Darwinian natural selection. He did so largely on metaphysical grounds. To understand how, we must sketch, however inadequately, some details of Vasconcelos' metaphysics.

Vasconcelos believed that at every "cycle," or level of ontological organization (roughly, mineral, biological, spiritual), there was some end or goal that organized the activities of

things at that level. While intentions and desires emerge at the biological cycle, it only makes sense to speak of the ends of organism or groups of organism in a way restricted to satisfaction of basic physical needs. Human, and human collectives, as entities in the spiritual cycle, have "higher ends" beyond mere biological ends such as the satisfaction of hunger. This metaphysics funds a particular philosophy of science and an accompanying epistemology. In Vasconcelos' view, science cannot answer the most important questions for creatures like us, creatures capable of asking about non-biological ends. The data of science, the products of rational and empirical inquiry, underdetermine theory selection or selection of ends for entities in the spiritual cycle. The gap between data and theory can only be closed by a kind of knowledge that Vasconcelos called "aesthetic." Aesthetic knowledge is, in his view, the highest form of knowledge for two reasons. First, it allows us a way to choose between various empirically and rationally underdetermined but competing theories generated by science. Second, and more importantly, it allows us to answer questions about our higher ends. Vasconcelos claims that a philosopher must be a "poet with a system" precisely because lower-level knowledge can only be completed by aesthetic knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

Sometimes Vasconcelos rejects the coupling of Darwinism to his theory of human races on the grounds that Darwinism makes a category mistake, illegitimately applying a law of the biological cycle to the spiritual cycle. For instance, Social Darwinism is condemned as a "false translation of physiological law to the realm of the spirit" (*La raza*, 33), and there is no reason why he could not say the same about Mendelian Darwinism.<sup>17</sup> Other times Vasconcelos takes advantage of the underdetermination of scientific theories to argue that theory selection should be guided by pragmatic concerns. In a 1926 lecture, he claims that all nations deploy scientific theories this way: "If all nations then build theories

to justify their policies or to strengthen their deeds, let us develop in Mexico our own theories; or at least, let us be certain, that we choose among the foreign theories of thought those that stimulate our growth instead of restrain it" (*Aspects*, 96).<sup>18</sup> For Vasconcelos, commitment to one biological theory or another ought to be guided by both the scientific evidence and the prospective benefits for promoting a particular cultural ideal (i.e., his aesthetic ideal). Theory underdetermination and the flexibility of supra-scientific knowledge therefore allow two things: first, it allows Vasconcelos grounds to pick and choose between biological theories and concepts of race, and second, it gives him a vantage point from which he can criticize scientific racism, for it is nothing more than an ideologically selected theory in the service of ruling group interests (*Aspects*, 85-86).

Given the biological fact of *mestizaje* and the relationship of Latin America to the racial conflict of the White race, the appropriate cultural ideal for the Americas, Vasconcelos thinks, is race mixing (recall that the subtitle to *La raza cósmica* is "the mission of the Ibero-American race"). Of course, the selection of a cultural ideal—in this case, a racial mission—is embedded in an aesthetic teleology that is of a piece with his aesthetic monism. The theory of race is thus nested in a theory about cultural goals. Where biology fixes the cultural future for Bulnes, it is exactly opposite for Vasconcelos. For him, it is a cultural ideal that fixes the racial future. Culture plays this role, he thinks, because of his convictions about the status of scientific theorizing and because of a comprehensive metaphysics that provides an aesthetic end for culture. The cultural ideal of a racially egalitarian culture, if located in Latin America, he thinks, offers the best hope for a utopic fifth race capable of satisfying his aesthetic ideals.<sup>19</sup> What I hope to have suggested with this too-brief sketch is that Vasconcelos' more-than-empirical approach to race and the future of Latin America is not free-standing and unmotivated as it initially appears, but instead a systematic part of a com-

prehensive metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of science.<sup>20</sup> If we want to understand his theory of race, cosmic or not, we cannot do so in a philosophical and scientific vacuum.

