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Work and Latin American Philosophy

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Philosophy has a long and notable history in Latin America, and a variety of Latin American philosophers have written about work, its significance, and its relationship to class, colonization, gender, and so on. Although there are several ways to usefully contrast generalities about Latin American philosophy with philosophy produced in other times and places, there is no single or unified tradition or school of thought that characterizes the entire history of philosophy in Latin America. Therefore, there is no single position or philosophical view about work that spans all the centuries of philosophical work in Latin America. Instead, one finds a multitude of ideas, discussions, and debates scattered across diverse philosophical programs and time periods.[2]

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[1] Authors are listed in alphabetical order.

[2] In this chapter, we use 'Latin American philosophy' to refer to philosophy produced in Latin America. In framing things this way, we do not mean to take a stand on the utility of other, often more restrictive conceptions of the field. There is an extensive debate within the field about how best to characterize the field. One important locus of these disagreements was the debate between Augusto Salazar Bondy and Leopoldo Zea. See Augusto Salazar Bondy, *Sentido Y Problema Del Pensamiento Filosófico Hispano-Americano,* trans. Donald Schmidt (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Center for Latin American Studies, 1969) and Leopoldo Zea, *La Filosofía Americana Como Filosofía Sin Más* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1969). For a sampling of English-language overviews of the wider debates and their stakes, see the following: Manuel Vargas, "*Real* Philosophy, Metaphilosophy, and Metametaphilosophy," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 3 (2007). Grant Silva, "The Americas Seek Not Enlightenment but Liberation: On the Philosophical Significance of Liberation for Philosophy in the Americas," *The Pluralist* 13.2 (2018); Jorge J. E. Gracia, and Manuel Vargas, "Latin American Philosophy." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2018): https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/latin-american-philosophy/; Susana Nuccetelli, "Latin American Philosophy: Metaphilosophical Foundations." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2021): https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/latin-american-metaphilosophy/.

Given the foregoing, we do not attempt anything like a synoptic survey of Latin American philosophical discussions on work. Instead, our approach is somewhat scattershot, in that it involves a somewhat arbitrary selection of figures and conversations that make distinctive, important, or especially fruitful contributions to philosophical understandings of work. Our aim is to provide a variety of starting points for further discussions about philosophical issues concerned with work in the context of Latin American philosophy.

Our discussion proceeds in chronological order. The first section canvases one example of Indigenous views about the nature of work prior that plausibly had some currency prior to the European invasion of what is now Latin America. The second section focuses on the early colonial period, and philosophical disputes about the nature of colonial labor practices, especially in the context of the *encomienda* system. The groundbreaking work by a 17th century nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and her remarks on the gendered division of labor is the subject of the third section. The fourth section discusses some influential work on Indigenous socialism by José Mariátegui. The fifth section focuses on a debate between Hermann Keyserling and José Vasconcelos on the putative passivity of Latin Americans. The penultimate section focuses on some of Rosario Castellanos's analysis of women's domestic labor. We conclude with some brief remarks on other work within the wider ambit of the topic of work within Latin American philosophy.

Tequitl, macehua, **and the Mexica**

We begin with one instance of Indigenous philosophical work prior to the European invasion and colonization of the Americas. Our focus is on the Mexica, more popularly known as the Aztecs, prior to their defeat by the Spanish/Tlaxcalan alliance in 1521. More generally, we draw from discussion about Nahua thought, that is, the Nahuatl-speaking peoples, of which the Mexica were the best known.

There are several things worth highlighting at the outset. First, the reconstruction of pre-Invasion Indigenous philosophical thought is a complex matter even in purely historiographical terms. Although there are a variety of pre- and Invasion-era texts that survived the European wars of conquest in the Americas, the Spanish effort to destroy anything potentially of religious significance to the Mexica was systematic and comprehensive. A

few decades after the fall of Mexica, there were sometimes efforts to reconstruct Indigenous philosophical and theological views, as in the case of the Franciscan priest Bernardino de Sahagún's organization of Nahuatl-speaking seminarians and Nahua elders in the construction of the *Florentine Codex*.

Such texts were not transparent windows into the thought of pre-Invasion communities. Most were written decades later, under a colonial regime. That is, they were written in the face of Inquisitional threats of censorship, and often in the service of aiding the conversion of Indigenous peoples to Catholicism. Consequently, terminology, categories, and distinctions were subject to some degree of adaptation to the circumstances of their being recorded.[3] Interpreting these texts with any nuance is therefore a formidable task. Ideally, it would involve a degree of familiarity with philosophical, philological, ethnographic, and historical considerations, as well as a working knowledge of 16th century Catholic theological and evangelical concerns. This combination of expertise among scholars reconstructing pre-Invasion Indigenous thought is less common than we might hope.

A second complexity is metaphilosophical, concerning how we think about what counts as philosophy. As Miguel Leon-Portilla noted, although many academics are prepared to acknowledge that the Indigenous people of the Americas prior to the European invasion had produced works of art and architecture, there is a long history of skepticism about whether they had

[3] There is sometimes trenchant scholarly disagreement about the extent to which European documentation distorted pre-Invasion thought and practice. See, for example: Miguel León-Portilla, "Have We Really Translated the Mesoamerican 'Ancient Word'?," in *On the Translation of Native American Literatures*, ed. Brian Swann (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Victoria Ríos Castaño, *Translation as Conquest: Sahagun and Universal History of the Things of New Spain* (Madrid: Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert, 2014); Aysha Pollnitz, "Old Worlds and the New World: Liberal Education and the Franciscans in New Spain, 1536-1601," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017); Andrew Laird, "Aztec and Roman Gods in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Strategic Uses of Classical Learning in Sahagún's *Historia General*," in *Altera Roma: Art and Empire From Mérida to México*, ed. John M.D. Pohl, and Claire L. Lyons (Los Angeles: UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2016).

produced philosophy.[4] Those disputes are partly a function of the capaciousness of one's conception of philosophy. For example, if one takes explicitly self-conscious theorizing as paradigmatic of philosophy, or one favors a sharp divide between philosophical and religious thought[5], or if one is inclined to discount philosophy as a way of life, then one may be less inclined to regard the speculative and normative efforts of pre-Invasion Indigenous peoples as instances of philosophy.

