

# Post-war Argentinian Philosophical Debates and the Peripheral Condition

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**Abstract:** In this paper we propose a reflection on the condition of written philosophy in Latin America, analysing the philosophical essays of three central Argentinian scholars: Francisco Romero, Carlos Astrada and Rodolfo Kusch during the controversial political context of first Peronism (1946-1955). The salient focus is the analysis of the ways in which these philosophers confronted the question of Latin American philosophy, in particular the role of the Western tradition in crisis and the question of the European, mestizo and indigenous heritage, linking these ideas with their political positions and mutual influences within the academic field. Finally, we propose some reflections on the possibility to write philosophy in Latin America within strong centre/periphery structures and political polarisations, analysing how these factors could operate by connection and disconnection within the construction of the Argentinian philosophical field.

## Introduction

In 1926, the Argentinian philosopher Coriolano Alberini was the first and only Latin-American professor invited to participate in the VI International Congress of Philosophy at Harvard. He aroused curiosity from the international community speaking for the first time in Spanish at an international philosophical conference. At the beginning of his speech about the role of philosophy in international relations he spoke provocatively about the importance of Spanish as a language in the USA, spoken by millions of people in that country and across the rest of the continent. On his return to Argentina, Alberini criticised the anti-(North)Americanism that had expanded throughout Latin American intellectual circles: “It is surprising that the USA, in spite of its material opulence, has for many years an artistic, scientific and philosophical history that is respected in Europe. Do we Latin Americans have something really comparable to this?” (Pró 1960: 268-270\*<sup>2</sup>).<sup>2</sup> More than twenty years later Alberini opened the so-called *Primer Congreso Nacional de Filosofía*, which took place in Mendoza in 1949, with a speech making reference to the fact that most philosophers from Europe and USA invited to this first international philosophical conference in Latin America would probably ask themselves whether it is possible to discuss philosophy in this part of the world, famous for its “cows” but not for its “spiritual” development (Alberini 1950: 63\*). Behind these anecdotes from the beginning of the Latin American academic philosophical field there are some presumptions: Spanish was not recognized as a language available to philosophy and Latin America was not associated as a space for doing philosophy. In fact, this situation has not changed. In a 2014 publication, a professor of Latin American studies in Oregon wrote: “The introduction of philosophy in Latin America is complicated further by the extremely limited information in the field available to English-speaking readers. Until ten years ago, just one Latin American philosophy reader existed, and today one may count but a few more” (Vallega 2014: 2). The question of the centre-periphery relationship within the international circulation of

ideas has become one of the main problems in the research about knowledge production renewal in the last few years (Alatas 2003; Beigel 2013; Keim 2014). Studies on circulation of knowledge between Europe and Latin America emphasise the colonial or hierarchical structure of the flow from the North to the South (Richard 1991; Dussel 1994; Mignolo 2001; Rodríguez Medina 2016). The research on this reception concentrates on transfers from Europe to Latin America and shows that transfers were not passive (Trainé 1994; Dotti 2000; Ruvituso 2015; Morcillo Laiz and Weisz 2016). On the contrary, this reception inspired a wide range of highly original ideas arising from heterodox and free interpretations and processes of translation. Nevertheless, the philosophical development and production of the South, in particular of the Latin Americas, remains mostly unknown in the North.<sup>3</sup>

However, the academic philosophical field has been developing in Latin America since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> This development was characterized by an ambivalent relationship between the European and US-American “centres”: Within only a few decades an enormous amount of French, German and English philosophers were translated, these works were researched and commented on, and journals, departments and university chairs of philosophy were created.<sup>5</sup> Following the European philosophical tradition, described by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) as a field focused on reading and commentating “consecrated texts” written by a very closed canon of Western thinkers, Latin American philosophers remain to this day at the “periphery”. The modernisation trend followed by the construction of the philosophical field has a teleological and Hegelian universal interpretation of the development of spiritual and philosophical history in which European philosophy is regarded as the more developed and the Latin American as a field waiting for “maturation” (Moya 2011).<sup>6</sup> Critical perspectives signaled the Eurocentric, male and white hegemony in international philosophical field (Yancy 2012; Santos-Herceg 2013).

