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CARLOS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITOR

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Offentimes, in our reflections on Latin American philosophy, or philosophy in Latin America (whichever you prefer), we tend to treat it as a historical artifact, something that *happened* and which we now have the privilege to evaluate for its philosophical merits. Thus, at times, we forget (and our students forget) that Latin American philosophy or philosophy in Latin America is still taking place, that philosophers exist there to which we must attend, as we attend to contemporary—i.e., living—European and North American philosophers. In an effort to address this periodic amnesia, from time to time this newsletter will endeavor to publish original work by contemporary—i.e., living—Latin American philosophers, as well as to highlight projects and initiatives that exemplify a living, vibrant tradition.

The present issue of the newsletter attempts to accomplish both tasks in two *seemingly* distinct ways. The first two essays highlight, in an introductory and accessible way, the work of two exemplary, contemporary Latin American philosophers, Stefan Gandler and Alejandro Tomasini Bassols. The third piece included in this issue, by Amy Reed-Sandoval, showcases and offers justification for an initiative currently taking place in Oaxaca, Mexico, aimed at engaging children of that region in philosophical dialogue and discussion.

Although drastically different in their interests and approach, both Gandler and Tomasini are representative of the richness and diversity of contemporary philosophy in Latin America (in this case, of Mexico). With sixteen books and over 150 articles published on critical theory, German philosophy, and Marxism in the Americas, Stefan Gandler is certainly worthy of study by anyone interested in this complex philosophical tradition, especially as it has been encountered and furthered by philosophers south of the U.S.-Mexican border. The study of Gandler's work will be facilitated by the forthcoming translation of his monumental *Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría*, to be published in 2015. The essay published here serves as an introduction to Gandler's work on critical Marxism in Mexico in general, and on Bolívar Echeverría in particular. "The Quadruple Modern *Ethos*: Critical Theory in the Americas" delves into Echeverría's "non-dogmatic" Marxism and applies its

insights into issues of cultural *mestizaje*, racial oppression, inequality, and modernity, as this has been formulated both in the United States and in Mexico.

Alejandro Tomasini Bassols's work tends toward a different direction than that of Gandler's. One could say that their philosophical interests lie at opposite sides of what we call, somewhat frustratingly, the analytic-continental divide. Bassols's eleven books and 100-plus articles deal with a myriad of issues, but especially with the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell, the philosophy of mathematics, religion, and the history of analytic philosophy. He has translated, into Spanish, the work of Wittgenstein, Ayer, Putnam, and Tolstoy. In the present essay, Tomasini reflects on the encounter between the astounding Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In the essay included in the present issue, Tomasini reflects on the arrival and appropriation of "analytical philosophy" in Mexico. He points to Luis Villoro's "The Sayable and Unsayable in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*" as a turning point in the study and development of this tradition. While largely disagreeing with Villoro's interpretation of the *Tractatus*, calling it "radically wrong," Tomasini credits Villoro for instigating a philosophical discussion that is still going on today, in Mexico as well as the rest of the Spanish-speaking world. He ends the essay rather pessimistically, suggesting that contemporary analytic philosophers are not doing analytical philosophy—that "analytical philosophy," as a school of thought, belongs to the past, and that if it is to have a future, in Mexico and elsewhere, it must recover some of what made it "analytical" in the first place.

In "The Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative as Place-Based Philosophy," Amy Reed-Sandoval aims to introduce an initiative aimed at including the "excluded voices of children" into philosophy while offering compelling reasons for its necessity. In her essay, Reed-Sandoval argues for the concept of "positionality" in the philosophy for children movement "in order to explore the ways that sociopolitical and philosophical context can impact the sorts of questions and discussions generated by children." Thus, when children are situated on the margins of social and political power, as is the case with the children of Oaxaca, their voices tend to challenge "western philosophical frameworks" and thus enrich our understanding and conception of philosophy itself.

ARTICLES

The Quadruple Modern Ethos: Critical Theory in the Americas

Stefan Gandler

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The bulk of contemporary philosophical and sociological activity is based on the assumption that only thought born at the epicenter of military, economic, and political power has “universal” significance. As such, many investigations into Latin America, for instance, consider its various countries and peoples as *objects* (as opposed to *subjects*) of scientific reflection. In order to overcome the intrinsic “philosophical Eurocentrism” that one inherits as a native of the so-called First World, I have carefully analyzed the works of Bolívar Echeverría, professor of philosophy at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Echeverría’s work in shaping the concepts of cultural *mestizaje* and *baroque ethos* has contributed significantly to understanding the myriad ways in which the capitalist modernity is manifested today.

Cultural *mestizaje* [*mestizaje cultural*]¹ refers to the melding of Spanish/European traditions with pre-Hispanic traditions—a process that has been particularly important to Mexican culture. However, it must be noted, in light of the experiences of other former colonies, that such an evolution is highly unusual. For example, until perhaps recently, the cultural *mestizaje* phenomenon in the United States was negligible at best, despite the coexistence and overlapping of distinct cultures. In its place existed (and arguably *still* exists) a deep and historic division of peoples—“races”—based on skin color. Notwithstanding, the United States is still considered one of the most progressive countries (progressive in the sense of progress) in the world, whereas countries like Mexico are often regarded as “underdeveloped” or “developing”—a term that once referred to a country’s industrial evolution, but has more recently come to be associated with the social structure and “everyday-life” culture.

For Echeverría, a society’s modernity is not so much measured by its industrial evolution but by its ability to open itself to other, *different* social entities and break down—at least partially—the pre-modern barriers set up to “protect” a false cultural “purity.” By this definition, societies whose everyday-life culture has been influenced by cultural *mestizaje* (as is the case for Mexico and many other Latin American countries) are extremely modern, whereas the United States and the majority of European states, which have systematically refused or hindered the development of *mestizaje* through repressive immigration legislation (for the most part, racially motivated), characterize themselves as pre-modern.²

THE FOUR HISTORICAL ETHE³

In order to examine the foundations of the cultural *mestizaje*, Echeverría develops the concept of historical *ethos*. This concept is based on the subsumption of the

production of use-values through the production of value—a norm in capitalist societies. While the use-value of a product is measured by its ability to satisfy human need, the economic category of value is calculated based on the manpower or the average time needed to produce a specific commodity. Within the context of prevailing, global capitalist production—where great lengths are taken to maximize production value and profit—those things that actually *improve* the quality of life suffer devaluation and, imminently, destruction—a destruction (for example, ecologically) that could ultimately result in human extinction. With this reality looming in the distance, the liberation of the production of use-values from dominating production of value appears, for Echeverría, an urgent necessity. However, this cannot be achieved through a single “messianic action.” The production of use-values and the production of value are so closely intertwined that simply *imagining* their liberation is nearly impossible.

Within this dilemma that has occupied generations of non-dogmatic Marxists, Echeverría attempts—beginning with a critique of production in capitalist modernity—to go beyond Marx and the sphere of production.⁴ He strives to examine and distill the moments of everyday-life, analyzing concrete forms of behavior as well as the social institutions that provide a livable appearance to essentially unlivable social relations. These details of everyday-life, which differ both regionally and temporally, is what Echeverría calls the “historical *ethos*”—an extensive concept that includes everything from traditional foods to the organization of work to communication; in brief, all forms of production and consumption of use-values and their significance. “Structural social behavior, which we may call *historical ethos*, can be regarded as a construction-principle of the lifeworld. It is a behavior that attempts to make the unlivable livable.”⁵

Bolívar Echeverría distinguishes between four “historical *ethe*,” which represent different ways of living within the social reality; the “*ethe* of capitalist modernity,” for example, means living everyday-life alongside the many contradictions of capitalist production. He names the four *ethe* “realistic,” “romantic,” “classical,” and “baroque.”

