

20th Century Mexican Philosophy

James Blair Hall 221, MW 3:30-4:50

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The Mexican hides behind a variety of masks, but he tears them away during a fiesta or a time of grief or suffering, just as the nation has cast off all the forms that were stifling it. However, we have not yet found a way of reconciling liberty with order, the word with the act, and both with the evidence ... of our fellowship with others. [...] [I]n these few years we have exhausted all the historical forms Europe could provide us. There is nothing left except nakedness or lies. After the general collapse of Faith and Reason, of God and Utopia, none of the intellectual systems – new or old – is capable of alleviating our anguish or calming our fears. We are alone at last, like all men, and like them we live in a world of violence and deception, a world dominated by Don No One. [...] But there, in that ‘open’ solitude, transcendence is also waiting: the outstretched hands of other solitary beings. For the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all mankind.

— Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950)

Description

The Mexican Revolution was, in many ways, the defining moment in Mexican history. It was a bloody response to several centuries of colonialism and neo-colonialism—an estimated two million people died, about three times more than in the American civil war—yet it generated a creative energy that has come to characterize the essence of Mexican identity. Novelists, poets, comics, journalists, movie directors, and perhaps most famously, muralists, were determined not only to understand and define *lo mexicano* (“the Mexican”), but also to create him and her. What is often left out of the story of the quest for Mexican identity, however, is the central role philosophers played leading up to the Revolution and in the cultural production and political processes that followed. The aim of this course, then, is to examine major figures of 20th century Mexican philosophy who inspired both a Revolution and the subsequent (largely thwarted) effort to alleviate its grief, liberate its masses, and discover its own identity.

Texts

The majority of our texts will be posted on Blackboard. However, I highly recommend that you buy *The Underdogs* by Mariano Azuela (Hackett), *The Cosmic Race* by José Vasconcelos (John’s Hopkins), and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz (Grove Press).

Course Requirements

35% A final philosophy paper due Tuesday, April 29 at 5pm (Blackboard).
Because this is an upper-division course, you are expected to choose and

	develop your own paper topic, which must be approved by me no later than April 15. Your paper should be 5-7 pages in length.
30%	Two short papers (1000 words) comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the philosophical positions of two of our authors (each worth 15%). For your first paper, due February 26 at 5pm, you must compare Vasconcelos and Caso. For your second, due March 24 at 5pm, you must compare Zea and Ramos.
15%	Each student is required to participate in a symposium on 20 th century Mexican philosophy to be held at William and Mary on April 11-12. You may be asked to introduce a speaker, work on advertising, etc., and are required to attend as much of the symposium as possible.
10%	Random short in-class essays in response to the reading.
10%	Attendance and participation.

Course Policies and Procedures

- You are allowed one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence thereafter counts against your grade. Six or more unexcused absences may result in an “F” for the course. Legitimate excuses include illness or emergencies that keeps you from attending class involuntarily. They do not include weddings, leaving early for break, job interviews, or any other voluntary, anticipatable absence. Please bring documentation of your excuse for my records, and please don’t email me to tell me that you’re going to be absent or why.
- If you need a laptop in class, you must sit in the front and turn off your Wi-Fi.
- Turn your phones on silent, not vibrate.
- Email is the most efficient way to contact me. Keep your questions and/or comments to anything I can respond to in a couple of sentences. Longer conversations – especially about your grade, paper topics, etc. – should be had in person. Emails must include, at a minimum, both your name and mine. You may not get a response otherwise.
- No late work will be accepted without being granted permission before the due date.

Cast of Philosophers/Artists/Thinkers

Primary: Antonio Caso (1883-1946), José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), Samuel Ramos (1897-1959), Leopoldo Zea (1912-2004), Emilio Uranga (1921-1988), Jorge Portilla (1919-1963), Luis Villoro (1922-)

Auxiliary (Mexican): Gabino Barreda (1818-1881), Justo Sierra (1848-1912), Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959), Mariano Azuela (1873-1952), Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Gullermo Hurtado (b. 1962).

Auxiliary (non-Mexican): Auguste Comte (1794-1859), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), William James (1842-1910), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-

1855), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1910), José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Max Scheler (1874-1928), Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Enrique Dussel (b. 1934).