Even so, there have been recent efforts, most notably by James Maffie, to approach reconstructive efforts with the requisite nuance.[6] His aim is to reconstruct both the pre-Invasion Indigenous thought of the Mexica, more commonly known as the Aztecs, and more generally, the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of what is now central Mexico.

On Maffie's reconstruction of Mexica metaphysics and ethics, at multiple levels of granularity the universe is organized around effortful, often painful labor (*tequitl*) that, in virtue of that effort, generates duties to cooperation and/or reciprocity in others. The normative notion of *macehua* is central to this account. The idea of *macehua* is, roughly, a kind of meriting or deserving.

Maffie characterizes its functional significance in the following way:

> "*Macehua* involves *tequitl* (work, labor) which, in turn, involve expending vital life-energy. One aims to transmit an effortful expenditure of vital energy as a gift or offering (*tiamanaliztli*)

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[4] Miguel León Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963). See also Walter Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," *Philosophy Today* 43 (1999).

[5] Adoption of this standard does not just exclude a good deal of precolonial thought around the world; it also entails the dismissal of large swaths of the history of European philosophy, perhaps as far back as Socrates' invocation of his daemon.

[6] James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder, CO: The University Press of Colorado, 2014); James Maffie, "The Role of Hardship in Mexica Ethics: Or, Why Being Good Has to Hurt," *The APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2019): 8-17; James Maffie, "The Nature of Mexica Ethics," in *Comparative Metaethics: Neglected Perspectives on the Foundations of Morality*, ed. Colin Marshall (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020).

> to another agent in order to induce that agent to act in some way. It is by virtue of expending and transmitting this vital energy that one attains merit, becomes worthy, or comes to merit or deserve the outcome one seeks".[7]

On this picture, *macehua* is typically produced by effortful labor; in turn, this produces a corresponding obligation for those who have accepted or enjoyed the fruits of that labor. These relations of reciprocal inducement to cooperation via a notion of deserving something by those who have accepted or received one's efforts is woven throughout Maffie's reconstruction of Mexica ethics and cosmology.

As a matter of the fundamental structure of the universe, the gods sacrifice themselves to create and maintain the universe. It is thus that human beings, in their ongoing existence and striving to prolong it, incur duties to help sustain and support that sacrifice by their own, typically painful, efforts of ritual practice, sacrifice, and conduct. At the intra-human level, a similar dynamic plays out: we induce cooperation with other humans via practices of gift-giving. That gift-giving generates duties at a time, but also across generations, as when we inherit norms, institutions, and social structures that were effortfully built and maintained by others. A similar narrative holds in the relationship of humans to the rest of the natural world. For example, effort must be put in sowing, weeding, irrigation, and harvest, in the hopes of deserving and appropriately eliciting the cooperation of life-sustaining maize and other crops.

Macehua is thus the material from which a spatially and temporally extended web of reciprocal cooperative relations emerges. It envelops agentic life, and not just as a description that so acting produces these goods, but as a conception of that one is always under an obligation to the antecedent social, divine, and cooperative order. In this picture, work and labor of all varieties are expected to be effortful, often painful and difficult. It is also not just a matter of prudence in human social life, but of obligations tied to the wider order of the universe.

In gesturing at this picture, we do not mean to suggest that it is representative of all Indigenous philosophical views about the normative

[7] Maffie, "The Role of Hardship," 9.

significance of effortful labor, or even all Mesoamerican views at the time immediately preceding the European invasion of the Americas. There were diverse groups in that region, with their own conception of things that sometimes overlapped and sometimes diverged from other groups. Moreover, it might well be that even within classical Nahuatl-speaking peoples there were disagreements about these matters. Still, this conception of the distinctive relationship between desert and labor, or *macehua* and *tequitl* is an intriguing place to take up questions of how people have understood these things in parts of the world that, until then, had been unaffected by Europe's particular conceptual history.

Indigenous Labor and the *Encomienda* System in the Americas

Initially devised to regulate the allocation of Indigenous labor to Spanish colonists for agriculture and mining, the *encomienda*[8] system —the Spanish colonial labor system that granted colonists the right to use local indigenous labor in exchange for promising to protect them and instruct them in Christianity— was the cornerstone of the early Spanish colonial economy. Under this system, the Crown established its political dominance over the territories and peoples of the Americas, thus retaining the exclusive ability to transfer restricted property rights over Indigenous labor exclusively to *encomenderos.* This arrangement emerged from a mutual agreement between the Crown and Spanish conquerors, whereby the conqueror self-financed their expedition in return for the "exclusive right to conquer an area" and the "power to assign groups of Indians in encomienda" to maximize wealth.[9] Through these measures, the Crown aimed to incentivize colonization, ensure a steady supply of labor for its profitable enterprises, and cement political control over the Americas, shielding its interests from both Indigenous populations and competing European powers.[10]

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[8] *Encomienda* is directly translated to English as "entrustment" or "commission"

[9] Ronald W. Batchelder and Nicolas Sanchez, "The Encomienda and the Optimizing Imperialist: An Interpretation of Spanish Imperialism in the Americas," UCLA Department of Economics, Working Paper 501 (1988).

[10] Batchelder and Sanchez, "The Encomienda and the Optimizing Imperialist: An Interpretation of Spanish Imperialism in the Americas," 4.