These four distinct viewpoints result from the potential combinations of *recognition* and *denial* of the contradiction between the logic of value and the logic of use-values, on the one hand, and the importance *given* to the value and/or the use-value, on the other. The realistic *ethos* denies this contradiction while, at the same time, attributing greater importance to value. The romantic *ethos* also denies this contradiction, but leans more toward use-value. The classical *ethos* acknowledges the existence of this contradiction and submits to the logic of value, while the baroque also recognizes this contradiction, but attempts to preserve the dynamics of the use-value.

The realistic *ethos*, due to its predominance in “First World” countries, is the most predominant on the global scale. It is the *ethos* of non-ambiguity, of clarity; it denies the insurmountable contradiction in the current relationship between value and use-value, and supposes that, with incremental fixation on the production of value, use-values

are also automatically improved and protected. Due to historical and geographical preconditions, there exists a variety of forms combining the realistic *ethos* and other historical *ethe*.

According to Echeverría, the baroque and realistic *ethe* coexist in Latin America and particularly in Mexico, though even here the dominance of the latter is undeniable. The baroque *ethos* is a paradoxical combination of soberness and rebellion. This means that withstanding the various forms of capitalist production acknowledges, all the while, its tendency towards the destruction of use-values and, with it, human happiness. However, it likewise shares the deeply romantic conviction that use-values can be preserved within existing social relations. This *ethos* is, for Echeverría, a “strategy which, although it accepts the laws of the circulation of commodities (. . .), functions in conflict with them and subjects them to a game of infringements.”⁶ As it does not openly *rebel* against existing social relations, it may be viewed as conservative; nevertheless, it opposes the absolute destruction of happiness, once a precondition of traditional life. And all the same, it is non-conformist in that it does not complacently accept the logic of capitalism, which sacrifices quality of life for profit. The baroque *ethos* is, therefore, one of contradiction; it allows us to live the unlivable, not by *denying* the unlivable nature of the existing social relations, but by *recognizing* it and playing on this impossibility of pleasure, which it attempts to find in hidden and spontaneously emerging spaces.

The realistic *ethos*, based on the principle of non-ambiguity (and yet, in denial of the elementary contradiction between the production of use-values and of value), is unable to attain its highest ideal: enlightenment—the recognition of the other as *conditio sine qua non* for the constitution of subjectivity of the self. The baroque *ethos*, on the other hand, borrows its name from the baroque art movement, with its capacity to combine and mix diverse elements and styles which, seen from a “serious” point of view, *cannot* be combined or mixed. This chaotic mixture poses a threat to the well-established rules of aesthetics. However, it was nonetheless the only art form in *Nueva España* capable of integrating elements of indigenous art.

A mutual lack of “comprehension” exists on both sides of this *ethos*; the elements do not “understand” one another but have agreed to peacefully coexist by turning a blind eye and a deaf ear when necessary. By Hegel’s definition, they do not comprehend or recognize one another; yet, neither seeks to destroy or aggressively exclude the other. It is this incongruous attitude, garmented in ambiguous speech and bubbling over with eager acceptance, that enables the baroque *ethos* to tolerate differences among people without demanding that one adapt in order to be more recognizable to the other.

MODERNITY IN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

We may observe the differences between societies in which the realistic *ethos* is predominant versus those where the baroque *ethos* preponderates by comparing the United States and Mexico. In the United States, while after hundreds of years, descendants of slaves and descendants of the former colonizers still fail to mix (both biologically

and culturally) due to a mutual lack of recognition, Mexico enjoys a high degree of *cultural mestizaje* on both levels. This *mestizaje* is not necessarily the recognition of the other in an enlightened or philosophical way, but it nonetheless has succeeded where the realistic *ethos* has failed by allowing for a peaceful coexistence in spite of the social hierarchy. While the realistic *ethos* succeeds only in reinforcing the economic limitations and racial barriers established by colonization, the baroque *ethos* offers the possibility of blurring these lines and limitations by encouraging harmonious living with the other, unheeding of the consequences of colonialism and its capitalist aftermath.

We must not imagine that there is no racial oppression at the heart of the baroque *ethos*; like the other *ethe*, it too represents the reality of capitalist modernity. However, it more aptly facilitates paradoxical exceptions like Mexico, where indigenous peoples who are faced with racial oppression, spontaneous, *traditional*, daily routine and ritual (such as the preparation and consumption of traditional foods), practiced by a greater part of the population, continue to exist and even thrive. To the even greater benefit of the baroque *ethos*, official state doctrine emphasizes the importance of the country’s pre-Hispanic heritage to national culture.

Though itself also a form of ideology, the baroque *ethos* nevertheless touches upon the social reality. One imagines the outrage with which an analogous representation of American history would be received—one where equal attention was paid to the subject of slavery, its true motives, and its crippling impact on American society. The fact that the skin tones of the ruling class in Mexico (slightly darker than that of its northern counterpart) do not differ so greatly from that of the general populous is, of course, also of consequence. In Mexico, where the realistic *ethos* is not the ascendant *ethos*, racial separation and segregation are less conspicuous than in other countries. And yet, as the realistic *ethos* denies the existence of contradictions like racism, societies guided by this principle will be faced with the inability to deal with them. Instead, these contradictions will be reproduced time and time again (which is evident by observing the underwhelming tendency towards mixed coupling in the United States), as will the continued domination of the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant ruling class. This is not, however, an attempt to palliate racism in Mexican society, but rather an attempt to demonstrate that the human rights movement’s superficial identification with the realistic *ethos* as it exists today in current ideology and predominating social theories is deeply ethnocentric and, finally, even racist.

A TIGER’S LEAP INTO THE PAST

Of course, one may inquire whether or not Echeverría, who considers himself a non-dogmatic Marxist, is not diluting the social question by considering the historical *ethe* only in chronological and geographical terms. On the one hand, Echeverría’s approach may be seen as a counter-stance to thinly-veiled Euro- or Ethnocentrism, which has ordained the European and U.S.-American social reality as the norm in terms of socio-theoretical and philosophical thinking. Capitalism is, however, considerably more than merely

his economic basis. In order to understand and change it, one needs knowledge of the social body. Echeverría's theory thus can be seen as a decisive contribution to this cause—even when it appears to fall behind Marxism or non-dogmatic Marxism in some ways.

On the other hand, Echeverría's social philosophy is situated in the context of a polemic that has existed among the Mexican and Latin American left for a long time now: whether these societies must immediately fight for social liberation or must first meet the economic and political "standards" set by Europe and the United States. This discussion—and the question of the bourgeois revolution as prerequisite for the socialist one—was particularly popular during the 1960s and 1970s. After 1989, the discussion resurfaced, this time under the term "modernization and democratization of Latin America" and requisite to solving the social question. Echeverría has systematically criticized undying faith in "progress" as a solution—a sentiment as pervasive today as in the past, and according to which "underdeveloped" or "Third World" countries have no choice but to follow the course taken by the so-called First World. Echeverría aspires to deconstruct this continuum; he chooses to *not* put off looking at Mexico's social question until after its "modernization," but rather esteems that contemporary Mexican society is already highly modern and ready to solve its most essential problems based on its current state of affairs.