Latin American philosophers recognized this status of “periphery” and disconnectedness in international philosophical circuits very early on and used this condition as inspiration for original debates and knowledge production. One of the key issues discussed in the Latin American philosophical essay tradition since the beginning of the century, and renewed during and after the Second World War, was the question of the “decadence” of the West as a model of civilization and the emergence of Latin America as a new spiritual force capable of occupying the position of Europe by the construction of a new Humanism. The Mexican Francisco Gil Villegas (1996) argues that the “outsider” or “foreigner” status of philosophers from “peripheries” makes it impossible for them to write systematic (or universal) texts like the savants of the center. He maintains that non-central philosophical texts are written in a more essayist style and that they refer to the local situation.<sup>7</sup>

In this article I propose a reflection on the condition of written philosophy in Latin America, analysing the post-war philosophical essays of three central Argentinian scholars: Francisco Romero (1891-1962), Carlos Astrada (1894-1970) and Rodolfo Kusch (1922-1979). Romero, Astrada and Kusch can be considered paradigmatic figures of the post-war philosophical field in Argentina, coinciding with the controversial period of the government of president Juan D. Perón (1946-1955).<sup>8</sup> Sharing the passion for the study of the modern and contemporary German philosophical tradition and for the constitution of a Latin American philosophy, they disagreed irreconcilably on the political level.

During Peronism Romero resigned both of his university chairs and became the centre of the academic opposition, while Astrada supported the university policy of Peronism, holding a great visibility and influence within the academic philosophical field and Kusch remained outside of the

polarization peronists-antiperonists. The political and philosophical positions of these scholars influenced his reception in Latin American intellectual history, opening up the necessity to analyse the construction of the philosophical field from a socio-political perspective. I will analyse the ways in which these philosophers confronted the question of Latin American philosophy, in particular the role of the Western tradition in crisis and the question of the European, mestizo and indigenous heritage linking this analysis with their political positions and mutual influences within the academic field. Finally, I will propose some reflections on the possibility to write philosophy in Latin America within strong centre/periphery structures and political polarisations, analysing how these factors could operate by connection and disconnection within the construction of the Argentinian philosophical field.

## Francisco Romero and the defence of the Western identity in Latin American

When Francisco Romero published his essay *La filosofía en América* in 1952, he was already recognized as a central scholar in Latin-American philosophical circles.<sup>9</sup> An unusual trajectory had led him to abandon his military career in 1930 to dedicate himself “entirely” to philosophy, guided, in his own words, by his “master” the famous doctor and philosopher Alejandro Korn (Speroni 2001). Romero was a co-founder of institutions and spaces for the production and diffusion of philosophical thought in Buenos Aires such as the *Kant Gesellschaft* in 1929 and the *Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores* in 1930 and was director of the prestigious *Biblioteca Filosófica* of the Losada publishing house. These spaces were central to the construction of their networks and functioned as institutional alternatives for many intellectuals, away from their university chairs during the first Peronism. Romero published seven books during this tumultuous period and started the journal *Realidad. Revista de Ideas*. According to Miró Quesada (1983), the Peronist times were the most productive time of Romero’s life. Although Romero devoted much of his career to the translation, commentary and reception of German philosophy (by his book *Teoría del hombre* published in 1952, he had a critical dialogue with Hartmann and Scheler) but his most lasting influence in intellectual history was that developed around Latin American philosophy.

Romero’s central essay *La filosofía en América* assumed a fundamental task for the consolidation of the Latin American philosophical field: the construction of a history of ideas that was to demonstrate an own and genuine tradition of thought. Including essays on the Latin American, Spanish and North American philosophical perspectives and a final appendix with notes on the influence of the “discovery” of America in European political philosophy, Romero attempted to demonstrate the originality of this tradition and the importance of German, French, Spanish and North-American influences in Latin America. The essay placed the Latin American tradition of Positivism and Anti-Positivism as the most original and typical philosophical manifestations of the subcontinent.

The most important figures in Argentinian Positivism were the generation of the “national foundation” during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, supporting “the liberal, secular and civil tradition of the Nation”. But the downfall of Positivism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was seen as a necessary spiritual renewal in which philosophical vocations could be fully developed without being intimidated by the work of politics or pedagogy. With his famous diagnosis of philosophical “normalization”, Romero mythologised the consolidation and professionalization of the young Latin American philosophical tradition. His diagnosis sparked a continental debate about the