### The Rise of *lo Mexicano* and the Suppression of Race: From Ramos to Zea

If Vasconcelos proposed the first post-Revolutionary theory of Latin American identity and the ends of culture, it was left to Samuel Ramos to set the course for subsequent philosophical reflection on specifically Mexican identity and the goal for Mexican culture. In 1934 Ramos published his landmark book *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* in which he offers us a portrait of the collective psychology of Mexicans as a way of approaching a philosophy of culture for Mexico. The Mexican of his time, he believed, suffered from an inferiority complex. The root of the complex was a relentless history of failures, failures to meet the expectations Mexicans had for their content or circumstances.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these marked differences, Ramos' work shares with Vasconcelos' a concern about the appropriate cultural mission of the Mexican people. But where Vasconcelos optimistically thought that a utopian cultural mission of racial unity was both possible and perhaps even inevitable, Ramos cautions that the Mexican people cannot adopt a positive cultural mission until the inferiority complex of the Mexican people is admitted and overcome. Ramos thereby abandons the racialized cultural mission that inspired Vasconcelos. In Ramos' work, racial categories are still present, but they are reduced to indicators of cultural difference. Gone is the idea that races have real differences in attributes. The explanatory work that racial categories performed in Bulnes and Vasconcelos' theories is shifted to culture, and culture is only contingently associated with a racial group. For instance, although Ramos has plenty of unflattering things to say about Indians, he does not attribute their

deficiency to race. Their "passivity" might have made them easier to conquer, he thinks, but this is an affliction of spirit or psychology, not biology. There is nothing biologically based that makes Indians less intelligent or "fit for civilization" (37), and an Indian raised in a non-Indian (i.e., European) cultural context will prove to be intellectually equal to a European. The problem, for Ramos, is Indian culture and its effect on the collective psychology of Indians. Similarly, the nature of *criollos* and *criollo* culture is not determined by race. Blood ties to Europe gave *criollos* an interest in European culture, but the resultant culture was a function of perception rather than biology. Race itself does very little work—it is the recognition or belief in a shared race or shared blood that is doing the work and not the purported fact of the blood ties themselves.<sup>22</sup>

I would be remiss if I failed to note Ramos' occasional ambivalence about the significance of race. He mentions in passing that "it might not be a bad idea to review certain phases of our history, focusing on it from the point of view of racial struggle" (123). This claim suggests that biology might have some causal role to play, although Ramos is quick to note that he does not think that we are yet in a position to evaluate sweeping claims that the outcome of a racial struggle is at stake in international politics. But Ramos also comments that the existing biological evidence concerning racial intermarriage is not conclusive, which may seem startling given that only a page before he explicitly rejects the possibility of inferior races (41). The source of his ambivalence is simple, though. The quickly changing field of genetics had made the biologized concept of race increasingly unstable and Ramos was uncertain about what conclusions he could draw. Even if he doubted that racial differences were biologically encoded, he needed to acknowledge that biology can set insuperable parameters on human beings, some of which we cannot yet appreciate.<sup>23</sup> In doing so, he separates himself from the wildly speculative deployment of science that is found in Vasconcelos, without lapsing back into biological racism. In the end,

Ramos resisted using race as a significant category of explanation and substituted cultural phenomena for it in a more complete way than had Vasconcelos.

In 1940s Mexican philosophy, concern for issues of race nearly completely disappeared. Although Leopoldo Zea's work represents an extreme version of that fate, it is illustrative. I will not attempt to canvass the immense body of work that Zea has produced (and continues to produce), but before I close I want to make some general remarks about it. Although much of it is obviously inspired by Ramos' work on the cultural position of Mexicans, Zea's work in the 1940s as well as the various projects he guided or stimulated had little to do with race and its consequences.<sup>34</sup> Fifty years earlier, racial differences were the biological substrate on which Bulnes thought the determinants of culture operated. For Zea, the inheritor of Vasconcelos' and Ramos' gradual abandonment of this view, it was as though there was no substrate of racial differences left to discuss. All that remained was simply the post-Revolutionary urban mestizo. In almost none of his work in the 1940s is there any discussion of races, biology, or racial differences, which is striking given the central role his later work awards to the concept of *mestizaje*. What is left is a singular entity—*lo mexicano*, or the Mexican—that can be studied independent of its diverse particulars.<sup>35</sup>

Examining the fifty year period between Bulnes and Zea shows us several things. Most obviously, we find a gradual but identifiable shift away from biological explanations of culture and society. As confidence in the biological underpinnings of race decreased, philosophers found other categories to use in explanations in their theories.<sup>36</sup> This was so much so that by the 1940s we find a nearly

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1. The third sense of "race" in *Merriam Webster's Third Collegiate Dictionary* traces it back to the Old Italian word *razza*.

2. Today scientific consensus rejects race as a category that tracks real biological differences. Among other things, this is because there are only very minor bio-

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#### ENDNOTES

logical differences between humans. Excluding applicability to the controversial domain of cognitive architecture, the standard view is probably this: "Human genetic variation, which is now directly detectable with modern electrophoretic techniques, is overwhelmingly sequestered into functionally superficial

biochemical differences, leaving our complex functional design universal and species typical. Also, the bulk of the variation that does exist is overwhelmingly inter-individual and within population, and not between "races" or "populations" (Tooby & Cosmides, p. 25). As will become clearer, though, it is not always the case that racial thought during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was very similar to the "ordinary" (biological) thinking still sometimes associated with race.