He is convinced that its traditional social customs are closer to those of an emancipated society than are those of societies we call "modern." His critique of the opinion that the realistic *ethos* will, given time, transmute into baroque (the latter being viewed as developmentally "slow"), is not born of a nostalgic desire to return to the past or "adhere firmly to the time-honored forms in opposition to the Americanization," such as conservative and extreme right-wing circles demand. Rather, Bolívar Echeverría's approach more closely resembles Walter Benjamin's idea of the revolutionary *tiger jumping into the past*. The tiger's leap is not merely an attempt to return to the past, but is rather based on the solid, dialectical conviction that it is only by recuperating the lost and missed chances of the past is it possible to create a *truly* different society.⁷

Short bibliography of Bolívar Echeverría

Las ilusiones de la Modernidad. México D.F.: UNAM and El Equilibrista, 1995.

La modernidad de lo barroco. México, D.F.: Era, 1998a.

La contradicción en "El Capital" de Marx. México, D.F.: Itaca, 1998b.

Valor de uso y utopía. México. D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1998c.

Definición de la cultura, México. D.F.: UNAM and Itaca, 2001.

Vuelta del siglo. México, D.F.: Ed. Era, 2007.

NOTES

1. I have not translated the Spanish term *mestizaje* because of difficulty in finding an equivalent English term. Perhaps the notion of the "melting pot" comes closest.
2. It might be said, going one step beyond Echeverría's thought, that the Eurocentrism today—also predominant among certain factions of the left—is a prerequisite for the continued existence of cultural racism.
3. Bolívar Echeverría uses the term *ethe* (the Greek plural form of "ethos"), as plural for "ethos."
4. This is not new. Georg Lukács, for instance, in his landmark work *History and Class Consciousness*, dedicates a great deal of attention to the question of ideology, and with that to the question, why, in spite of the objectively-given conditions, do the subjects not take the step out of "prehistory" (Marx)? See Georg Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: The Merlin Press, Ltd., 1971).
5. Bolívar Echeverría, *Las ilusiones de la Modernidad* (México D.F.: UNAM and El Equilibrista, 1995), 18.
6. Bolívar Echeverría, *La modernidad de lo barroco* (México, D.F.: Era, 1998), 26-27.
7. In this matter and in the deep distrust of promises for the future—in which too often even the most radical left's viewpoints fatally resemble the bourgeois politicians and propagandists—there is an amazing proximity among the ideas of Benjamin, Echeverría, and the Zapatistas. See also Stefan Gandler, *Peripherer Marxismus. Kritische Theorie in Mexiko* (Hamburg, Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1999), 215-17. (In Spanish: *Marxismo crítico en México: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez y Bolívar Echeverría* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México - Facultad de Filosofía y Letras/Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, 2007). This book contains a general discussion of the works of Bolívar Echeverría and Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez.

Luis Villoro, the Tractatus, and Analytical Philosophy in Mexico

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I) THE BACKGROUND

I should perhaps start off by recognizing that, within Mexico's philosophical horizon, analytical philosophy was the last great philosophical school to make its appearance. Incidentally, it turned out to be the most persistent one and the trend of thought with the greatest vitality, since—as a matter of fact—it ended up displacing the other ones without, however, making them disappear altogether. Right now there are many people in Mexico working in philosophy and devoted to phenomenology and hermeneutics, and, fewer and fewer all the time, to existentialism, Marxism, and Thomism. Now, it should be pointed out that analytical philosophy's delayed introduction in Mexico is to some extent explainable and understandable. In retrospect, we now see that it was obviously an inevitable phenomenon. Putting aside all sorts of speculations about the conditions of cultural transformations that some way or another have to take place anyway, it seems to me that some of the factors that contributed to the philosophical change in Mexico were the weakening of certain themes (like the discussions concerning the nature of Mexican culture, Mexican mentality, etc., or about the Mexican or the Latin American identities) and also the atomization of Marxism into multiple

sects (orthodox Leninists, Lukacsians, Althusserians, Maoists, Guevarists, and so on). It was therefore natural that the introduction of fresh subjects and a new terminology was received with great enthusiasm by many lecturers and students, and it almost immediately had a powerful effect on both academic programs and institutions. We should add to that incipient situation the fact that academic exchanges with foreign universities began to be implemented, that books and papers started being translated into Spanish on a massive level (not only in Mexico, but in Argentina and Spain as well), and the publication of journals and books originally written in Spanish. All of this made it clear that the liveliest philosophical trend was precisely the one that had just arrived. Papers were produced on, for instance, Russell's Theory of Descriptions, the so-called "Private Language Argument," the "analytic-synthetic" distinction, and on many other related subjects. Again, this doesn't mean that no Kantians, Heideggerians, Husserlians, and so on remained, but only that analytical philosophy became something like the main axis of philosophical life in Mexico.

Now, my view is that there are two principal works that form the backbone of analytical philosophy: the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. And it was precisely about some aspects of the *Tractatus* that one of the most important contemporary Mexican philosophers wrote in the early 1970s in a quite original essay that immediately gave rise to a polemic which even nowadays inspires new and fresh discussions.

Before critically analyzing Luis Villoro's reading of certain parts of the *Tractatus* it would be useful to say a couple of words about him. I would say that Villoro's conception of philosophy is slightly old-fashioned. In fact, he is an excellent representative of a certain class of thinkers—namely, the kind of philosopher who aims at combining rational reasoning and argumentation with what could be called "wisdom"—that is, someone who is able not only to argue rationally and critically about a particular issue, but also someone who would aspire to speculate about human nature, the meaning of history, and themes of that nature. Not only was he a marvelous teacher and lecturer and a very learned man, but he was also a thinker who involved himself in philosophical research on a variety of facets of the history of philosophy. It could be said that some of his essays and books are somewhat overwritten, but it remains true that Villoro produced very interesting texts on Descartes, Dilthey, political philosophy, a nice and useful little book on the concept of ideology, philosophy of religion, and of course the history of ideas in Mexico, from the Independence of Mexico onwards. He has written on medieval philosophy and he has what he certainly would like to be considered a text in analytical philosophy, that is, a book on the theory of knowledge, with a title somewhat difficult to translate into English. The title in Spanish is *Creer, Saber, Conocer*. Unlike in French (where we have the two verbs *connaître* and *savoir*), in German (*kennen* and *wissen*), and in Polish (*wiedzieć* and *znać*), in English there is just one verb—namely, *to know*. Therefore, I really don't know what would pass as an acceptable translation for the title of Villoro's *Creer, Saber, Conocer*. But regardless of how we are tempted to translate such a title, the fact is that in his book Villoro examines our basic cognitive concepts,

like belief, knowledge, epistemic justification, reasons to believe, reasons to doubt, and so on, and he advocates the idea that there are two kinds of knowledge, together with their respective justification normativity. There would be, on the one side, the standard sort of knowledge with its well-known canons for establishing and justifying propositions, and there would be, on the other side, another form of knowledge, more personal, irreducible to the first one and which could be better labeled as "wisdom." I must say I don't feel particularly convinced by Villoro's approach and treatment of the subject, but one could hardly deny that it's an interesting and well-argued book. This is, however, a much later work. Regardless of what we think of his philosophical adventure into the territories of analytical philosophy, what is undeniable is that to a great extent it was papers like his on the *Tractatus* that were the seeds of contemporary Mexican analytical philosophy. Therefore, I would like to say some words about it.