The impact of the *encomienda* system was profound, leading to severe exploitation and significant demographic decline among Indigenous peoples across the continent. The Caribbean, especially, experienced especially brutal and devastating consequences. These early experiences shaped the later adaptations of the encomienda system in regions like Mexico and South America, where the strategies were refined based on the outcomes observed in the Caribbean. Bartolomé de las Casas, in his "*History of the Indies,*"[11] documents the brutal nature of the *encomenderos* of the Caribbean, noting that "300 Indians allotted to an official were reduced by *nine-tenths in just three months,* as they were driven relentlessly."[12] Thus, the establishment of the *encomienda* in the Caribbean marked not only the theoretical beginnings of this institution but also symbolized the darker aspects of colonial expansion, laying a foundation that would shape the interactions between Spanish colonizers and Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas.

Several dimensions differentiate slavery—which was also prevalent in the Caribbean—from the encomienda system. In practice, though, these distinctions were often conveniently blurred. While both systems involved unfree or coerced labor, they diverged significantly in the extent of personal autonomy and the rights afforded to those subjected to them. Slavery of the indigenous in the Americas treated individuals as complete property, stripping them of personal, political and property rights. Their condition was lifelong, hereditary, and all-encompassing, with slave owners exerting control over every aspect of their lives, including leisure. Unlike other coerced labor systems in the Americas, the type of labor performed extended to personal service, compelling enslaved individuals into domestic roles without any form of compensation reinforcing their complete domination. In addition, Spanish colonizers retained the authority to buy, sell, transfer, and inherit slaves at will, further entrenching their control over enslaved populations.

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[11] Historical Note for Further Reading: According to Talbot in "*The Great Ocean of Knowledge*," "The History of the Indies" was found in John Locke's library and is believed to have influenced his political theories.

[12] Bartolomé de las Casas, *History of the Indies*, trans. Andrée Collard (New York: Harper & Row, 1971): 208.

Justifications for slavery often framed it as rightful compensation for injuries sustained in conflicts with the Indigenous population.

In contrast, the encomienda system did not involve direct ownership of individuals. Instead, it granted colonists restricted property rights[13] over the labor of local Indigenous populations, focusing on the right to labor (and its fruits) rather than full ownership of the person. This allowed the encomienda system to technically adhere to the official royal position, established in the early 1500s, that Indigenous peoples were considered legally and politically free under the laws of the Crown. Natives subjected to the encomienda system were entitled to receive nominal compensation for their labor, such as meager wages, clothing, and religious instruction while also restricting their labor to agriculture and mining only. Further, the Indigenous people retained restricted rights to their own land and property. Even so, they were seen as tools for production, lacking the autonomy to make independent decisions, enter into voluntary contracts, or leave their assigned encomienda.[14] Although this system did not resemble traditional forms of slavery in the Americas, it established a complex set of political rights that ostensibly distinguished those Indigenous people who "voluntarily consented" to Spanish rule from those deemed slaves through "just war."[15] Nevertheless, as Zavala notes, this distinction was largely formal, as both groups ended up, in practice, performing similar labor.[16]

In 1512, after the brutality of the *encomenderos* and the resulting depopulation of the Indigenous people due to their harsh working conditions were exposed, the Laws of Burgos were promulgated. Although

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[13] Timothy J. Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery? The Spanish Crown's Choice of Labor Organization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America," *The Journal of Economic History* 55, no. 4 (1995): 843.

[14] Silvio A. Zavala, *La Encomienda Indiana* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1935): 3.

[15] For extended commentary on this distinction, see Sepulveda's *Apologia* in the 1550 Valladolid Debates.

[16] Zavala, "La Encomienda Indiana", 3.

these laws continued the practice of forced labor, they also instituted stricter state control over the labor relationship between Spaniards and Indigenous as it tried to differentiate even more the condition of slavery versus that of the *encomendado*, that is, those subject to encomienda. This included implementing limitations on working hours, supervising wage payments and maintenance, and introducing other protective measures for Indigenous workers.[17] However, the fundamental issue with the encomiendas—their incompatibility with the legally free status of the Indigenous peoples—persisted despite these new protections.

To reconcile this issue, advocates of the encomienda system highlighted and distorted the religious and social practices of the Indigenous as evidence to argue that their rational and moral capacities were naturally defective. This portrayal was used to emphasize the supposed benefits of "qualified servitude" or forced labor, drawing primarily on the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery, which posits that the best life for a natural slave is to serve as a "tool" for a natural master.[18] Proponents could not fully equate the *encomienda* with outright slavery without violating the crown's principle of the general freedom of the Indigenous peoples. However, they maintained that such arrangements—interpreted as an intermediate form of governance, positioned between the political rule of free citizens and the despotic rule over slaves and with the condition of forced labor—were beneficial to developing the rational capacities of the Indigenous peoples.[19] The more arduous the work, the more it was argued to positively affect the moral

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[17] *Ibid,* 7

[18] Aristotle, Politics Book I (1254a14-15); for later echoes of this picture, see the discussion of '*gana*' in Keyserling, below.

[19] As Zavala writes, quoting Gregorio, "the Indians should not be considered as servants without dominical rights who could be freely sold, but rather it should be arranged that they serve the Christians with qualified servitude as was the encomienda, which was beneficial to the Indians themselves because total freedom would harm them" (Zavala, "La Encomienda Indiana," 21). A similar position was defended by Sepúlveda in the 1550 Valladolid Debates.

character of the Indigenous and make conversion easier.[20] As Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Dominican priest and advocate of Indigenous peoples writes,

> "These men [proponents of the *encomienda*] established the Indian reputation so that to accuse the Indians of all imaginable defects, such as being lazy animals unfit for self-government, became the pretext with which to hold them in a state of hellish servitude under the guise of serving God and the King by providing supervision and teaching them work habits."[21]

Interestingly, Las Casas' early views on the benefits of labor were not substantially different from the prevailing opinions. While he criticized the *encomiendas* due to their severe consequences—specifically, the significant mortality among the Indigenous populations of Cuba, Jamaica, and San Juan—he still believed that labor, under appropriate conditions, was beneficial for the Indigenous. He thought it could teach them Christian work habits and facilitate their conversion.[22]

In his early work, "*Memorial de Remedios Para las Indias*" (1516),[23] Las Casas pleaded with the Crown to at least temporarily suspend the services

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[20] Las Casas attributes this idea to Gregorio who on several occasions told Fray Antonio Montesinos "I will show you, by Saint Thomas, that the Indians must be governed with an iron rod [*in virga ferrea*], and then their fantasies [idolatry] will cease."