possibility, meaning and function of philosophizing in Latin America. Romero understood Latin American philosophy as a discipline framed within the Western tradition, whose most important influences were French and German, with special attention given to Bergson, Dilthey, Hartmann, Husserl, Scheler and Heidegger. Nevertheless, Romero argued that the “Latin American mind” differed from the European in the predilection for issues pertaining to spirit, values and especially the concept of “freedom”. One of the main operations to define the difference of Latin American thinking can be found in Romero’s description of those he considers to be the great Latin American philosophers such as Alejandro Korn and Alejandro Deustúa. He described Korn as a thinker “...Not a proverb of indigenous curiosities, not the maker of archaeological inlays, but a man imbued with all Western essences and capable of rethinking them, reworking them and carrying them forward on the Latin American stage” (Romero 1952: 73\*). Other cultural “difference” of Latin American philosophy with respect to the western was the “amplitude of perspectives”, phenomenon that in a letter to the Mexican Alfonso Reyes in 1955 was baptized by Romero with the concept of “*occidentalidad más espacio libre*” (Romero 1960: 115\*). Anyway, the crucial difference lay in the fact that in Latin America there was a “fundamental unity” that should also be expressed in its political reality. Romero criticised the “mechanical copying” of certain traditional European schemes, such as the idea of “nation” itself, damaging the conformation of a necessary “new” type of politico-social reality in Latin America. For Romero, the European nations had identified themselves with the conformation of selfish and aggressive nationalisms and with the disposition of conflicting diplomatic and military apparatus. “They have very particular conditions of life and culture, and establishing frequent and sometimes almost continuous situations of struggle and conflict with other nationalities, especially with the closest ones. In such circumstances, maintained for centuries, the profile and substance of each one of them has been defined and solidified with a gradual strengthening of the differential moment, of the individual exclusivity of each one” (Romero 1960: 114\*). On the contrary, in Latin America there is “a primary uniformity, coming from the almost contemporary implantation of Western culture in the vast new scenarios” where “an ancestral set of common ideas, feelings and institutions persists as a link. A fairly homogeneous bundle of problems” (Romero 1960: 115-116\*). Thus, for Romero, the connection and approximation between the Latin American countries was not only a convenience; but also, “will be the enterprise of restoring a semi-occult or disfigured reality” (Romero 1960: 114). The Latin American national states - as essentially different from the European ones - were destined to unify and not be in conflict. Romero expressed the conviction that Latin America was prepared to be a pioneer in the necessary political change of the West towards the ideal of a “democratic and humanist Socialism”:

It’s hard to know. But I think it will start in the younger countries, in the less powerful ones. I would not be surprised if the first continent to attempt the serious application of a genuine democratic Socialism were ours. In Europe it is very difficult. What is happening in the Nordic countries is important, it is a glimpse of what could be done, but it is not a true Socialism. The Leon Blum movement in France was doomed to failure. With Laborism there is no hope of achieving Socialism. And if any party triumphed in France or Italy, it would only be possible to make partial reforms. The conditions prevailing in Europe prevent a democratic change towards true socialism. As for the United States the circumstances are even less favourable (Miró Quesada 1983: 137-138\*).

Romero’s hope for political transformation in Latin America did not ignore the dangers of Imperialism and the Cold War: “The only danger, and a very serious one, is external influence. The powers that govern the world can intervene in a way that prevents change” and culminated in a prognosis that - read 50 years later - represents an interesting vision of future history: “We

will have to go through very hard times, even tragic times. But in the long run I'm optimistic. I have faith in the future of Latin America, I have faith that true social justice will one day take place among us" (Miró Quesada 1983: 137\*).

Positioned within the peronist/anti-peronist polarization, Romero was an organic intellectual by the socialist opposition. After the overthrow of Perón in September of 1955, Romero returned to his chair in the UBA and collaborated with the so-called "desperonisation" of academia. In 1962, Romero died in the ship that brought him back from his first trip to Europe. As an anti-peronist and precursor of a continental intellectual network sustained over the decades, Romero was able to position himself in the annals of Latin American intellectual history in a central way. Numerous tributes and academic articles have been published on his trajectory - most of them produced within the philosophical field - and are considered in Argentinian and Latin American histories of philosophy.

Romero used the concept of difference and identity to form the idea of the privileged position of Latin America as a unity for the construction of a new Humanism within the Western tradition. His position on the unimportance of indigenous heritages in the construction of the Latin American identity leading with a Eurocentric view of the Latin American philosophy were strongly debated.