II) VILORRO AND "THE UNSAYABLE IN THE TRACTATUS"¹

Actually, Villoro's reading of the *Tractatus* is quite original. He does perceive the logical foundations of Wittgenstein's peculiar mysticism. According to Villoro, the global meaning of the book is the outcome of an effort to pass from the analysis of what can be said to the realm of what cannot be put into words. Villoro, therefore, grasps and explains the paradox of the *Tractatus*, as Wittgenstein himself states it at 6.54. After a detailed exposition of the logical theory of language, that is, the Picture Theory, Villoro draws an interesting classification of the propositions of the *Tractatus* which deal with the (so to speak) forbidden subjects: logical form, the nature of propositions, the world as a limited whole, and, of course, the last propositions of the book about the important questions (ethics, the meaning of life, God, etc.). He divides them into affirmative and negative categories, the most important perhaps being the latter, that is, those who "say" what something is not (ethics is not about empirical norms, God does not manifest Himself in the world, the world of the happy man is not like the world of the unhappy man, etc.). Villoro admits that in both cases we are dealing with pseudo-propositions but, according to him, with signs that nevertheless, somehow, manage to pass on a message. "The propositions of the *Tractatus* must communicate something if we are to understand that they are senseless."² Based on this idea, Villoro develops his view, which ultimately may be contradictory but that at any rate is a faithful reflection of the ambivalence we found in the *Tractatus* itself. "Before keeping quiet," says Villoro, "Wittgenstein gives in to babbling what, strictly speaking, cannot be said."³ For Villoro, therefore, the propositions of the *Tractatus* about the unsayable are meaningful although of course they represent nothing; they are senseless collections of signs that somehow elucidate something saying or showing nothing at all, expressions that have some kind of indirect reference. What does this mean? Well, "For instance, 'object' no longer refers to any perceptible changing object, but to the unchangeable substance (2.071),⁴ 'life' no longer applies to certain psychophysical events in the world but to the world itself as it is contemplated by me ('World and life are one and the same' (5.621)); 'God' no longer designates

a supernatural being but 'the meaning of life; 'ethics' no longer refers to sentences about the qualities of things, but they are about "what is most worth living up to."⁵ And, as was to be expected, from Villoro's perspective the ultimate understanding of all these nonsensical expressions of the *Tractatus* presuppose a metaphysical experience, that is, the experience of the world as a limited totality.

It goes without saying that Villoro's text, which is quite long, contains a variety of interesting and original remarks about many other subjects that Wittgenstein considers and about which many English-speaking scholars would examine exhaustively during the next forty years. So as far as I'm concerned, I think that Villoro's interpretation of the *Tractatus* is radically wrong, but before saying something about it I'd like to establish a couple of points.

The first thing I'd like to make clear is that what Villoro offers is what could be called a *religious interpretation* of Wittgenstein's book, which is not a very common one. I'm not sure whether his way of reading the *Tractatus* would have pleased Wittgenstein himself, but what is important for our purposes is to notice that there's something like a personal explanation of that, which is Villoro's pedagogical and philosophical upbringing. He was educated in an atmosphere of strict religiosity and religious themes were always crucial for him. I would even say that more than political philosophy, more than the history of philosophy, the philosophy of religion constituted for him the most important branch of philosophy. It couldn't possibly be doubted that his interest in the *Tractatus* was genuine, but it nevertheless seems to me that deep below his interest in Wittgenstein's thought lay his search of support for certain fundamental religious beliefs. His religious inclinations, however, don't prevent him from understanding that the mysticism of the *Tractatus* doesn't represent a defense of transcendence, but only of the transcendental. Villoro does understand that the Wittgensteinian idea of there being something that cannot be put into words is not useful to recover the theistic conception of God, the idea of an eternal life after death, etc. But his upbringing time and again leads him to try, I'd say *desperately*, to rescue whatever remains of traditional religious beliefs, and he certainly seems to have thought that the *Tractatus* was the best tool to achieve that. It's difficult not to feel, therefore, that his paper is terribly biased in the sense that from the very beginning he ascribes to the *Tractatus* goals that he certainly had, but that could hardly be ascribed to Wittgenstein himself.

III) THE REFUTATION OF VILLORO

Obviously, this is not the right occasion to start a work of exegesis of the *Tractatus*, but I think it would be interesting to critically examine some of Villoro's views and try to assess whether or not he's right. So, roughly, I'll raise two objections to Villoro's interpretation, objections that he should or could have foreseen. These are as follows:

- 1) It's a mistake to think that there is such a thing as elucidatory nonsense;
- 2) the *Tractatus'* paradox can be explained in a different way from the way Villoro explains it,

and it spares us all sorts of engagement with experiences of a special kind.

Villoro assumes, wrongly in my opinion, that there is such a thing as subject-matter concerning the unsayable. However, the unsayable for Wittgenstein is not something about which we can say something meaningful in order to discover later that what we thought we had said cannot be put into words. It's more simple than that: there's nothing to be said because, among other things, there's no genuine subject involved. Wittgenstein has no ethics of silence, no religion without dogmas, etc. The meaning of life is something that shows itself not as something to be discovered after death but as something internal to the world attained through morally correct actions and artistic creation, which is what leaves us satisfied or makes us happy, not of course in an empirical sense but in a transcendental one. This non-factual or non-empirical satisfaction arises out of our being aware that the actions carried out (by each of us in our own cases) contribute to mold our lives in a particular way. The morally correct action has no phenomenal features by means of which we could distinguish it from other sorts of actions. That's why Wittgenstein asserts that "the world of the happy man is different from the world of the unhappy man," because there's nothing else we could possibly say. It's because of its contribution to the meaning of my life that an action is characterized by the subject as "good" or "bad." So expressions like "ethics of silence," which are so often used to speak about the supposed Wittgensteinian ethics, are most misleading, since they induce us to think that actions have objective moral features—features that cannot be described in purely "naturalistic" terms. I think that that's not Wittgenstein's stance. So about this particular issue I think Villoro is definitely wrong.

My second objection has to do with the *Tractatus's* paradox, the big problem that Russell had already pointed to in his introduction. The trouble with Villoro's interpretation is that it doesn't enable him to explain the problem, which, to a certain extent, he doesn't even seem to perceive. Rather, Villoro sees Wittgenstein's problem positively, as a contribution, as an effort to say something meaningful and important precisely where others had failed. But things are not as Villoro sees them. I think rather that the final paradox of the *Tractatus* suddenly springs as an undesirable consequence of pronouncements made in other parts of the book, and it is certainly something Wittgenstein would have preferred to avoid. The problem has its roots in the logical universalism of the *Tractatus*. For Wittgenstein, logic constitutes the ultimate platform or basis for both language and reality. Logic is always the logic of language and the logic of the world. The world is intelligible because we can describe it, and we can describe it because our language is governed by logic. The problem arises because when he states his views on the nature of logic Wittgenstein has to do it in a particular language, and thus he realizes that there is after all something more universal than logic, that is, natural language. It's because language turns out to be more universal than logic itself that the paradox arises: there's something more universal than what is more universal than anything else. This is a mistake that the later Wittgenstein certainly didn't make.

The fact that Villoro's paper contains some rather definite errors doesn't diminish the value of his contribution. Much more important than the content of a particular text is the fact that thanks to its existence analytical philosophy in Mexico was strongly motivated and was propelled ahead in a context in which there already were many other contenders. It's to the issue of the development of analytical philosophy in Mexico that I now turn.