For many of the issues, see Zea's *El Positivismo en México: Nacimiento, Apogeo, y Decadencia*. The first of several of Zea's works on positivism was also translated into English as *Positivism in Mexico*. A shorter but excellent discussion of the role of race in the consolidation of class interests during the Porfiriato can be found in Knight, pp. 78-80. For a criticism of Zea's interpretation of positivism with respect to class and the endorsement of scientific racism, see Sáenz, p. 224.

Cf. Crawford, p. 252.

Some might think it odd to include Bulnes in a discussion of race in Mexican philosophy, given the social science overtones of the work. But in nineteenth century Latin America (and Europe too, we often forget), the lines between philosophers and other species of intellectuals were often very blurry. I think it is entirely appropriate to call Bulnes a philosopher, but even on a restrictive account of philosophy, there is still good reason to begin with his work. The reason for doing so is the status of philosophy in Mexico under positivism. Positivism, especially of the Comtian type, made sociology the queen of the sciences, usurping the traditional role of theoretical philosophy. See the chapter II of *Cours de philosophie positive*. "Classification of the Positive Sciences." A small English-language selection of this work can be found in Comte's *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*, ed. by Frédéric Ferré (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988). Mexican positivism, while not straightforwardly Comtian, nevertheless preserved (especially in education) the practical, anti-metaphysical orientation prescribed by Comte's division of the positive sciences. What this meant was that with only minor exceptions (and arguable ones at that), serious non-scholastic and non-positivist philosophical reflection on race and identity did not begin in Mexico until after the intellectual break made by the *Ateneo*

*de la Juventud* in 1909. (The *Ateneo* was organized by a group of young intellectuals, which included José Vasconcelos, Antonio Caso, and Alfonso Reyes, among others. For a useful discussion of the significance of the *Ateneo*, see Fernando Salmerón's "Mexican Philosophers of the Twentieth Century" in *Mexican Trends in Mexican Philosophy*, pp. 247-57).

Thus, to get a sense of the concept of race that philosophers were later extending or rejecting, it is important to begin with the work of someone like Bulnes.

For the sake of exposition, I am suppressing the role of geographic determinism in Bulnes' thought. Geography is, for Bulnes, the other main determinant of Latin America(ns) geocultural and geopolitical status.

Although surely not *all* mestizos wanted to be manly! Or at any rate, it would be an implausible bit of Freudianism to suppose that the mestizas, or female mestizos, would share the singular aspiration of manliness. Typical of the period, Bulnes discusses women largely separately from the racial portraits he offers.

As far as I am aware, the reasons why Latin American intellectuals paid so much attention to the French has not been adequately discussed. The standard story is that the French provided an intellectual home that was not Iberian. But this does not answer why France in particular had so much influence, rather than, e.g., England or Germany. In part, France's influence was due to Paris' status as a major intellectual center of the world and the mid-nineteenth century Pan-Latinist project of Napoleon III (see the article by Phelan). But, as Carlos Mariñel pointed out to me in conversation, surely trade considerations played an important role in the manufacturing of cultural and intellectual allegiances. For instance, during the late nineteenth century Mexico was the world's largest producer of silver and France the largest consumer. Relatedly, the nature of publishing networks (another trade-based element) may have been highly influential. These issues are worth discussing in more detail elsewhere.

I owe the background information in this paragraph almost entirely to work done by Nancy Stepan. In "The Hour of Eugenics," she makes a convincing case for the influence of Lamarckian theories of heredity in Latin America after the 1910s (see pp. 8, 65, 91 and 194-95). Stepan's research does not include anything

before the 1910s, but clearly, eugenics (although not under that name) and Lamarckian-influenced scientific racism were present long before then. For instance Spencer's doctrine of Social Darwinism arrived in Mexico in the 1890s and Lamarck's work was listed in Comte's "positivist library" (and as such, both were surely part of Bulnes' intellectual context).