## Carlos Astrada and a long forgotten rupture in the Latin American philosophy

Born in Córdoba in 1894 in the heart of a traditional creole family, Carlos Astrada initiated his university studies at the *Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*, where he headed the so-called University Reform with other intellectuals in 1918. In 1926, he won a scholarship to study philosophy in Germany and between 1927 and 1932 he resided in Cologne and Freiburg, where he attended the courses of Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, who he considered his main "master" (David 2004). He was one of the few Argentinian scholars who could presume to meet the most important German philosophers of the time in person.<sup>10</sup> After his study trip to Germany, Astrada continued his successful, well published career, focusing on German phenomenology and existentialism and took over the chair of Ethics at the *Universidad Nacional de La Plata* (UNLP) and of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy at the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (UBA). Perhaps one of the points of greatest political controversy between Romero and Astrada was not only the fact that Astrada remained in the university during Peronism, but - above all - that he took the chair of *Gnoseología y Metafísica* left vacant by Romero in Buenos Aires. Astrada's influence in the university philosophical milieu during the Peronism was controversial: He had a moment of greater centrality in his university career when he was appointed as the director of the Institute of Philosophy of the UBA in 1946 and founded and directed the journal *Cuadernos de Filosofía* between 1947 and 1955, which functioned as a forum for expression of the German philosophy of secular orientation. He stayed in the university together with a group of professors of the secular tradition, attempting to prevent the philosophical formation from becoming the bastion of the numerous groups of Catholics that entered in replacement of the outgoing professors. After this initial support for Peronism, Astrada began a theoretical and political turn towards Marxism, parallel to a progressive and definitive move away from Peronism which, according to his biographer Guillermo David (2004), already had its turning point in 1949. Anyway, his central position as organizer of the *Primer Congreso Nacional*

*de Filosofía*, held at the University of Cuyo in 1949 with broad official support, meant that he was linked with Peronism and confronted by anti-peronist intellectuals for the rest of his career.<sup>11</sup>

A singular philosophical essay *El mito gaucho* (1948) was the first interpretation by Astrada of the particular way of Argentinian “being” in contrast with the European “existence”. The position of Astrada moved away from Romero’s in as much as, according to his essay, Argentinian existence was essentially different from the European. The question of the indigenous past and the conquest seen as a process of “transculturation” took centre stage in Astrada: “Not only do we nourish ourselves with nostalgia and the appetite for what has not evaporated from the classical, but also of the legends and mythologies that emotionally, for the sake of memory, haunt us from the millennial American past” (Astrada 1964: 79\*). The *mestizo* condition of the Argentinian being, his mythological origin and destiny was represented by the figure of *Martín Fierro*, the great Gaucho poetry from José Hernández. The influence of the landscape, “the native soil of *la Pampa*”, represented for Astrada the constant and determining factor of national difference:

While the existence of the people of the Pampa is an erratic impulse, attracted by the magnet of remoteness, the absence of all limits, which makes his arrival already a break, becoming difficult to stay and rest in his own being, gathered in the outline, European existence at all times manages to focus on its native landscape and in itself. The alertness he makes, the caring concern with the long-matured, enlightened, inscribed designs, makes him easily recover from the eccentricity proper to all existence, from all life which, launched into the great adventure of thought and art, always aspires to be more than life, that is, culture (Astrada 1964: 57\*).

Astrada closed the essay with a plea to return to this mythical source through the liberation of the European cultural “assimilation” and “dependence”. On the occasion of the International Congress of Philosophy of San Pablo in 1954, Astrada presented a paper titled “*La filosofía latinoamericana como exponente de una cultura autónoma*” (Latin American philosophy as exponent of an autonomous culture), assuming a continental position. Astrada argues that Latin American thought will not “adhere” to the categories proper to European philosophy, those that have arisen according to the contents of a historical reality “different from ours” (Astrada 1956: 1078\*). For Astrada, it was not necessary to “ignore” the contributions of Western culture, but rather to induce the mixture between European inheritances – “adapted to the own needs” – and the millenary cultures “torn violently by the enterprise of transculturation”. The central idea that mobilized Latin American thought and spirit was that of political and social freedom, but the continent was already in a position to create original “expressive conceptions of spiritual idiosyncrasy and adapt to an autonomous mode of life and of thought” (Astrada 1956: 1077\*). This mixture would give expression to a proper *Weltanschauung* “as an expression of a vital and existential modality different from the Western one” (Astrada 1956: 1082\*). Astrada took into account the instrumental function of Heideggerian Existentialism for the development of Latin American thought. The centrality of Existentialism - understood as the “philosophy of the time” - was marked by its “emotional and intuitive” character and the approach to the concrete structures of historicity. However, for Astrada the Heideggerian “*Angst*” was not the fundamental and essential state by which one could understand the Latin American people. “We are not involved in such a situation”, since the spirit of the Latin American people is not characterized by “*Angst*”, as postulated by Heidegger, but rather a raised and euphoric one, in the presence of enormous possibilities for development. Astrada questioned the current validity of the Western ideology that he considered “at the limit of his historical possibilities” and in “decay and disintegration”. It is interesting to note the political position of Astrada in 1954, which had, already removed from