IV) ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY IN MEXICO AND IN THE WORLD

There's no doubt that the Spanish philosopher José Gaos's arrival in Mexico at the end of the 1930s is a landmark in twentieth-century philosophy. Gaos's own work is indeed impressive; he also made important contributions in translating classic texts into Spanish (his translation of the pre-Socratics deserves respect, in spite of the progress made in this field since then), but above all he was an excellent lecturer and teacher. In fact, almost all Mexican philosophers of that period—Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga, Alejandro Rossi, Fernando Salmerón, etc.—were his pupils. Naturally, Villoro was too. The problem was that Gaos was a philosopher educated in the German tradition, a great scholar of Husserl and Heidegger, some of whose works he translated into Spanish, notably Heidegger's *Being and Time*, a task that took him ten years to achieve. Thus, both phenomenology and existentialism constitute Villoro's main philosophical background. So it's somewhat curious that the first seeds of what nowadays is the most important philosophical trend in Mexico came from some of Gaos's students who had not been raised as analytical philosophers at all.

Why is analytical philosophy here and now so important in Mexico, and what role does it play? Well, it's important because as a matter of fact classes, seminars, conferences, papers, books, and academic exchanges are all linked to this philosophical school. In Mexico we have had such diverse and important invited lecturers as G. H. von Wright, W. V. O. Quine, D. Davidson, S. Kripke, P. Strawson, C. Hempel, G. Evans, H. Putnam, E. Anscombe, and many others, almost all of them recognized as significant analytical philosophers. Our students and post-graduate students go on with their masters and PhDs mainly in British and American universities and therefore go on working in analytical philosophy. All of this sounds very good, and I think we are in a position to assert that we are on a level with both Spain and Argentina, for a long time the most important centers in the Spanish-speaking philosophical world. Does it mean that we can speak of philosophical progress in Mexico? I think we can. However, there's a problem that worries me, and about which I'd like to present my own point of view. It has to do with a kind of misunderstanding related to analytical philosophy not just in Mexico but as it is understood and practiced around the world.

My view requires me to make some elementary historical reminders. As is well known, analytical philosophy arose during the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century. *Formally*, this philosophical school distinguished itself from others by the clarity of its language and by its close association with science and logic. Putting aside Frege,

who belonged to another century, the most outstanding thinkers linked to the new way of conceiving and doing philosophy were people like Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, L. Wittgenstein, and R. Carnap. Now, from the point of view of its goals, the origin of analytical philosophy lacked the kind of unitary character that other schools had, such as neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and British Hegelianism (Bradley, McTaggart), but it had instead two defining or essential features. On the one hand, it was the philosophical trend that gave priority to the philosophy of language above all other branches of philosophy. In fact, I would say that it is with analytical philosophy that the philosophy of language became an autonomous branch of philosophy. It's very important to understand this. It means that for the first analytical philosophers the perplexities which up to then were conceived as (so to speak) "substantial" problems, as objective difficulties but so abstract that no science could in principle deal with them, those difficulties now had to be faced and rephrased as difficulties related to the meaning of words and, more generally, were conceived as dependent upon language. For instance, instead of trying to discover the good by means of intuitions or insights through an introspective sort of research, what analytical philosophers tried to do was to grasp and describe the meaning of words like "good" so that traditional ethical questions were now seen to be founded on linguistic or semantic confusions. Little by little this new analytical approach tended to replace the traditional way of doing philosophy and assigned philosophy a new task. So thanks to this new way of conceiving philosophical work, analytical philosophy left behind traditional philosophical speculations and theorizing, philosophers' eternal aim to obtain *a priori* but non-vacuous truths, synthetic *a priori* truths, and the like. Naturally, this emphasis on language—that is, on words and their applications—led to the second feature I just mentioned, namely, the conviction that philosophical problems were essentially linguistic. Thus, through a natural evolution, the *original* analytical philosophy transformed itself into linguistic philosophy. This way of understanding philosophy and its complexities had great advocates, such as J. L. Austin, but in fact it attained its zenith in Wittgenstein's later work. Putting aside Wittgenstein, in my view the best practitioner of the sort of analysis that this school favored was the great American philosopher, who passed away in England, Norman Malcolm.

It follows from what I've said that we now have a serious problem of identification. First, for a variety of reasons, the philosophy of language stopped having priority in the philosophical world. The philosophy of language is not particularly fashionable nowadays and as a consequence very few philosophers still think that philosophical problems are linked to or dependent upon language. So it is a fact that contemporary philosophers, just as the great philosophers of the past, are mostly interested in construing philosophical theories, and many of them are convinced that it's only thanks to scientific progress that philosophical problems can in principle be solved. For instance, except for some honorable exceptions, no one is interested in investigating, say, the concept of consciousness. In general, philosophers simply assume that they know what the word "consciousness" means, and then they turn to

neurophysiology to try to show that consciousness is indeed to be found in the brain. It is assumed that there can be a science of consciousness, since consciousness is seen as a phenomenon that takes place in space-time and therefore, it is argued, it has to be physical, and if it is physical, then the only place to find it is inside the skull and more specifically in the brain. All this may sound appealing to more than one, but we still have the right to raise the question, Is that analytical philosophy? The answer, in my opinion, is relatively simple: in the original sense of the expression “analytical philosophy,” certainly not. So contrary to what the vast majority of philosophers, not only in Mexico, who conceive themselves as doing analytical philosophy think, we can say that the only thing they don’t do is just that. I would say that if, due to habits, laziness, etc., we want to keep the word “analytical” in use, then we should speak of “analytical metaphysics” (even if that expression is in fact nonsensical), “analytical theory of knowledge,” “analytical ethics,” and so on, as long as we don’t lose sight of the fact that what is being done is something radically different in goals from what the first analytical philosophers, the *foundational* ones, used to do.

If I’m right in what I’ve been saying, the expression “analytical philosophy” is not only misleading but rather useless, and it enables us to assert that what is being done in Mexico, in the United States, in England, etc., is whatever you want except one thing: analytical philosophy. Although, of course, I don’t submit this as an argument, it nevertheless seems to me that an “analytical philosopher” like Lewis would feel more comfortable with Leibniz than with Hacker, Searle would feel in better company with Descartes than with Malcolm, and so forth. I infer from this situation that there is a sense in which the real analytical philosophy is something that belongs to the past. Now it’s just a label, but it has to be remarked that it used to be a school of thought which passed away without ever being refuted. It had, so to speak, a natural death. This demands an explanation which I’d like to sketch out roughly.

V) THE FUTURE OF ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY IN MEXICO AND IN THE WORLD

It is obvious that the future of the so-called “analytical philosophy” in Mexico is linked to and dependent upon the fate of analytical philosophy in other parts of the world and especially, of course, in the United States. I think that if we are to provide the expression “analytical philosophy” with a more or less precise and specific meaning, if we don’t use it just to refer to any kind of technical reflection on traditional philosophical subjects (the mind-body problem, the existence of God, the nature of numbers, the structure of scientific theories, etc.), if to speak of analytical philosophy will simply be to speak of philosophy in which formalization of language is permanently used and in which abundant mention is made of the latest scientific discoveries, then the future of “analytical philosophy,” in this present sense of the expression, looks just brilliant and assured. At first sight, nothing could in principle modify the way philosophy is understood and practiced nowadays. But it is equally obvious that there is a confusion involved here, a confusion that amounts to a trivialization of the very notion of analytical philosophy.

