

## **Pragmatism as Gunship Philosophy: José Vasconcelos' Critique of John Dewey**

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### **English Abstract**

This work expands the crucial and evolving Inter-American philosophical dialogue from its current state, which has focused on establishing commonalities between the Americas, to include conversations that intelligently and candidly address points of contention. This paper strives to constructively introduce into this dialogue a trenchant critique of one of the most influential English language philosophers of the Americas – John Dewey—made by one of the most influential Spanish language philosophers of the Americas – José Vasconcelos. In particular, this paper examines Vasconcelos' charge that Dewey's Pragmatism was merely a gunship philosophy designed to provide ideological cover for a U.S. led Anglo-Saxon global empire. This critique merits scholarly attention not only because it is virtually unknown among English language philosophers (as it is still only available in Spanish), but because it anticipates later discussions about the relationship between Pragmatism, democracy and empire in the United States.

### **Resumen en español**

Este trabajo expande el diálogo filosófico Inter-Americano crucial y en evolución de su estado actual, el cual se ha enfocado en establecer los puntos comunes entre las Américas, para incluir conversaciones que de forma inteligente y cándida abordan los puntos de discordia. Este ensayo se esfuerza para introducir constructivamente al diálogo una crítica incisiva de uno de los más influyentes filósofos de lengua inglesa de las Américas – John Dewey – hecha por uno de los más influyentes filósofos de lengua española de las Américas – José Vasconcelos. En particular, este ensayo examina el aporte de Vasconcelos de que el pragmatismo de Dewey era simplemente una filosofía de intimidación con el único propósito de proveerle un amparo ideológico a un imperio global anglosajón comandado por los Estados Unidos. Esta crítica merece atención académica no solo por ser virtualmente desconocida entre los filósofos de lengua inglesa (por seguir siendo solamente disponible en español), pero porque anticipa siguientes discusiones sobre la relación entre el pragmatismo, la democracia, y el imperio en los Estados Unidos.

### **Resumo em português**

Este trabalho amplia o diálogo filosófico Interamericano crucial e em evolução do seu estado atual, que tem focado em estabelecer pontos em comum entre as Américas, para incluir conversas que de forma inteligente e candidamente abordem pontos de discórdia. Este artigo se esforça para introduzir construtivamente neste diálogo uma crítica mordaz a um dos mais influentes filósofos de língua inglesa das Américas -- John Dewey -- feito por um dos mais influentes filósofos de língua espanhola das Américas - José Vasconcelos. Em particular, este artigo examina a acusação de

Vasconcelos de que o pragmatismo de Dewey era meramente uma filosofia de intimidação para fornecer cobertura ideológica para um imperio global anglo-saxão conduzido pelos EUA. Esta crítica merece a atenção acadêmica não só porque é praticamente desconhecida entre os filósofos de língua inglesa (como ainda só está disponível em espanhol), mas porque antecipa discussões posteriores sobre a relação entre o pragmatismo, a democracia e o império nos Estados Unidos.

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## Introduction

In recent years, philosophers from across the Americas have collaborated to bridge the linguistic, cultural and geographic divides that have long isolated Spanish language philosophy and English language philosophy from each other. Philosophers including Gregory Pappas, Guillermo Hurtado and Eduardo Mendieta, have cleared and broadened the trail first blazed by the Argentinean Philosopher of the Americas, Risieri Frondizi, by placing these traditions in fruitful dialogue with an eye on developing a truly Inter-American philosophical discourse.[1] As these Inter-American integrative projects are only just beginning (considering that these traditions have developed in near total isolation from each other for centuries) it is appropriate that these recent works are ecumenical in spirit, emphasize the commonalities shared by these traditions and suggest how they might complement each other. Many of these philosophers agree that the most fruitful common ground between these traditions involves the affinities between North American Pragmatism and the ratio-vitalist philosophy of the Latin American “Founders” as Francisco Romero called the anti-positivist philosophers that emerged from the *Ateneo de la Juventud* in Mexico in the early 20th Century.[2]

This paper accepts as a premise that greater Inter-American philosophical integration is a worthwhile goal both for the sake of better informed and more pluralistic scholarship and as a means to fostering the Inter-American civic discourse necessary to democratically and fairly address the trans-national, social, economic and environmental challenges faced by the people of the Americas. When this paper posits Inter-American philosophical integration as a worthwhile goal, it uses the distinction drawn by Linda Martín Alcoff between assimilation and integration in her essay “Alien and Alienated.”

Assimilation is absorption, where a new item is transformed so as to become part of a whole. The larger whole is augmented, but not qualitatively changed if assimilation has occurred properly.... Integration, by contrast, is a combinatory process that desegregates in order to produce a newly unified system. It is not an absorption of a smaller part by

a larger whole, but a system of modification that yields a new integrated unit.[3]

Following her demarcation, this paper strives to contribute to an integrated Inter-American philosophical tradition, not one where Latin American philosophy is assimilated into North American English language philosophy, or vice versa.