Peronism, assumed an anti-imperialist and Marxist stance, not so distant from Romero's socialist postulates:

Affirming the national independence of the Latin American peoples, these become, in the domain of science and philosophy, Western culture, but without renouncing their particular way of being, and without considering themselves imitators or servile spokesmen of European. They assimilate the European technique, which is already a universal good, assigning it an instrumental value for the liberation of the economic and the social. It could not be otherwise since the hegemonic tendency of international capitalism in its present imperialist stage, having found an auspicious field for its enterprises in the immense riches of American soil and exploitable work, has interfered in the life of our peoples, reducing them to economic colonialism. The reactive attitude to this situation has for a long time begun to be expressed, in doctrinaire, in Marxism (Astrada 1956: 1082\*).

For Astrada, Marxism would enter into direct dialogue with the exploited masses in Latin America, who would see in it not only the theoretical foundation, but also the "instrument" and "method" suitable for the struggle for economic liberation: They are accessible to the influence of Marxism on its affinity, the form of social organization that supports its doctrine, and the collectivist spirit that prevailed in "Amerindian" people (Astrada 1956: 1082\*).

Although Astrada was one of the first philosophers to pose the problem of the "transculturation", "dependence", "*mestizaje*" and "difference" of Latin America with respect to Europe, his essays were long forgotten in Latin American intellectual history. One of the reasons for the silence around the figure of Astrada was his early Peronist affiliation. After the fall of Perón in 1955 Astrada had to abandon his positions at the university and his influence were large rejected by anti-peronist scholars (David 2004). However, it must be noted that his influence can be identified in the work of the next generation of philosophies of liberation and *dependencia*-thinkers.

## Rodolfo Kusch opening borders in the philosophical field

Rodolfo Kusch was born in Buenos Aires in 1922 as the son of German immigrants, inheriting bilingualism that helped him in his studies of philosophy in the UBA, strongly influenced by the German tradition. He graduated as Professor of Philosophy in 1948, at the beginning of the first Peronism, witnessed the deep crisis that had opened up in the academic field with the interventions to universities, dismissals, resignations and the removal of many of his professors. Close to some young intellectuals of the opposition but also near to Peronist debates and ideas, Kusch remains outside of the strong political polarisation in philosophical field starred by Astrada and Romero. His first philosophical essay *La seducción de la barbarie. Análisis herético de un continente mestizo* (*The seduction of Barbarism. Heretic Analyses of a mestizo Continent*) was published in 1953 in the collection *Estudios Americanos* of the Raigal publishing house, where Romero had published *La Filosofía en América* a year before. Making a great rupture within the Western philosophical tradition supported by Romero, Kusch's essay was influenced by Astrada's Myth Gaucho although this was entirely unacknowledged by him. Kusch's essay recaptured the concepts of *mestizaje*, mimesis and authenticity, landscape, being, culture and nation – already used by Carlos Astrada in his essay – but assuming different interpretations. The cover of the book announced: "Rodolfo Kusch is weaving his unorthodox theory of an America that can only be rescued by an immersion in the telluric, separating the conscious and welcoming the unconscious, distancing itself from the strange, and facing radically and from the beginning with the

surrounding, with the here”\*. At the beginning of the essay Kusch summed up the central argument of the text, claiming that the “*mestizo*” character of the “American people”<sup>12</sup> was based on the simultaneous participation of two realities and the consequent impossibility of developing their authenticity: “America is irreparably divided between the fundamental truth of their demonic nature and the fictional truth of their cities” (Kusch 1953: 16\*). For Kusch, the concept of “*mestizaje*” did not refer to the biological or racial component, but to a “mental” condition of the Americans in which “the sky, the bird, the spirit is pointed on one side, and on the other the Serpent, the earth, the demonism of the jungle” (Kusch 1953: 29\*). The American -in so much mental *mestizaje*- is represented by the “Feathered Serpent”: installed in the city, on the one hand, and on the ground, on the other, works only by parts and if he chooses both, he does so by attachment, by *mestizaje*. One of the most salient questions of this interpretation is the idea that the mental *mestizaje* -the “Feathered Serpent” as conciliation of opposites- was already present in the pre-Columbian period, latent-for example-in the Mayan city, in its rites and myths. During the conquest, the opposition perfects itself and, following Kusch, takes its “carnal truth” and the indigenous becomes a pariah.