Everything indicates that the fundamental insight underlying contemporary philosophy is that human knowledge is a unique, complex propositional body and that the goal of philosophy is to contribute to its enlargement. Philosophy is thought of as a kind of inquiry in which its practitioners are in search of truths, just as in science, but in or for different domains. From this perspective, philosophy is nothing but the avant-garde of science. It investigates what science for the time being can say nothing about. I think that the original analytical philosophers had an utterly different conception of philosophy. For them analytical philosophy was something quite different. In my view, the best exponent of real analytical philosophy was precisely Ludwig Wittgenstein. Already in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein pointed out that philosophy is something below or above science, but not something to be put on the same level; he made it clear that the goal of philosophy is not theory-construction but the clarification of thought, a kind of exercise that can be carried out in any philosophical context. Nothing of this, however, seems to appeal to the majority of contemporary philosophers. They are not interested in conceptual analysis nor, more generally, in the kind of clarity that Wittgenstein advocated, but in rational speculations and in (I would say pseudo-scientific) theorizing. Someone who represents this non-analytic tendency very well is, to my mind, Karl Popper. As we all know, Popper views philosophical research as providing, for any philosophical subject one deals with, conjectures, that is, high-level hypotheses, which are immediately subject to objections and depending upon whether or not they are refuted we discard them or we polish them and submit them again to new refutations and so on. I think it’s unquestionable that it is the Popperian conception which now prevails. But this, I hold, is not analytical philosophy.

So if I’m not totally mistaken, we are now at a crossroads—we face a dilemma. There is a problem of self-identity, the requirement to determine what exactly we do when we do philosophy, what do we want to achieve and how should we pursue it? Do we study philosophy to become some sort of guide for scientific research? If so, we are Russellian, Popperian, Quinean, etc. Or rather are we in philosophy because we are convinced that, induced by our language, our thought creates intellectual knots, puzzles, enigmas and that our function as philosophers is to try to disentangle them, not of course by elaborating more complex ones? If so, then we are Wittgensteinians. It seems to me that in our days this is an alternative we just cannot ignore and with respect to which we have to choose. There is of course a collective tide leading us in one direction, but given the autonomy of our thought, I still believe that the last decision about the direction in which to take philosophy falls upon each of us in particular.

NOTES

1. Luis Villoro, “Lo indecible en el *Tractatus*,” *Crítica* 7, no. 19 (1975): 5–39.
2. *Ibid.*, 7.
3. *Ibid.*, 14.
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964). It is customary, when dealing

with this particular work, to cite only the propositions by using Wittgenstein's unique numbering system.

5. Villoro, "Lo indecible en el *Tractatus*," 31-32.

The Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative as Place-Based Philosophy: Why Context Matters in Philosophy for Children

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The Zapotec term *guelaguetza* is difficult to translate into English or Spanish with precision. It has been described both as a "reciprocal exchange of goods and labor" and "a primary source of prestige, leadership, and access to labor and resources within . . . households and in the community at large."¹ It has also been described as "an institution of 'total service'"—one that "create[s] a sense of security that offers protection to those involved."²

Many are also familiar with another employment of the term: *La Guelaguetza* or *los lunes del cerro* in the month of July in Oaxaca City.³ Those who have celebrated *La Guelaguetza* there will have seen the seemingly non-stop parades which are, in fact, mixtures of public celebrations of Oaxacan indigenous identities and pointed political protests. The cheerful, traditional song "La Pinotepa" is performed countless times by the brazen brass bands that flood the streets, and women dressed in gorgeous *trajes de tehuana* throw gifts to onlookers from atop parade floats.

Attendees of *La Guelaguetza* will have also observed the "street-children" of Oaxaca City—poor, primarily indigenous youth who labor in the streets to try to support themselves and their hard-working families. Some sell traditional Oaxacan handicrafts to tourists; others will shine your shoes for a donation; still others carry around boxes of bookmarks and homemade toys for sale. They are often ignored, subjected to racist insults, and kicked out of establishments (including establishments that use Oaxacan indigenous identity-markers to attract tourists), and in the face of this they continue to work with a steady resolve. This is the livelihood, and the *milieu*, of many of the children—the young philosophers—with whom I collaborate in the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative.

Indeed, they are young philosophers. Though academic philosophy has historically excluded the voices of children, deeming them incapable of the abstract, self-conscious critical thinking that philosophical inquiry demands, practioners and scholars of Philosophy for Children (and just about anyone who has dared to discuss philosophical questions with kids) know them to be both capable and eager philosophers.⁴

In previous work I have discussed how my experiences of doing philosophy with indigenous youth in Oaxaca caused me to question some prevalent assumptions of the Philosophy for Children movement in the United

States (which I participate in and deeply admire, even as I am critical).⁵ I have argued that greater attentiveness to concerns of positionality—of students and teachers—and greater engagement with the Latin American philosophical tradition, particularly liberation philosophy and pedagogy, would be extremely beneficial to the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement in a variety of contexts.⁶ As part of this, I have explored some ethical concerns arising from the fact that I am in many respects a privileged outsider in relation to the students (as a non-Oaxacan *gringa* and academic); such concerns compel me to reflect regularly on why and how I work in Oaxaca.

In this essay I wish to build on this previous work. I aim to broaden this discussion of positionality in P4C in order to explore the ways that sociopolitical and philosophical context can impact the sorts of questions and discussions generated by children in P4C programs. In particular, I wish to show how the context of Oaxaca City shapes the philosophical contributions of the children of the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative—in a way that often challenges western philosophical frameworks. I use the narrative of the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative to argue for a *place-based* P4C in which the instructor often learns far more philosophy than she teaches.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN OAXACA

The presumption that children are incapable of doing philosophy is fortunately losing its credibility. Gareth Matthews, a pioneer of the P4C movement, argued that "it should be obvious to anyone who listens to the philosophical questions and comments of young children that these comments and questions have a freshness and inventiveness that is hard for even the most imaginative adult to match."⁷

Matthew Lipman, another P4C leader, explained that "since children do not have fully formed frames of reference in which to place each experience as it happens, each such experience takes on an enigmatic, puzzling quality. No wonder, then, that children wonder at the world."⁸

Philosophy for Children sessions are designed to support children as they question and wonder at the world. While there are countless ways to facilitate P4C, a very popular method involves reading a philosophically inviting children's book to students. The children then volunteer the philosophical "why" questions that occurred to them over the course of the story. The class then votes on which question(s) they would like to explore as a group. Subsequently, a philosophical dialectic and debate generally unfolds as children work together to explore the ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological puzzles that have been raised. This popular P4C methodology is referred to as a "Community of Inquiry."⁹ Generally, P4C students find the philosophy classroom to be a safe, supportive, and open space in which they can carefully explore many of life's most perplexing questions. In addition, through P4C children often learn that they can disagree with one other in respectful and productive ways.

The Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative provides free summer P4C courses to children and teenagers as young as nine and as old as eighteen in Oaxaca City, Mexico (a summer course was also conducted in the Zapotec village Santa Ana Zegache, located in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca). It has been in operation for four years, and over half of the students currently involved in the program have participated since the first summer.