Accordingly, mixed race groups inherit a motley of characteristics created by (primarily) the diets of their source races. The future of mixed race groups, however, depends significantly on the diet and environment to which they are subjected after their formation, and it is for this reason that it was a travesty that the Spanish failed to build the agricultural infrastructure required to benefit the mestizo population brought in to existence by colonization. Ultimately, however, the Latin America of the 1900s needed to face its genetic vulnerabilities and stop looking elsewhere for sources of blame. Bulnes thought that "The enemy of the Latin American peoples are not Europe and the United States, with their ambitions; there are not enemies more terrible to our well-being and independence than ourselves. Our adversaries are called our tradition, our history, our morbid inheritance, our alcoholism, our education [or breeding—it is ambiguous in Spanish] contrary to the development of character" (p. 10). All translations of Bulnes' work are mine.

In discussions about the sources of Latin America's apparent cultural, economic, scientific, or intellectual inferiority, race was frequently seized upon as one of the best explanations of why Latin America was lagging behind Europe or the United States. In fact, race was probably the single most important subject for the collection of intellectuals that Stabb memorably called "the diagnosticians of the sick continent," a group that included, among others, José Ingenieros, Carlos Octavio Bunge, Alcides Arguedas, and Francisco García Calderón. If racial qualities turned out to be fixed and unchangeable, then the worry was that so might be Latin America's political, economic, and cultural position. On the other hand, if racial traits were malleable, the challenge was to determine whether Latin America had the tools, or whether the tools needed to be imported, in order to make the necessary changes of racial traits.

The Chicano movement's misappropriation of *Luz cosmica* is predicated on a confusion about just this point. Mestizos, understood as mixtures of Indians and Europeans, are not the final race, but rather, the kind of population best suited for the further race-mixing required to bring about the final race. Unfortunately, this confusion persists today. See, for example, Ilan Stavans' recent *Latino U.S.A.*, where he incorrectly reports Vasconcelos as claiming that mestizos are "The Cosmic Race" and called to conquer the globe in the near future (p. 74).

For instance at various points Vasconcelos makes claims (about blacks, e.g.) that contradict the theory of racial egalitarianism he proposes. I would contend that many of the apparent contradictions can be removed by attending carefully to his distinction between "culture" or "civilization" and "race" (also see n. 33). Further, I think we distinguish between problems with the theory and Vasconcelos' problem seeing the commitments of the theory. One ostensive aim of philosophical system-building is to construct a theory capable of explaining some set of issues that are apparently in need of intersubjective explanation. The basic presupposition of such a project is that one is trying to create a theory that may have a locatable historical source, but is nonetheless applicable independent of the historically contingent virtues or vices of the historical source (oneself). If we accept this point, we can usefully distinguish between the commitments of the theory and Vasconcelos' occasional failure to recognize those commitments. Though distinguishing between the author and his theory may strike some as a methodological mistake, the interesting benefit of making this mistake certainly outweighs the costs.

As noted earlier, Lamarckian theories of heredity persisted in Latin America through Vasconcelos' time. But Vasconcelos' education, in part because of his periodic exiles, was more cosmopolitan than most Latin American of his time. Also, Mendel's work was actually on plants, but his work was the first to show how genetic variation worked in biological systems by the mixing of dominant and recessive genes.

Race mixing (i.e., whitening or Europeanizing) was proposed as a solution to racial problems by numerous Latin American intellectuals, at least since Sarrieno. What made Vasconcelos different, beyond his (at least superficially) more egalitarian ra-

cial views, was precisely that he was not saddled, as many positivists were, with a problem in light of also believing in racial poisoning and geographic determinism. After all, if racial poisoning is possible on account of the environment, or what have you, importing Europeans will only do so much good in the long run.

16. *Ética*, 2nd ed., p.55.

17. This line is echoed in his Chicago lectures that were printed in *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*. There, he claims that "Modern scientific theories are in many cases like the religious creeds of the old days, simply the intellectual justification of fatalities of conquest and of commercial greed" (p. 96).

18. This lecture, which he titled "The Race Problem in Latin America" was published along with other lectures by Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio in a book entitled *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*. Perhaps because of the different audience, Vasconcelos' tone in the 1926 Chicago lectures is much more subdued, and the speculative and prophetic elements prominent in the earlier work are kept to a minimum. Gone, for instance, is the term "*la raza cósmica*," and the dogged insistence on the Atlantean thesis of the origins of the indigenous populations in Latin America—though he cannot help mentioning it in passing.

19. Although he tends to be speaking in Pan-Latin American terms, it is clear that Mexico's on-going search for national identity was clearly on Vasconcelos' mind. This is why he opposes "Indianism" as one possible way of organizing Latin American identity. For him, the cultural conquest of the Spanish was undeniably successful such that mestizos and Indians both are really "Spaniards even against their will and knowledge" (*Aspects*, pp. 89-90). To try and reconstitute contemporary culture based on autochthonous Indian culture and value is therefore impossible. (Typical of the time, Vasconcelos seems to conceive of Indian culture as fairly unified, both historically and contemporaneously.) The best path available to mestizo America is one that celebrates its diversity, taking universal racial unity as its goal (*ibid.*, p. 97).