Kusch’s acute interpretation of the “loneliness” (*soledad*) and “*Angst*” (*angustia*) of the American people in the city is one of the most original interpretations of Existentialism transferred to the Latin American context. For Kusch, the “ambivalence” and “*Angst*” of the American people are perceived in the way of making history, philosophy, politics, in the educational system and the laws, produced by the city from a foreign or fictional perspective:

As the American feels that a future of fiction is unappeasable and that it is only an object of interest and not of faith, he places his faith in the archives or in a conscious past that sacrifices demonism from the ground. The visual narrowness of the present, the foreign pressure exerted on him leads him to seek the past in circumstance, in the anecdote or in the monotonous repetition of his own cowardice before fiction. There he conceals the anguish of his remoteness of being, the deep recognition of the lie in which he lives, and to put it in existential terms, of his former existence (Kusch 1953: 58-59\*).

The disturbance of American reality makes it take refuge in fiction, jumping over its own end, as mimesis that postpones its authenticity: “Between fiction and reality an insurmountable abyss opens”. The importance of landscape and *mestizaje* as a mental and non-racial phenomenon so that all the inhabitants of America could fully identify with the American being, including “the suspicion that we have something to do with the aboriginal past”:

The search for a tradition in this sense, from a background for this ‘here and now’ in an American city, is not the search for an extension in history, nor in the race, nor in the tradition itself, that does not exist. It is, above all, a question of prolonging our present experience in the sense of geography, of the landscape and even if we simply feel this situational perpetuation of being inhabited in a continent that has existed for millennia (Kusch 1953: 79\*).

The telluric question – represented by forest or *la pampa* – was central to the understanding of American people by Kusch in the philosophical essay: the analysis of American history must be done “with a certain faith in the irrational” and with the belief that the native soil is the basic factor and shaping of all structure. For Kusch, the greatness of a culture or a civilization, its apogee “is in the form of conceiving the being” or in marking, at a certain moment, its limitation:

The relationship between nationality and the concept of being is realized through the process that underlies every culture, according to which the nutritional forces of a



people become conscious and integrate the state or the intelligent relations of the city. Everything is in the degree of realization of that consciousness. In Europe it is already finished. The proof of this is that it even brought consciousness to nothingness. The final point reached by a culture is that of the question of its ultimate goal when it has already achieved its being, its definition (Kusch 1953: 63\*).

From this conceptual framework, which included Hegelian and Heideggerian concepts, Kusch understood that Europe had reached the realization of consciousness and in this way of its authenticity, then it had died, the moment of its disintegration. One proof that Europe had reached this limit was the development of Existentialist philosophy: “The proof is when Heidegger asks why there is something rather than nothing. He is also planned in dimension of being but negatively. In that question, a nostalgia for an intellectual demonism, symbolized by nothingness, shows precisely that Europe has exhausted its living nourishing background” (Kusch 1953: 90\*). In America, on the other hand, “there is a lack of expression in a big way, the national style that translates into all the orders of social and spiritual life an awareness of authenticity” (Kusch 1953: 90\*) said Kusch.

From these concepts that mixed very eclectic uses of German philosophy and the tradition of the Latin American literature and sociology, Kusch tried a new interpretation of America in which the well-known antithesis civilization-barbarism was stripped down to its fictional core and in the necessity inevitably to overcome it. But instead of trying to suppress barbarism, there will be the inevitable “cruel triumph” of the autochthonous in the face of the falsity of the city: “Only in this way can the American be apprehended at the very roots of our life, which is the only creator of culture” (Kusch 1953: 17\*). To achieve this path, it is necessary to think of the American people as the opposite of being and from another point of view, “to suppose that no logos existed before their discovery and that all reality is previously an original chaos”. This implied in Kusch to encompass reality in all its breadth, to apprehend man in its integrity by analyzing its authenticity. Both American and European attitudes are involved in some form of metaphysics, concluded Kusch, but the truth of both is diverse: “The truth of *mestizo* America lies in its social unconscious, in its denial of the truth acquired by fiction. An inverse truth to that of European culture, where the real is added to the a priori of being” (Kusch 1953: 91\*).

Kusch’s essay transcended the disciplinary and political frontiers of the philosophical field in which he had formed by opening heterodox dialogues with anthropology, sociology, literature, archaeology and placing himself in an intermediate position in the political polarizations. Unlike Romero and Astrada, Kusch was not an organic intellectual either to Peronism or Anti-Peronism. According to his radical criticism to the city and his institutions, Kusch expended long research stays with indigenous people and lived the last years of his life in Maimará, a small town in the North Argentina. His departure from the centres of intellectual production and his radical criticism of university circles may have influenced the reception of his work in intellectual history. We still do not have works that reconstruct the intellectual biography of Kusch, his intellectual networks, itineraries and political positions throughout his career. However, following Graciela Maturo (2011), the influence of his work was crucial for the generation of young students in the sixties and seventies, in a renewed Latin American search for identity, and in the last two decades, the figure of Kusch was acknowledged in ecological, artistic, social, de-colonial and critical academic movements.