We employ many popular P4C techniques in the program, including community of inquiry, and the intensive courses generally last for about one month. At the end of each summer course we have a “closing ceremony” in which the children present a short philosophical essay that they have developed in the class. Family members often attend these ceremonies to support their children’s philosophical accomplishments. In the summer of 2013 we created a short documentary in which the students share their views on what philosophy is and why it is valuable.¹⁰

The program is hosted, primarily, by the Centro de Esperanza Infantil (CEI), a long-standing Oaxaca-based NGO with advisory boards in Mexico and the United States.¹¹ The CEI provides resources to impoverished Oaxacan families who would otherwise be unable to afford the costs of sending their children to school. These resources take the form of public school tuition, health care, school uniforms, and more.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Both the CEI and the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative operate in the complex sociopolitical context that is Oaxaca City. Oaxaca is the state of Mexico with the highest representation of indigenous peoples: in 209 Oaxacan municipalities, over 90 percent of Oaxacans self-identify as indigenous.¹² Along with Guerrero and Chiapas, Oaxaca is also one of Mexico’s poorest states; an alarming percentage of Oaxacan municipalities live in conditions of high or extreme marginalization.¹³ Poverty in Oaxaca is, of course, largely attributable to the ravages of colonialism widely imposed upon the region. However, it was more recently exacerbated by the 1994 imposition of NAFTA. As a result of NAFTA, many Oaxacan indigenous farmers lost their livelihoods and land and were compelled to attempt to migrate to the United States or other parts of Mexico (including Oaxaca City).¹⁴

A diverse group of Oaxacan students are served by CEI. The majority are members of the Triqui indigenous group. Because the Triquis are currently experiencing a violent territorial conflict in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, a great number of Triqui families have migrated to Oaxaca City. The CEI also serves a great number of Zapotec, Mixtec, Mixe, Mazatec, and *mestizo* children. Most indigenous families served by the CEI have migrated to Oaxaca City to earn enough money with which to feed themselves. Sadly, many families find themselves unable to make ends meet—or to send their children to school—after relocating to the city.

Another important sociopolitical concern to bear in mind in thinking about the unique context in which the CEI and Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative operate is the historical conflict between public school teachers and the

Mexican government. In 2006, tensions were at an all-time high when standard negotiations for a pay-raise for Oaxacan teachers were halted. This led to a lengthy teacher’s strike that was responded to with violent repression of Oaxacan teachers and widespread social unrest in Oaxaca. Many Oaxacan K-12 students in public schools—including a number of students who are now involved in the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative—missed nearly a year of school in 2006.

Most of the young philosophers who have participated in the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative self-identify as Triquis, Zapotecs, or *mestizos* (or simply “Oaxaqueños”). We have a roughly equal representation of female and male students, and often several children from the same family will participate in the same philosophy class. The CEI provides the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative with classroom space in Oaxaca City, basic classroom supplies, and vital administrative support. Almost all of the students served by the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative are from CEI.

THE PHILOSOPHY

The young philosophers of the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative engage enthusiastically with the wide range of philosophical problems that they raise (and with which they are sometimes presented). Given that almost all of our discussion topics are student-led, the children regularly philosophize about issues that are especially concerning to them. Unsurprisingly, many of these issues pertain to the unique sociopolitical and philosophical context of Oaxaca.

For instance, the ongoing tensions between public school teachers in Oaxaca and the Mexican government have made students reflect deeply upon the role of education in their lives—particularly when they are out of school during periods of teachers’ strikes, or when they are witnessing teachers’ protests in the streets and on television. The children’s views on this conflict are very nuanced and not always directly aligned with any particular political position on the issues. (For example, some but not all students support the teachers’ strikes.)

In addition, the young philosophers regularly want to dialogue about various forms of discrimination—racial, cultural, and gender-based—that indigenous peoples of Oaxaca experience. There is also great interest in talking about Oaxacan indigenous philosophies. We have had lengthy philosophical discussions about the aesthetics of Oaxacan indigenous handicrafts, the intricate significance of Triqui and Zapotec words that cannot easily be translated into Spanish, and the philosophical underpinnings of traditional Oaxacan poems, phrases, and songs that students share in class.

The undeniable poverty in which the children and their families live impacts our philosophical dialogues. Not only does it influence the sorts of questions that the students raise for philosophical discussion, it also renders certain “famous” philosophical problems awkward and uninteresting for students. For instance, I have found it nearly impossible, in the Oaxacan context, to generate

interest in philosophical debate about the existence of inalienable property rights—a problem of political philosophy that is often explored in P4C classes in the United States. Indeed, it is very difficult to motivate a strict libertarian position (if only for the sake of philosophical argument) to students who live in inadequate, irregular housing without stable roofs and running water, and who have regularly experienced hunger pains at night after a long day of hard work.

I have found it similarly difficult to motivate discussion of ethical egoism and even certain questions of distributive justice. In the Oaxacan political context, where *guelaguetza*, *cooperación*, and *tequio* are familiar moral and political concepts, it is intuitive and almost philosophically uninteresting that community members ought to help one another and redistribute resources as needed.¹⁵

Allow me to exemplify this point with an example that is familiar to U.S.-based philosophers. It is commonplace (in the United States) to use Rawls's Veil of Ignorance thought experiment in political philosophy discussions—not only in college-level philosophy courses, but also in P4C sessions. The lesson plan usually runs as follows. Students start out discussing how resources should ideally be distributed by the state, with full knowledge of their particular social positions. Generally, at least a portion of students will be inclined to allot resources in a manner that strongly favors those who are positioned as they are.

Then, students are asked to go behind the Veil of Ignorance. Behind the veil they must think about how to distribute resources without any knowledge of what their social positions and identities will be in their society. Some students find this experience very illuminating, as they realize that their previous conceptions of distributive justice were designed to benefit their own (generally privileged) social groups. David Shapiro, a P4C scholar and practitioner in the United States, has designed ways to “drive home” this message even more efficiently in P4C classes. He often distributes to students pre-prepared “identities” written on note cards, which they receive upon emerging from behind the veil. A few of these “identities” seem to guarantee one an easy life (i.e., able-bodied, wealthy, heterosexual white male), but most “identities,” when assigned to the students, make them realize that life is unfair.¹⁶

Though I, too, have found it useful to employ the Veil of Ignorance thought experiment in a variety of political philosophy classes (at the K-12 and college level), it is almost entirely unhelpful in the context of the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative. My students already understand, all too well, that life is unfair. This understanding impacts the way they think about political philosophy. Indeed, long before I asked them to get behind the Veil of Ignorance, they already had the worst-off in mind in their discussions of distributive justice. Thus, the Veil of Ignorance did not help them perceive any truths. It only generates lively philosophical conversation if at least some of the students are inclined to unjustly favor economically privileged social groups in their musings about distributive justice. The lesson plan was entirely unsuccessful.

Because of all of these concerns, as a P4C instructor in Oaxaca I have had to work hard to respond to the uniqueness of the philosophical and sociopolitical context in which the program operates. For the program to function it simply has to be place-based. It also has to respect and engage with indigenous philosophies of Oaxaca.

Given that Oaxacan indigenous experiences and philosophies are, as a general rule, neglected in academic philosophy, we have had to seek out new, alternative ways to generate discussions about these themes in the classroom. One strategy we have employed involves having the children, as a homework assignment, interview their family members and community leaders about their views on important philosophical questions. The children then use these interviews as a springboard for philosophical dialogue and debate in class. These assignments have generated very positive feedback from students and their families, and they never fail to promote fascinating philosophical discussion.