[21] Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, Book III.8, 190.

[22] Bartolomé de las Casas, *Memorial de Remedios para las Indias* (1516), in *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, Tomo CX: Obras Escogidas de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, ed. Ediciones Atlas (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas).

As Keen notes, "Las Casas's successive reform projects from 1515 to 1520 aimed to organize colonial exploitation on a more satisfactory basis than the encomienda, with conversion serving merely as its ideal backdrop or ultimate justification," in Benjamin Keen, "The Legacy of Bartolomé de las Casas," *The Americas* 34, no. 3 (1977): 14.

[23] Keen notes that there are intriguing commonalities between *Remedies* (1516) by Las Casas and Thomas More's *Utopia.* More's book imagines a "complex, self-contained community set on an island, in which people share a common culture and way of life." According to Keen, "A recent study by Victor N. Baptiste, Bartolomé de Las Casas and Thomas More's Utopia: Connections and Similarities (Culver City, California, 1990), offers a different hypothesis:

demanded from the Indigenous so that their populations could recover.[24] Las Casas condemned the wars and the encomiendas, maintaining that the Indigenous were capable of faith, virtue and good manners. He argued that the encomiendas were an economic organization of private exploitation—not substantially different from outright slavery—that not only undermined their rational capacities but also violated their autonomy. Instead, Las Casas advocated for a communal labor regime where Spanish laborers and politically free indigenous laborers would work under the supervision of paid employees of the State to control and restrain private appetites of the Spanish. He proposed that Spanish laborers work alongside "five Indians each", and once the King's share was taken, the other part would be divided "between the laborer and the five Indians . . . these [Spanish] laborers, companions of the Indians, *would be like their helpers*, they would be induced to work and the Indians, seeing that the Christians work, would be more

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He suggests that a first Latin draft of Las Casas's *Memorial de Remedios* of 1516, proposing the establishment of associated communities of free Indians and Spanish peasants, was sent to Flanders, where King Charles resided in 1515. There it was shown to More by his close friend Erasmus, then a member of the Royal Council, and inspired him to write his famous work. Baptiste cites numerous tantalizing similarities between the two "utopian" schemes in support of his thesis." See Benjamin Keen, "The Legacy of Bartolomé de las Casas," *The Americas* 34, no. 3 (1977): 14; and Victor N. Baptiste, *Bartolomé de Las Casas and Thomas More's Utopia: Connections and Similarities* (Culver City, CA: Labyrinthos, 1990).

[24] It should be noted that in the New Laws of 1542, Charles V stipulated that "it is our will and we command, that the Indians who at present are alive in the islands of San Juan, and Cuba and the Española for now and as long as it is our will, not be bothered with tribute, or other royal services, nor personal, nor mixed, but as are the Spaniards who reside in the said islands, and let them be at ease, so that they can better multiply and be instructed in the things of our holy faith, neither personal, nor mixed, more than the Spaniards who reside in the said islands, and let them be left alone, so that they may better multiply and be instructed in the things of our holy Catholic faith, for which purpose they shall be given religious persons, who shall be suitable for that purpose" cited in Zavala, "La Encomienda Indiana," 38. See also Arcángello Rafael Flores Hernández, "Nuevas Leyes y Ordenanzas De Las Indias Fechadas En Burgos, El 20 De Noviembre De 1542 AGI, Patronato, Legajo 170, Ramo 47, 1," in *La Protectoría De Indios Durante El Siglo XVI* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, S. A. de C. V., 2010).

willing to do what they see if the Indians are able to live by themselves and govern themselves" [transl. Karina Ortiz Villa].[25]

This is, of course, only a cursory sketch of some of the complexities of philosophical reactions to the *encomienda* system, and of Las Casas's views on it. Although we will not attempt to sketch the details here, it is perhaps notable that by the end of his life, Las Casas fervently rejected the civil and political authority of the Crown, condemning it as morally and legally responsible for the systemic exploitation and mistreatment of Indigenous populations and as derelict in its duty to protect its subjects.[26]

Knowledge and gendered labor

This section concerns one thread of the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a 17th century Hieronymite nun in New Spain, renowned for her poetry and plays. In a later section, we'll return to some of these themes in the work of Rosario Castellanos, a 20th century philosopher, writer, poet, and playwright from Mexico.[27] Sor Juana was concerned with the role of gender in

[25] One of his remedies also included the importation of African slaves to the Caribbean, aimed at relieving the indigenous population from hard labor. The quote itself says "Third, that your highness grant the Christians who are now in the islands, that they may each have two black (male) slaves and two black (female) slaves, and that there should be no doubt of their safety, and that the reasons for this should be given." Las Casas, *Memorial de Remedios para las Indias* (1516), in *Obras Escogidas.* Las Casas eventually denounced his own stance on African slavery insisting that he was misled to think that the wars in Africa were just.

[26] For other reflections on the philosophical significance of the encomienda system, see Silvio Zavala, *La encomienda indiana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1935); Enrique D. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "The Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80; and Castro-Gómez, Santiago, *Zero-Point Hubris: Science, Race, and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Latin America,* trans. George Ciccariello-Maher, and Don T. Deere (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021). While there is extensive literature on these historical figures and their influence, there has been less direct reflection on the specific significance of the encomienda system in contemporary political philosophy. This situation is roughly analogous to the relatively limited attention given to the legacy of indentured servitude in contemporary political thought.