## Conclusion: About philosophy in Latin America and the peripheral condition

The Mexican Francisco Gil Villegas (1996) came to a provocative conclusion: He argued that Georg Lukács and José Ortega y Gasset were “precursors” of Heidegger, but that their status as “outsiders” in the philosophical centers resulted in their ideas not being acknowledged. Leaving out the discussion as to whether the Spaniard and the Hungarian were indeed precursors of any of Heidegger’s ideas, their example may prompt us to consider the question of center and periphery in the philosophical circulation of ideas. The first English edition of Kusch’s work in 2010 was commented on by the editor and de-colonial thinker Walter Mignolo: “Why did I, in Argentina, know about Heidegger’s philosophical investigations, deep-seated in the history of Europe and of Germany, and not of Kusch?” (Mignolo 2010: XXVI). The discussions surrounding Latin American philosophical identity during the post-war period was ignored by the traditional centres in Europe and North America and also marginalized within the trend of Latin American “modernisation’, but placed at the centre of the debates central questions and concepts with political and social reverberations, continuing until the present. Even if the international philosophical field has peripheral languages and consequently there are also peripheral countries, this condition resulted in very productive and original debates. For decades, philosophical thinking in Spanish, in the periphery, meant thinking about the colonial condition, of a western heritage in crisis, and of the place of the indigenous heritage. Thus, the situation of disadvantage in the international circulation which Romero, Astrada and Kusch was confronted with is not comparable with the non-hierarchical development of his works. The present analysis of the philosophical essays demonstrates the original and emancipated character of the Latin American philosophical production towards identity. Writing in Spanish, a language spoken by millions of people, but not recognised in the dominant philosophical centres, could have helped these philosophers to emancipate the disciplinary boundaries of Latin American philosophy. In addition, their essayist style was nurtured by a long tradition in Latin American thought and could contribute to thinking of philosophy from a critical point of view of the supposed universality of Western philosophy and the role of thought for emancipation. In constructing their own tradition they distinguished characteristics, topics and methods for Latin American philosophy: it is linked with practice, openness, political theory and the values of liberation and independence, indigenous heritage and *mestizo* cultures. These earlier essays operated on many levels, as existential analysis, and a sustained reflection on otherness that had enormous impacts for the later development of the dependence theories, the philosophy of liberation and de-colonial thinking, that have become prominent in critical international social sciences.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>All translations with \* are by the author.

<sup>3</sup>One of the first Latin American debates recognized and received by scholars in Europe was the critical discussion surrounding “dependence” developed by a transnational group of scientists including Brazilian, Mexican, Chelonian, Argentinian and some European scholars in Latin America (Werz 1991). The Philosophy and Theology of Liberation was the first debate from Latin American humanists with enormous international impact in Europe that has reverberated until the present day (Fornet-Betancourt 2005; Jahnel 2009). During the eighties and nineties, the so called “de-colonial turn” influenced epistemological debates in European and the North-American academic field and social movements.

<sup>4</sup>Here we refer to the construction of a specifically philosophical academic field, that is, to the formation of chairs, institutes and philosophy journals within Latin American universities. In the early tradition of the history of ideas, the existence of philosophical ideas and schools during the colony, emancipations and the construction of national states (scholasticism, romanticism, positivism) was reconstructed in Latin America leaving aside the existence of ideas before the colony (Zea 1949, Romero 1952). In contrast, the studies of Miguel León-Portilla (1956) were pioneers in the construction of a history of philosophical ideas by indigenous (especially *náhuatl*) thought. The studies of Dussel, Mendieta and Bohórquez (2011) and Beorlegui (2004) have taken into account the indigenous world views as a substantial part of the history of Latin American philosophical thought.

<sup>5</sup>The reception of German philosophy and the fascination with Germany already began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when young intellectuals wanted to substitute metaphysical theories for the positivistic theories, which had dominated the social sciences and humanities. Thus, Kant, Hegel, Fichte as well as Dilthey, Hartmann, Husserl and Heidegger were a “novelty” that was introduced to Latin America by Spanish philosophers like José Ortega y Gasset and later other exiled philosophers and authors who had fled from the upheavals of the Spanish Civil War. Latin American philosophers read the German texts in their Spanish and French translations and some of them were able to make the “intellectual journey” to Germany, the philosophical “Mecca” and became mediators, translators and editors; they used, but also distorted (more or less consciously) texts and philosophical concepts.