However, while an eventual Inter-American philosophical integration is both possible and desirable, it is also the case that this process won't always be pleasant or easy. While it is appropriate that the early phases of this process have focused on finding common ground, it is also the case that vital Inter-American dialogue will have to intelligently address points of disagreement and contention. Nonetheless, if this important movement to forge an Inter-American philosophical discourse is to be successful, it must examine and productively engage the instances where these two American traditions clash.

One such point of conflict involves John Dewey, one of the most prominent North American Pragmatists, and José Vasconcelos, one of the most prominent Latin American philosophers from the generation of the Founders (1910-1940). Vasconcelos charges in his 1939 work *Ética (Ethics)* that Dewey's pragmatism is but a gunship philosophy: its primary purpose, according to Vasconcelos, is to facilitate the expansion of Anglo-Saxon empire, first into Latin America and then the entire world. While Vasconcelos' assessment of Pragmatism is extremely harsh, philosophers interested in Inter-American philosophical integration should know and engage his critique as it functions both as a critical mirror and as diagnostic sign for philosophers, especially those from the English speaking parts of the Americas, committed to Inter-American philosophical dialogue.

By examining Vasconcelos' arguments against Yankee imperialism and his views on why Pragmatism facilitates this imperialism, this essay highlights some of the greatest challenges facing projects of philosophical integration. First, this essay draws our attention to the linguistic divide in the Americas: Vasconcelos' *Ethics* is available only in Spanish, a language that is not emphasized in the majority of US and Canadian philosophy graduate programs, and therefore the excerpts from *Ethics* in this essay were translated into English by the essay's author. Second, it will underscore the great extent to which US government policies and corporate actions in Latin America had, by 1939, already poisoned any potential Inter-American democratic community and caused Latin American intellectuals to doubt any talk of Pan-Americanism with well-warranted suspicion. Of course, the challenge of addressing the problem of US imperialism in Latin America is made all the worse by the fact that US imperialist actions became even more brutal and un-democratic after Vasconcelos' critique with the Cold War and the Drug Wars.[4] Third, reading Vasconcelos' critiques of Pragmatism and Dewey highlights the fact that Pragmatism is viewed in a harsh and perhaps unfair light in much of Latin America. This essay will hopefully show that while Vasconcelos offers cogent critiques of US imperialism, many of his criticisms of Pragmatism are not directed as a

full and charitable version of Pragmatism. Nonetheless, it is imperative that public intellectuals committed to developing a truly pluralistic civic discourse across the Americas read these and other Inter-American critiques in order to develop informed and honest discussions that examine all elements of these political and intellectual traditions charitably and fairly.

## The Global Conflict between Latinism and Anglo-Saxonism

Latin American philosophy still bears the indelible mark of the philosopher and “cultural *caudillo*” of the Mexican Revolution, José Vasconcelos.[5] One of the most influential public intellectuals of the Spanish speaking Americas, Vasconcelos was a staunch champion of Latin American autonomy and a missionary for education and culture. He was also a vociferous critic of United States culture, philosophy and foreign policy. While many English speakers are familiar with his critique of the US from reading the English translations of his most famous work *La Raza Cósmica*, very few are aware of his later, even more pointed critique in *Ética*. [6]

Like most Latin American intellectuals of his era, José Vasconcelos' early thought reflected the influence of positivist philosophy that dominated Latin American universities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, Vasconcelos, along with other luminaries such as Antonio Caso, Samuel Ramos and Pedro Henríquez Ureña, participated in the *Ateneo de la Juventud* (the Athaeneum of Youth) which Samuel Ramos described as “a struggle against the demoralization produced by the Porfirian Era.” [7] Significant for Vasconcelos' future role as a critic of English language philosophy is the fact that the participants in the Athaeneum associated the corrupt regime of Porfirio Díaz with British-identified utilitarianism and positivism and consequently sought alternatives in spiritualism, existentialism and vitalism. [8] Vasconcelos would not only remain a critic of positivism for the rest of his life, but he would eventually implicate this and other English-language philosophies in an Anglo-Saxon plot to rule the world.

Historians like Enrique Krauze point out that while his political views changed dramatically over the course of his life – shifting from Revolutionary Communism, to fascism and ultimately to traditional Catholicism - the belief that English speaking “Anglo-Saxons” in general and North American Yankees in particular posed an existentialist threat to all Latin Americans served as his intellectual North Star throughout his life. [9] This association of positivist philosophy with a global Anglo-Saxonism is instrumental for understanding his critique of pragmatism as well as his suspicion towards any form of Pan-Americanism that includes English-speaking Americans. Further, his consistent and problematic association of Pragmatism with the positivist ideologies of *Porfirismo* and other anti-democratic regimes of 19th and 20th Century Latin America is one of the greatest obstacles that must be navigated by anyone interested in greater Inter-American philosophical integration. As Guillermo Hurtado points out, Vasconcelos did not merely see Pragmatism as flawed or

problematic: it was for him an ideological tool of political domination which Latin Americans could only combat by creating their own, authentic philosophy.[10]