20. Realizing this fact makes sense of some otherwise puzzling passages like the following from *La raza cósmica*: "Only a leap of the spirit, nourished with facts, can give us a vision that will lift us above the micro-ideology of the specialist. Then we can dive deeply into the mass of events in order to discover a

direction, a rhythm, and a purpose. Precisely there, where the analyst discovers nothing, the synthesizer and the creator are enlightened. Let us, then, attempt explanations, not with the fantasy of the novelist, but with an intuition supported by the facts of history and science" (p. 8). He makes a similar claim in his Chicago lectures. It should also be noted that his theory is also all of a piece with his vitalism, influenced as he was by Bergson. Vasconcelos cites work by the vitalist biologist Uexküll that purports to show that biological entities must indeed be motivated by some functional plan, which Vasconcelos took to show the biological need for the sort of teleology he imagined to govern races (*La raza*, p. 36).

21. This theme is also pervasive in Zea's early work and he explicitly attributes it to Ramos. See *En torno a una filosofía americana*.

22. In a discussion about the relationship of technology and culture Ramos claims that "It is quite evident that the colored races do not possess the spirit to dominate" (p. 120). But this absence turns out to be an absence of "will to power," by which he understands a "primordial psychic force" (p. 121). So again, it appears that the problem is at root psychological, and if he is being consistent, therefore grounded in a group psychology that is a product of a particular history.

23. He claims, for instance, that "superior to a man's will is a biological law which precludes any fundamental suppression of the past" (p. 40) and in the first quoted passage of this section, "Historical heredity, ethnic mental traits, and environmental peculiarities determine the evolution of life with a rigidity that will can never alter" (p. 75). I believe that the phrase "ethnic mental trait" is not supposed to be a biologically based category, but rather a category of collective psychology. Ramos thinks that different groups have genuinely distinctive collective psychologies, and that these collective psychologies fix many of the life possibilities of members of that group. See, for instance, my comments on his discussion of Indians and their culture.

24. Most famously, he influenced the philosophy of *lo mexicano* and the Hypertion group. As far as I can tell, what discussion there is of race in the 1940s is largely historical in orientation (for example, the work of Edmundo O'Gorman). However, Luis Villoro's *Los grados momentos del indigenismo en México* published in 1950 would provide an appropriate starting

point for a study on race in Mexican philosophy between 1950 and 2000. As my remarks thus far might have suggested, the general tendency in the second half of the twentieth century has been to discuss issues that were previously treated as racial or biological as, instead, ethnic or cultural. Much of Villoro's own work in the 1990s has concerned the issue of multiculturalism. In particular, see *Estado plural, pluralidad de culturas*.

25. For a particularly rigorous criticism of this period of Zea's work, see Hurtado's "*Dos mitos de mexicanidad*." Zea continues today to resist treating race as a relevant factor in the culture of Mexico. In a much later work (*Fin del siglo XX ¿Centuria perdida?*) Zea makes the amazing claim that "In Mexico, the proletariat, just like the bourgeois or the boss, is purely and simply Mexican; the former ceased being indigenous and the latter ceased being of *criollo* origin. When the armed stage of the Mexican Revolution ended, the institutions that have been instrumental in the transformation of Mexico have been animated by Mexicans. The foreign observer, and a foreigner he will have to be, will be able to see only racial differences, but these do not correspond to social, political, or economic differences. It is rather

simply a matter of differences proper to any nation in which there are the poor and the rich, proletarians and bosses, rulers and the ruled" (translated and quoted in Séznz, p. 317). For an excellent analysis and criticism of this passage and its place in Zea's recent thinking, see Séznz pp. 305-24.

26. If we were to view the history of Mexican thought *specie saeculi*, or from the perspective of the century, we would no doubt find a general pattern that is not unique to Mexico: the geographic and the racial give way to the cultural, the cultural to the national, the national to the ethnic. This is not a perfect pattern, by any means, but it does capture the trajectory of concerns that have occupied much of Mexican philosophy of culture.

27. In addition to audiences at SPEP, the University of San Francisco, The Radical Philosophy Association, and the Center for Race and Ethnicity at Stanford, the following people deserve thanks for their help with various aspects of this paper: Michael Bowler, Carlos Marichal, Michael Montoya, Lúcia Sá, and Sarah Shemmer. I would also like to give special thanks to Eduardo Mendieta for his unflagging support and guidance.

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