Tentative Reading Schedule¹

Introduction: Mexican Philosophy

- 1/15 Introduction: Discussion of Azuela's *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*); show clip from *Revolución*
- 1/16 7pm Screening: *The Storm that Swept Mexico*, Media Center in Swem
- 1/20 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, no class
- 1/22 Romanell, "A Character Sketch of the Two Americas" (P); Paz, "The *Pachuco* and Other Extremes" (S); Paz, "Mexico and the United States" (T)
- 1/27 Romanell, "Five Stages in Mexican Thought," (P), Salmerón, "Mexican Philosophers of the Twentieth Century" (P); Reyes, "Thoughts on the American Mind" (S); Haddox, "Philosophy with a Mexican Perspective" (S); Hurtado, "20th Century Philosophy in Mexico" (S)

Positivism, Anti-Positivism, and the Ateneo de la Juventud

- 1/29 Zea, "Positivism and Porfirism in Mexico" (P); Hurtado, "The Anti-Positivist Movement in Mexico" (S), Selections from Comte and Spencer
- 2/3 Stehn, "From Positivism to 'Anti-Positivism' in Mexico: Some Notable Continuities" (P); Flower, "The Mexican Revolt Against Positivism" (S);
- 2/5 Caso, Selections (P); Romanell, "The Christian Dualism of Antonio Caso"
- 2/10 Caso, Selections (P); Paz, "From Independence to the Revolution" (S)
- 2/17 Vasconcelos, Selections (P); Haddox, "The Aesthetic Philosophy of José Vasconcelos" (S); Romanell, "Bergson in Mexico: A Tribute to José Vasconcelos" (T)
- 2/19 Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race* (P); Romanell, "The Aesthetic Monism of José Vasconcelos" (S); Vasconcelos, "Aspects of Mexican Civilization" (T)
- 2/24 Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race* (P); von Vacano, "Zarathustra Criollo," (S); Paz, "The Mexican Intelligentsia" (T)

Mexican Philosophy, Philosophy of Culture, *Lo Mexicano*

- 2/26 Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, Chap 3 (P); Stabb, "The Search for Essence" (P); Paz, "The Sons of La Malinche" (S); Garrido,

¹ The readings are divided into *primary*, *secondary*, *tertiary*. *Primary* indicates those readings that are required to participate in class discussion; *secondary*, those that expand on the primary readings, but which aren't required; *tertiary*, those that are intellectual background and/or primary texts in Spanish. I will distinguish the three with a "P," "S," and "T," respectively.

“Ortega y Gasset’s Heritage in Latin America” (S); Ortega y Gasset, Selections from “The Modern Theme” (T)

3/1-3/9 Spring Break

3/10 Ramos, *Profile*, Chap 6 and 8 (P); Romanell, “Samuel Ramos on the Philosophy of Mexican Culture” (P); Barta, “Does It Mean Anything to Be Mexican?” (S); Paz, “Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude” (T); Ortega y Gasset, Selections from *Meditations on Quixote* (T)

Leopoldo Zea and *El Grupo Hiperión*

3/12 Zea, “The Actual Function of Philosophy in America” (P); Zea and Maciel, “An Interview with Leopoldo Zea” (S); Oliver, “Mestizaje, mexicanidad, and Assimilation: Zea on Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality” (T)

3/17 Zea, “Identity: A Latin American Philosophical Problem” (P); Paz, “The Present Day”; Sánchez, “Leopoldo Zea, Stanley Cavell, and the Seduction of ‘American’ Philosophy” (S)

3/19 Zea, “History and the Latin American Mind” (P); Oliver, “Introduction” to Zea’s *The Role of the Americas in History* (S)

Phenomenology and Existentialism: Uranga and Portilla

3/24 Sánchez, “Heidegger in Mexico: Emilio Uranga’s ontological hermeneutics” (P); Uranga, Selections from *Análisis del ser del mexicano* (T); Wimer, “La muerte de un filósofo” (T)

3/26 Ziri6n, “Phenomenology in Mexico: A historical profile” (P)

3/31 Portilla, *Phenomenology of Relajo* (P); Portilla, “Comunidad, grandeza, y miseria del mexicano” (T)

4/2 Portilla, *Phenomenology of Relajo*

4/7 Portilla, *Phenomenology of Relajo*

4/9 Finish up Portilla, prepare for Symposium

4/11-4/12 Symposium

Villoro and the Role of History

4/14 Luis Villoro, “The Ideological Currents of the Epoch of Independence” (P); Xirau, “Review of Villoro’s *Los Grandes Momentos del Indigenismo en México*” (P); Selections from Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México* (T)

4/16 Villoro, “The Triple Confusion of Utopia” (P)

4/21 Beuchot, “The Study of Philosophy’s History in Mexico as a Foundation for Doing Mexican Philosophy” (P)

4/23 TBA