[27] "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" is an adopted name that marks Sor Juana's entrance to her religious order. This is a standard practice in Catholic religious communities. It translates as "Sister Juana [or Joan] of the Cross." Even so, in both the popular and scholarly Anglophone literature, it is customary to refer to her as "Sor Juana" or "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz." Note

intellectual and practical life, and the ways in which the subordination of women produced distorting effects on individuals, women as a group, and society collectively. She was particularly concerned with the way in which gendered labor practices had moral and epistemic costs.

Sor Juana was famed for her intellectual and artistic prowess in her own period, and vividly aware of the ways in which the social norms around gender hindered her own intellectual pursuits and reflected often hypocritical norms.[28] Nevertheless, she persisted. After being admonished to give up her popular creative activities (poetry, playwriting) and wide-ranging intellectual interests, she undertook a defense of her intellectual life in a 1690 letter that is sometimes translated as "The Reply."[29] Among other things, she argued for the importance of studying a wide range of subject matters beyond the religious topics that were regarded as most suitable for a cloistered nun.

For present purposes, one of the most interesting aspects of that text is the way in which she frames the epistemic costs of living in a world where there is a gendered division of labor, and where there is differential access to education by gender. Together, these things are bad for a community's collective knowledge, because insights available to either sex tend to be closed off to the other. Even men, who possess the advantage of access to more formal education and the freedom to pursue intellectual endeavors, pay a price for this arrangement. As she notes in her letter:

> And what could I tell you, señora, about the natural secrets I have discovered when cooking? Seeing that an egg sets and fries in butter or oil but falls apart in syrup; seeing that for sugar to remain liquid it is enough to add a very small amount of water in which a quince or other bitter fruit has been placed . . . what can we women know but kitchen

too that although "de la Cruz" is not a last name, it is commonly used that way for bibliographic purposes.

[28] Manuel Vargas, "If Aristotle Had Cooked: The Philosophy of Sor Juana," *Journal of Mexican Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2022): 13-38.

[29] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "Response of the Poet to the Very Eminent Sor Filotea De La Cruz," in *Selected Works*, ed. Anna More (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016): 90-125.

> philosophies? As Lupercio Leonardo so wisely said, one can philosophize very well and prepare supper. And seeing these minor details, I say that if Aristotle had cooked, he would have written a great deal more.[30]

By Sor Juana's lights, Aristotle of the Lyceum could have discovered and written even more than he did. It is also true that the wisdom and discoveries of the Aristotles of the kitchen, disproportionately women, were lost to the wider project of collective knowledge. Thus, the gendering of labor tended to make women's labor less subject to attention and consideration. It didn't need to be this way, and the forgotten or suppressed history of learned and intellectually accomplished women, she thought, showed that same sex education might blunt some of the epistemic and moral harms of a gendered social world that regarded gendered divisions of labor as fixed. In Sor Juana's world such possibilities seemed remote. Still, her work made it hard to avoid musing about "how much harm could be averted in our republic if older women were as learned as Leta."[31]

Andean Indigenous socialism

José Carlos Mariátegui is recognized as one of Latin America's most influential and original Marxist theorists.[32] His writings on socialism, labor, and race continue to resonate and impact discussions and studies in these fields to this day.[33] Mariátegui not only explored the extreme conditions faced by peasants and the Indigenous in Peru but also the complexities of labor, the ills of imperialism, the status of women, aesthetics and the racial

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[30] de la Cruz, "Response," 110.

[31] de la Cruz, "Response," 115.

[32] Michael Löwy and Penelope Duggan, "Marxism and Romanticism in the Work of José Carlos Mariátegui," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 4 (1998): 76–88.

[33] Mike Gonzalez, "José Carlos Mariátegui Was the Great Pioneer of Latin American Marxism," *Jacobin*, 2023; Michael Löwy, "Mariátegui's Heroic Socialism," *Jacobin*, December 15, 2018; Nicolas Allen, "José Carlos Mariátegui's Indo-American Socialism," *Jacobin*, August 24, 2020; see also, César Cabezas, "Mariátegui and the Failed Promise of a 'Mestizaje Otherwise,'" unpublished manuscript.

dynamics both in Peru and Latin America as a whole. In addition to this, his commitment went beyond theory as he was deeply involved in the workers' movement, playing a key role in establishing the *General Confederation of Peruvian Workers*, the largest trade union in Peru, which helped unify and advance the Peruvian working class, but also aimed at political solidarity among different class workers including the Indigenous population.[34] On the third anniversary of *Amauta,* the magazine he founded in 1926, Mariátegui, issued a call to action to his readers— "We certainly do not want socialism in America to be a copy or imitation. It must be a *heroic creation.* We have to give life, with our own reality, in our own language, to Indo-American socialism." This invitation, made nearly a century ago, now sets the stage for our brief exploration into Mariátegui's philosophy of work.

Mariátegui's philosophy was deeply intertwined with his broader socio-political theories, incorporating elements of Marxist methodology,[35] Indigenous Andean practices, and socialism. Thus, it should come as no surprise that his views on the value of work, as having intrinsic rather than mere instrumental value--which he calls "absolutely medieval and aristocratic"[36]—were deeply influenced by "the spirit and tradition of the Inca society, in which idleness was a crime, and work, performed with devotion, was the highest virtue."[37]

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[34] José C. Mariátegui, *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, edited and translated by Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 351. For a different perspective, see also Cabezas (unpublished manuscript).

[35] Though his method was called "unorthodox"

[36] José C. Mariátegui, "Public Education" in *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1988), 111.