<sup>6</sup>The hegemony of modernisation trend in Latin American philosophy is linked with the idea that philosophy is possible only in the Western tradition, and the Latin American philosophical production should be a continuation of this tradition. The conservative male Eurocentric position in philosophical fields is not only supported by the right wing. Martin Jay – the famous historian of Marxism and the Frankfurt School, participated in a conference on de-colonial philosophy in Berkeley in 2005. “His remarks about the underdevelopment of Latin American philosophy vis-à-vis German and Anglo-American philosophy indicate that he understands identity as a kind of psychological crutch employed by racial or geographical minorities who have not yet completed the process of philosophical maturation” (Moya 2011: 82).

<sup>7</sup>This peripheral condition of Latin Americans thinkers developed into an “inferiority complex”, especially in philosophy. The Mexican Leopoldo Zea describes this situation from a critical perspective: “Latin American thought finds itself in limbo between ideas that do not find application to their situation and a seemingly unfitting reality... The result is that Latin Americans feel European by origin but inferior to this origin in their circumstance” (Vallega 2014: 25). Nobody would ask whether Greek, French or German philosophy exists. Philosophy is the only discipline in the humanities that questions the possibility of its own existence in Latin America.

<sup>8</sup>The “first Peronism” refers to the historical period between the first election in which Juan D. Perón became Argentinian president in 1946 and the coup d’état, called “Revolución Liberadora” which removed Perón from power in September 1955. During the presidencies of Perón (1946-1955) there was a great deal of polarization between those intellectuals who chose to stay at the university and those who chose to retire as a form of resistance or were forced to resign.

<sup>9</sup>Romero was born in Spain in 1891, at the age of 13 he emigrated with his family to Argentina. In 1910 he became an Argentinian citizen and entered the Military College of the Nation in 1915. Parallel to his successful military career, he started a Doctorate of Letters at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). He ended his military career in 1930. Romero’s international intellectual network was especially nurtured by the generation of Spaniards and Latin American intellectuals who had begun a wide-ranging work of translation and interpretation of the German tradition inaugurated by José Ortega Gasset in the *Revista de*

*Occidente*. Among its closest were the exiled Republicans such as José Gaos and José Ferrater Mora, the Mexicans Leopoldo Zea and Alfonso Reyes, the Peruvians Francisco Miró Quesada and Alberto Wagner de Reyna and the Uruguayan Arturo Ardao. To the trajectory of Romero see Speroni (2001).

<sup>10</sup>In contrast to Romero, Astrada's intellectual network was directly linked to German philosophy and Heideggerian Existentialism. As his biographer points out: "In addition to his knowledge and experience, his knowledge of the German intellectual life, as well as the direct and in some cases profoundly friendly treatment of the great names of philosophy in the twentieth century, Astrada has not only had a good relationships with Husserl, Scheler, Hartmann and Heidegger, he has also studied with Karl Reinhardt and Walter Otto, eminences in matters of theology and classical mythology whom he would listen to once a week in Frankfurt, or Kurt Goldstein, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Karl Löwith, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ernesto Grassi, Ludwig Landgrebe, and Eugen Fink, the Husserl's assistant, and Maximilian Beck, among others" (David 2004: 63\*).

<sup>11</sup>Through the resounding support of the national government for the financing of the *Primer Congreso Nacional de Filosofía* of Mendoza in 1949, Astrada was able to renew his relations with much of the German philosophical community he had met on his trip. In the large contingent of German universities were the Hungarian Wilhelm Szilasi who had just arrived in Freiburg in place of Heidegger, the phenomenologists Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrebe, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the Italian-German Ernesto Grassi and the Heideggerian Walter Bröcker, from exile in the USA came Karl Löwith and from Italy the Heideggerians Nicola Abbagnano, Ugo Spirito and Luigi Stefanini. The congress renewed the disputes between Astrada and Romero: while Astrada sent the invitations, Romero began a campaign, of relative success, so that some intellectuals did not attend the congress financed by the Peronism, considered by the liberal and socialist spectrum as a Latin American version of the fascism (Ruvituso 2015).

<sup>12</sup>"*América*" (translated by the author as "America") often connotes the United States. In Kusch's interpretation the term "*América*" means the colonized territories "booth Americas". Nevertheless, the main examples used by Kusch were located in Latin America.

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