Importantly, dialogues about Oaxacan indigenous experiences and philosophies are not limited to presentations on what family members and community leaders report about philosophical issues. Students are encouraged to question what goes on around them and offer unique philosophical perspectives on indigenous philosophies of Oaxaca.

For example, we have had lengthy conversations about the significance of *guelaguetza*. For many children in the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative, “*guelaguetza*” means more than service, giving, and/or a celebration of Oaxacan indigeneity. For children who work in the streets of Oaxaca City, *guelaguetza* can also represent the strange, often disquieting encounter between Oaxacan indigenous people and outsiders (“*gente de fuera*”) that frequently occurs during *guelaguetza* season in July. Students have argued that *guelaguetza* is a time when Oaxacan indigeneity may be presented and misunderstood, when Oaxacan families are forced to put a price on priceless indigenous handicrafts, and when the children put in hours of hard work selling to tourists in the street.

Our philosophical conversations about *guelaguetza* have also inspired discussions about the appropriate role of sharing and gift-giving in one's life. What is the right way to give or receive a gift? Can one person ask for too much from another person? Is it wrong to wish to keep things to yourself? We have had such conversations while the brass bands of *guelaguetza* parades wail along nearby streets in Oaxaca City.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I began doing Philosophy for Children in the United States and I brought my training with me to Oaxaca. I am extremely supportive of P4C and believe that it has truly liberatory potential. In order for the P4C movement to reach this potential, however, scholars and practitioners should begin to reflect upon the ways that sociopolitical and philosophical context can and sometimes ought to impact the content of P4C sessions.¹⁷ I have found this to be especially true in the context of the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative,

where the political context is complicated and oppressive, and Oaxacan indigenous philosophies often shape the children's lives in rich and powerful ways. In Oaxaca City, failure to do place-based philosophy would entail failure for the program.

Fortunately, as I started to learn from my students as a P4C instructor the program began to flourish. As a place-based program (that still has very much room to grow and improve), the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative gives uptake to voices and philosophical perspectives that are routinely ignored in politics, society, and the academy—those of marginalized Oaxacan street-children. It does this by sustaining a safe space in which children can collaboratively dialogue about many of the philosophical questions that are most important to them.

Another success of the program is the fact that several children who have been with the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative from the beginning now wish to become professional philosophers. A key objective of the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative is to support them in this goal and, eventually, for program alumni to take over as leaders. Thus, hopefully, the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative will eventually be led by professional Oaxacan philosophers who will, in turn, educate future generations of young philosophers.

NOTES

1. See Lynn Stephen, *Zapotec Women: Gender, Class and Ethnicity in Globalized Oaxaca* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 46. In this passage Stephen also discusses the ways that *compadrazco* and *respet* generate such prestige.
2. See Jeffrey H. Cohen, *Cooperation and Community: Economy and Society in Oaxaca* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 90 and 106.
3. *Guelaguetza* is also practiced in other parts of Oaxaca; my focus here is strictly on Oaxaca City.
4. For further discussion see Thomas E. Wartenburg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy Through Children's Literature* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009).
5. See Amy Reed-Sandoval, "Cross-Cultural Exploration: Reflections on Doing Philosophy with Triqui Children in Oaxaca," *Teaching Ethics* 12, no. 1 (2014): 77–90.
6. For an excellent discussion of the relationship between liberation philosophy and pedagogy, see Iván Márquez, "Liberation in Philosophy, Theology and Pedagogy," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, eds. Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otavio Bueno (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013).
7. Gareth Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood* (President and Fellows of Harvard College: 1994), 17.
8. Matthew Lipman, *Philosophy in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 33.
9. This term was originally introduced by Matthew Lipman.
10. See "Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative/Filosofía para Niños y Jóvenes, Oaxaca," directed by Julia Reihls, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3HEjPFF_20.
11. I should note that I am, as of 2014, a member of the advisory board of Oaxaca Streetchildren Grassroots, the U.S.-based non-profit that is primarily responsible for fundraising for the CEI. All of the opinions expressed in this essay are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the advisory boards in Mexico and the United States. I make these statements in my capacity as an academic, not in my capacity as a member of the board.

12. SíPaz, "Oaxaca: Indigenous Population," accessed May 26, 2013, <http://www.sipaz.org/en/oaxaca/facts-about-oaxaca/412-poblacion-indigena.html>.
13. SíPaz, "Oaxaca: Social Inequality," accessed July 16, 2014, <http://www.sipaz.org/en/oaxaca/facts-about-oaxaca/413-desigualdades-sociales-ds.html>.
14. For further discussion of the impact of NAFTA on Oaxacan Indigenous farmers, see Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
15. For excellent anthropological discussion of the significance of these concepts, see Jeffrey H. Cohen, *Cooperation and Community: Economy and Society in Oaxaca* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).
16. For more information about this lesson plan, and a range of other P4C games and techniques (which I have used with great success in a range of P4C classes), see David Shapiro, *Plato Was Wrong! Footnotes on Doing Philosophy with Young People* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2012).
17. There are a few examples of work that addresses these sorts of questions in the existing literature. See, for instance, Lena Harwood Pacheco, "Unexpected Philosophers: The Advantages of Teaching Philosophy for Disadvantaged Children," in *Philosophy in Schools: An Introduction for Philosophers and Teachers*, eds. Sara Goering, Nicholas J. Shudak, and Thomas Wartenburg (New York: Routledge, 2013): 299–308, and Nell Rainville, "Philosophy for Children in Native America: A Post-Colonial Critique," in *Analytic Teaching* 21, no. 1 (2000): 65–77.

CALL FOR PAPERS

CIVILIZATIONAL VALUES AT THE CROSSROADS 45TH ISCS RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL JUNE 10 – 13, 2015

Civilizations cannot be properly studied or compared without examining their basic value systems. But what exactly are values? How are they exemplified across civilizations? Do values even exist? Are they relative or absolute? Are "decline" and "progress" relative terms? Are there universal values? Possible topics include the following:

Values in Crisis

- Do we now live in a Nihilistic Age? What does this mean?
- Values in transition
- Moral crises and catharses

Values and Power

- Is "the good" defined by the powerful? What do ancient thinkers say (Cf. Thrasymachus, Thucydides)? What about modern thinkers (Nietzsche, Foucault, Gabriel Garcia Marquez)?
- Ideology, politics, and soft power

Religion, Science, and Values

- Do we live in a secular age (Taylor)? A post-secular age? Is this era the time of the Second Religiousness (Spengler)? What specific values are represented by fundamentalist religious movements worldwide? How is their rise to be interpreted?
- Science and religion represent different explanatory frameworks. Is science really “value-free”? Should it be? Is this even possible? Are these different explanatory frameworks compatible or incompatible?

Values and Culture

- North vs. South, East vs. West. As this is the first ISCS conference to be held in South America, we are extremely interested in any papers specifically on South American and Meso-American civilizations, history, value systems, etc., especially Brazil and its complexities, challenges, and paradoxes.

Send abstracts of about 300 words to the program chair, Michael Andregg, at mmandregg@stthomas.edu.

Abstracts must include **your proper name, email address, and institutional affiliation**, if any.

Any professional treatment of civilizational issues, especially comparative, is appropriate.

The deadline for abstracts is April 1, 2015, but earlier submissions are encouraged. The conference language is English, but papers may be read in Spanish or Portuguese if accompanied by a supplement in English outlining the paper’s basic argument.

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