[37] *Ibid,* 118. Mariátegui's ideas bear some resemblance with Marx's views, particularly those expressed in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. For example, Marx's perspective on labor as a "life activity"—an expression of human creativity and a fulfilling aspect of life—mirrors significant parts of Mariátegui's argument in "Public Education". However, it is noteworthy that the 1844 manuscripts were not published until 1932, two years after Mariátegui's death, suggesting that Mariátegui's understanding of the importance of work was likely more deeply influenced by Inca labor and economic practices than by his Marxist training. *See,* Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959); José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Manuel

For Mariátegui, the Andean "community," or the *Ayllu*, serves as empirical evidence challenging the dominant view that labor is only valuable for its economic output. Instead, the *Ayllu* offers an alternative model where work is a key component of human dignity, societal well-being, and economic progress. The "social and moral framework"[38] of the "community," according to Mariátegui, transcends mere social connections, functioning instead as a dynamic "system of production that keeps alive in the Indian the moral incentives that stimulate him to do his best work."[39] In this context, work evolves from being an individual burden to a shared responsibility or "collective contract"[40] that not only sustains and enriches community bonds but cultivates other moral virtues such as solidarity and charity. Thus, in this context of "community", work becomes "creative, liberating,"[41] extending beyond mere economic activity to a meaningful pursuit that contributes to the flourishing of the collective whole and where "man fulfills himself."[42]

However, when community are supplanted by feudal property and work, a crucial aspect of cultural identity lost and its potential for economic progress is transformed into a system "incapable of technical progress."[43] This loss, he contends, is the key factor contributing to the "Indigenous problem." Mariátegui emphasizes the severe consequences of this shift: "The gradual expropriation and absorption of the "community" by the *latifundium* not only plunged [the indigenous] deeper into servitude but also destroyed the economic and legal institutions that helped safeguard the spirit and

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Burga, *The Incas: Land and Labor in Pre-Columbian Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988)

[38] José C. Mariátegui, "The Problem of Land," in *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1988), 61.

[39] *Ibid,* 61.

[40] *Ibid,* 69.

[41] Mariátegui, "Public Education," 111.

[42] *Ibid,* 111.

[43] Mariátegui, "The Problem of Land," 69.

substance of his ancient civilization."[44] Importantly, for Mariátegui, not everything is lost or destroyed. The "community", though not the same as before colonial intervention, has retained some of its spirit where "work and property are replaced by cooperation of individuals" leading to the practice of "the collective contract . . . instead of individuals separately offering their services to landowners or contractors, all the able-bodied men of the cooperative collectively jointly contract to do work."[45] This cooperation, rooted in Indigenous cultural practices of 'community,' positions Indigenous peoples uniquely for communism to take root without transitioning through a capitalist stage, thereby forming the basis for Indo-American socialism.

***Gana,* Passivity, and the Agency of Strategic Detachment**

As we have seen, part of the legacy of colonialism was a long-standing and entrenched attitude of Europeans disparaging the purported 'passivity' of Latin Americans. Hundreds of years later, the attitudes persisted, but they were also resisted in new forms by Latin American philosophers.

In his 1931 *South American Meditations* [*Südamerikanische Meditationen*], the German philosopher Hermann von Keyserling charges that Latin American life encourages passivity and inhibits the development of active agency, or the pursuit and initiation of intentional or volitional actions.[46] He draws this racist and essentializing conclusion from the presence of something called *gana* in Latin American discourse about action. He notes that when one asks a Latin American why they performed, or refused to perform, a certain action, a usual explanation appeals to *gana*: I did *x* 'porque me dio la *gana*' or I did not do *x* 'porque no me dio la *gana*'; roughly, 'I did (or did not do) *x* because I had (or did not have) *gana* to do it.'[47]

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[44] *Ibid,* 67.

[45] *Ibid*, 69.

[46] Though Keyserling's book is officially about South America, he clearly intends for his analysis to apply to all Latin America.

[47] Hermann Keyserling, *South American Meditations: On Hell and Heaven in Man's Soul,* trans. Therese Duerr (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1932): 161, 177.

According to Keyserling, *gana* is neither the product of deliberation nor a desire, nor an emotion.[48] It is instead a pre-reflective, non-deliberative, and uncontrolled urge or drive that compels a subject to behave in a certain way. As he puts it: *gana* is an "intrinsically blind urge [*Drang*] to which the mere idea of forethought must mean an offense…as a blind urge it has a compelling power which man of these latitudes can not resist."[49] Because *gana* is what characteristically impels Latin Americans to act, and because *gana* is an urge over which control cannot be exercised, Latin Americans are thereby rendered passive non-agents. This, Keyserling thinks, in effect inhibits Latin Americans from being agents, or initiators or volitional action, and renders them mere mediums for *ganas*, urges they have no control over. Thus, he claims that Latin Americans "are undoubtedly passive [*passiv*]," for they "suffer their life. It is a continuous yielding to what urges them from within."[50]

In fact, Keyserling thinks that the condition of Latin Americans is even worse than one of passivity. Given that *ganas* are pre-reflective and non-deliberative, and so are not products of reasoning or deliberation, a life of *gana* is one "opposed to a life determined or co-determined by the mind [geistbestimmten oder geistmitbedingten]."[51] And, because Keyserling thinks that Latin Americans live a life of *gana*, he claims that "their depths are dumb."[52]

In sum, Keyserling portrays Latin Americans as unthinking people who lack agency because their actions source from pre-reflective, non-deliberative, and uncontrolled urges (*ganas*). Crucially, Keyserling identifies the archetype most exemplifying this condition as the Indigenous person.[53]

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[48] *Gana* is usually translated as 'will' or 'desire' or 'feeling' in English, but given that Keyserling does not understand *gana* in this way, I leave it untranslated.

[49] Keyserling, *South American Meditations,* 164.

[50] Ibid., 177.

[51] Ibid., 162.

[52] Ibid., 185.

[53] Ibid., 189.

The Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos responds to Keyserling's charges, especially as they apply to Indigenous people, in his 1935 *Bolivarism and Monroism* [*Bolivarismo y monroísmo*]. While Keyserling conceives of the purported passivity of Latin Americans as (i) preclusive of agency and (ii) a consequence of the role of *ganas* or urges in impelling action, Vasconcelos claims that (i) passivity is a properly *agential* phenomenon (ii) whose explanation lies *not* in urges but rather in social conditions. More specifically, Vasconcelos argues that passivity is a kind of *agency of detachment*, and it is often undertaken in response to harsh or oppressive social conditions.

According to Vasconcelos, "[w]hen the fate the external world has in store is adverse, vigorous natures take refuge in their own intimacy, and, from there, compensate for the fatalism of the situation."[54] The idea is that under harsh conditions, such as those of oppression and exploitation, agents can "compensate" for their conditions by psychologically 'detaching' themselves from them. In so doing, agents typically adopt an orientation of passive indifference toward those conditions. This form of psychological detachment is a *decision* for Vasconcelos. It results from an understanding and appraisal of one's situation.

Of particular interest to Vasconcelos is how the above dynamic plays out in the domain of labor. Under exploitative laboring conditions, he thinks, workers can decide to psychologically detach and will cease to take interest in their work, thereby becoming passive. This detachment is thus strategic and agentic, and one way that it manifests is as an unwillingness to work. This model of laborial passivity is especially important to Vasconcelos because it enables him to respond to Keyserling's racist treatment of Indigenous people as the exemplars of the Latin American non-agential way of life.

Vasconcelos grants the essentializing stereotype that Indigenous people are characteristically passive regarding work. Contra Keyserling, though, he argues that their passivity neither sources from urges (*ganas*) nor is indicative of an unthinking way of life. Rather, their passivity is a response to the social position they have occupied since "the day following the conquest," and it serves as "a mode of escaping servility," a way of distancing

[54] José. Vasconcelos, *Bolivarismo Y Monroísmo: Temas Iberoamericanas* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Ercilla, 1959): 173.

themselves from their oppressive conditions.[55] Vasconcelos notes that in the absence of oppressive working conditions, when Indigenous laborers are given sincere opportunities to improve their lot, their orientation toward their work ceases to be one of passivity, unwillingness, and indifference. It becomes active and inspired. That is to say: when the conditions to which detachment is a response cease, so too does the recourse to an agency of detachment. The explanation for this, according to Vasconcelos, "is very simple: the Indigenous person [*el indio*], as any other person, ceases to work and becomes indifferent when the work does not offer a good opportunity for enrichment or artistic expression…The [indifference] which is opposed to effort is defeated by an opportunity of enrichment for the laborer."[56] Two philosophically interesting upshots emerge from this explanation.

First, the passivity that Keyserling claims occupies a prominent place in Latin American life need not be understood as nonagential and unthinking. Rather, where it is present, and in the relevant circumstances, we can plausibly understand passivity as a kind of *agency of strategic detachment*, a deliberate response to or a "defense against" exploitation.[57] Second, the idea of an agency of detachment that Vasconcelos applies to the case of Indigenous laborers provides an interesting and illuminating way of making sense of how agents relate to their work under exploitative, or more generally unfavorable, conditions. This idea can be further applied and developed in other contexts to yield a richer understanding of passivity. Though, for the sake of space, we could not explore such contexts here, we close this section by noting that Vasconcelos goes some way in this regard by applying his model of the agency of detachment to the aristocratic classes of Latin America.

The mad virtues of domestic labor

Between when Sor Juana wrote about it in the 17th century and when Rosario Castellanos undertook examination of it in mid-20th century Mexico, the norms surrounding the (frequently unpaid) labor of women

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[55] Vasconcelos, *Bolivarismo y monroísmo,* 174.

[56] Ibid., 174-5.

[57] Ibid., 178.

changed in important ways. Even so, there was much about mid-20th century Mexican gender norms that would have been immediately recognizable to Sor Juana. The social world continued to be structured by relatively inflexible norms around which labor was performed by members of which gender. Women were enjoined to focus on childrearing and domestic tasks, and there was comparatively little celebration and support of women's labor in other domains, perhaps especially in the subject matters taught at universities. The ongoing double bind of women having limited and frequently unpalatable options to choose between was a central concern for Sor Juana, one that she explored in several poems and letters.

Rosario Castellanos, though, provides a different reading of the position of women. While acknowledging and repudiating what we would now characterize as structural inequalities, she also offers a distinctive account of gender-based differences in cultural achievement. Her account suggests that women were given few opportunities to pursue cultural production because it constitutes a protected sphere in which men strive to achieve goods more readily available to women in childbearing and childrearing. Even so, Castellanos argued that it was an urgent matter that women participate in that cultural production on their own terms, not structured by patriarchy and its image of women.

In *On Feminine Culture*, Castellanos's 1950 Master's thesis in philosophy, Castellanos asks why so much cultural production—art, music, poetry, philosophy, literature, and so on—had been produced by men.[58] One factor that she points to is a phenomenon that figured in Sor Juana's decision to enter a convent: given the overwhelming expectation for women to marry, bear children, care for the children, and provide for all the needs in the domestic sphere, there has been considerably less time, energy, and opportunity for women to engage in such things. Social norms surrounding "women's work" and the expectation that women are to engage in domestic labor entail that there are fewer incentives and opportunities to engage in that work. Moreover, she thinks, we can readily explain why women have tended to gravitate towards writing, especially about domestic matters. First,

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[58] Rosario Castellanos, *Sobre Cultura Femenina* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005). The last chapter of it is available in English as Rosario Castellanos, "On Feminine Culture," in *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century*, ed. Carlos Sánchez, and Robert Sanchez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): 206–15.

there are relatively few barriers to taking up writing (in comparison to, say, chemistry, sculpture, or theology). Second, a focus on domestic matters in the writing provides the woman writer with some way of performing compliance with social norms that enjoin her to focus on domesticity.[59]

Those are the relatively ready lessons of the text. Other aspects are more elusive. Although it is one of her earlier texts (something she later treated as juvenilia), it is nevertheless subtle and suggestive in ways that make it challenging to interpret. For example, Castellanos seems to think, rather uncharitably, that women's literature rarely manages to escape a kind of narcissism, a fixation of the author at the exclusion of wider themes. But she also goes on to express hope that women writers might escape the constraints of male-imposed conceptions of gender that have hamstrung women writers.[60] Indeed, this was something of a life-long project for her own creative work, which came to be widely celebrated.

Perhaps the central theme of the entire book concerns the relationship of cultural production and the apparently supreme value of eternity, and the way in which women's labors fit into this picture. For example, Castellanos claims that cultural production is an effort at realizing values with some connection to eternity.[61] She then suggests, with more than a little ambiguity, that perhaps part of the story is that women who bear and care for children are already realizing values connected to eternity in perhaps the highest way possible, i.e., in the creation and formation of human beings. On this reading, the impulse to produce cultural works looks more like a second-best option for those without the kind of secure tie towards such value that comes from carrying a living being inside one, and then nurturing it and shaping it in a direct and sustained way. It is difficult to tell how committed she is to such a view though, because in the last chapter, Castellanos seems centrally concerned to defend the possibility and value of women's creative cultural production, even if it had been thus far, she thought, less excellent than it could be. Indeed, it was one of the dominant themes of the rest of her life.

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[59] Castellanos, "Feminine Culture," 213-215.

[60] Ibid., 215.

[61] Castellanos, *Sobre cultura*, 215.

A later example of Castellanos reflections on gendered labor can be found in her short essay entitled "Self-Sacrifice is a Mad Virtue."[62] Castellanos begins by highlighting that despite the diverse socio-economic positions of women in 20th century Mexico, "when we utter the word *woman*, we refer to a creature who is dependent upon male authority: be it her father's, her brother's, her husband's, or her priest."[63] She must realize "the halo of maternity," and her greatest virtue is to live a life of ubiquitous self-sacrifice, especially in the context of domestic life.[64]

Here, she invokes G. K. Chesterton's idea of "mad virtues" to reflect on the costs of the putative virtue of women's self-sacrifice in the context of family relations. For Chesterton, mad virtues are virtues that have become unmoored from a wider framework of virtues.[65] In the absence of that wider conception of virtues and their proper role in life, virtues tend to be monomaniacally pursued in a way prone to corruption. The result is an often-monstrous simulacra of virtue, one that makes no sense in contemporary life, nor in the evaluative framework of yore.

The result, Castellanos thinks, are children and spouses who are unable to be self-sufficient, paralyzed by emergencies, immature, and dependent. In short, everyone—the self-sacrificing woman, but also those who the sacrifice putatively serves—are rendered worse off. However, here too, gendered divisions of labor have consequences. Men, at least, typically get compensation and a sense of usefulness from their work outside the home, and of being a participant in a wider community. They enjoy greater opportunities for creativity. In contrast, women are left with labor that "is not worthy of remuneration, that barely reduces the feeling of superficiality

[62] Rosario Castellanos, "Self-Sacrifice as a Mad Virtue," in *A Rosario Castellanos Reader*, ed. Maureen Ahern 1988 [1971]): 259–63.

[63] Ibid, 261.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Chesterton contends that traditional virtues have "gone mad" in the wake of the Reformation's fracturing of the Christian worldview. See Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909): 52. Although Castellanos was Catholic, Chesterton's specific concern about the fracture of a putatively unified Christianity prior to the Reformation plays no obvious role in Castellanos's discussion.

and isolation: duties, which by their very nature are short-lived and never-ending."[66]

Other developments

We have focused on a handful of episodes in the history of Latin American philosophy where there are particularly interesting discussions about aspects of philosophy and work. To conclude, we briefly gesture at some other contributions that merit more discussion than we can provide here.

Mariátegui's work is the tip of a long tradition of Marxist-influenced thought in Latin America. One aspect of that work has focused on the nature of human productive activity under the guise of the "philosophy of praxis."[67] Another has focused specifically on the complex matrix of forces and effects produced by colonialism. For example, Aníbal Quijano's work has focused on the way in which colonial labor relations produced the economic and racial stratification of peoples in the Americas.[68] Still others, including Maria Lugones have extended and transformed that picture by attending to the role of gender and sexuality in the process of colonization and its aftermath.[69]

A sometimes overlapping but importantly distinct project has concerned philosophy animated by the foundational concern for the liberation of the poor. Under the banner of "the philosophy of liberation," a diverse group of philosophers with diverse orientations have argued for the urgency of taking liberation from oppression in general but poverty in particular as the central philosophical mission.[70] Again, a good deal of this

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[66] Castellanos, "Mad Virtue," 262.

[67] Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez, *The Philosophy of Praxis,* trans. Mike Gonzalez (London, U.K.: Merlin Press, 1977).

[68] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America."

[69] Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186–209; Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742–59.

[70] Eduardo Mendieta, "Poverty and Latin American Philosophy," in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Poverty*, ed. Gottfried Schweiger, and Clemens Sedmak (New York: Routledge, 2023), especially 262-269; see also Eduardo Mendieta, "Philosophy of Liberation." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2020): https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/liberation/.

work takes as its point of departure the fact of centuries of European colonization in Latin America, including the arrangement of labor, the imposition of a caste-based labor system, and the lingering effects of that system and the regimentation of those features in the contemporary geopolitical economy.[71]

[71] Thanks to Guillermo Hurtado and Carlos Sánchez for recommendations, and to Julian Jonkers and Grant Rozeboom for feedback on the chapter.