Vasconcelos opened his 1939 *Ética* by describing a Latin American crisis that had only worsened since the publication of *La Raza Cósmica (The Cosmic Race)* in 1920. The problem facing Mexico and other Latin American countries was not merely one of maintaining autonomy and sovereignty in the face of the United States' military, industrial and economic expansion. Instead, Vasconcelos called on his fellow Ibero-Americans to see that the Americas were a cultural and intellectual battleground where two titanic civilizations vied to direct humanity's fate. In *The Cosmic Race*, he urged his readers to realize that "[o]ur age became, and continues to be, a conflict of Latinism against Anglo-Saxonism; a conflict of institutions, aims and ideals.[11] Vasconcelos' *Ethics* described an even more perilous situation where the English have concocted a tool of global domination that resembled a twisted homunculus stitched together from disparate pieces of Christian doctrine, industrial efficiency and zoology. They planned to convince the people of the world that it was both a divine mandate and scientific law that the weak must submit to the strong, by which the Anglo-Saxons meant themselves. He saw United States' occupation of territories in the Pacific and the Caribbean as just the latest iteration of this plan.

This satanic plan will now consume the U.S., the conscious heirs of the semi-divine mission to impose English upon the Earth. Owners of the best of all the new world lands, they are continually occupying new lands according to the plan known as getting the cage without the bird: annihilate the native people and then take their land. The Yankees are even better at this than the English, and in the last twenty years they have proletarianized Puerto Rico, ruined Cuba and have torn Mexico apart by encouraging corruption and supporting strongmen who cheaply sell off their country's resources in exchange for conditional and temporary power.[12]

Vasconcelos' critique of Yankee imperialism in his *Ethics* expanded his similar critique in *The Cosmic Race* in at least one significant regard: it described in detail how he saw English speaking philosophies and intellectual movements like behaviorism, Darwinism and Pragmatism facilitating U.S. imperial expansion into Latin America. This analysis starts in the section "Philosophy and Empires" where he examined the distinctive colonial philosophies of North American and Latin America and finds the philosophy imported from England to be mundane and crass compared with the liberating and transcendent philosophy imported from Spain.[13] He then describes a Latin America trapped within a "false situation" after the fall of what he calls the Hispanic Empire with the Spanish-American War of 1898.[14] Ever since then, the glory of the independent, liberating and expansive Hispanic mind has been held in thrall by England's technologically advanced but culturally stunted grip.[15] With this narrative Vasconcelos revealed the deep *Arielismo* of his thought: that is, his commitment to the idea put forth by José Enrique Rodó in his hugely influential 1900 work *Ariel* that the Colossus of the North is like the malformed, materialistic and brutal monster Caliban

from Shakespeare's *Tempest* who promises nothing but pain and misery for Ariel, the air-spirit whom Rodó sees as a metaphor for the far more noble and humane Spanish-American civilization of Latin America.[16]

Vasconcelos diagnosed what he saw as being the essential cruelty and simplicity of the English-speaking mind as an intellectual malady stemming from an infection that was introduced by Francis Bacon, festered by Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer and rendered fatal by the Imperial Pragmatism of John Dewey and John Watson. His assessment of Francis Bacon gives us a vivid sense of his feelings towards Anglo-Saxons:

Bacon was a swindler. His greatest achievement, using ice to slow the putrefaction of dead flesh, has had the dubious distinction of creating the Chicago of meatpackers who furnish the world with edible animal mummies.[17]

Where Spanish imperial philosophy of the colonial era bore a "global spirit [... and] brought to the colonies a municipality of liberty,"

Bacon's philosophy, being less generous but more cautious, set its feet upon the earth and in its development produced the Anglo-Saxon Empire. Uninterested in the other world, it has triumphed by exploiting the present and only appears to be perfect to those who lack the sense to perceive the invisible.[18]

As a philosopher committed to the belief that the only way to understand the rhythm of the universe was through what he called aesthetic monism, he rejected English speaking philosophy's tendency towards empiricism, an orientation that Vasconcelos and many of the other philosophical revolutionaries of early twentieth century Latin America associated with the tyranny of Porfirio Díaz and other regional dictators friendly with the United States.[19] By relying on experience over idealism, Vasconcelos argued that these Baconian philosophers undermined philosophy's very legitimacy and purpose.

The magical power over concepts that is characteristic of philosophical thought as well as its unifying gift cannot be derived from mere practice, which always needs an orientation beyond experience, which is myopic and can barely manage to record the phenomenon and is incapable of producing it. The intuition of unity from which normativity derives its imperative can only come from a superior force; for example, from that state of consciousness that I in my *Metaphysics* define as aesthetic value.[20]

However, Positivism, Pragmatism and other experiential philosophies are not merely wrong for prioritizing experience and ignoring supposedly superior forces: they

are dangerous because they inevitably slide from using experience to justify norms to cutting and stretching norms to fit a procrustean bed of self-serving interests.

Therefore, any philosophy that limits itself to playing the role of the submissive daughter of physical experience must fall, sooner than the classical systems, into a puerile syncretism and, what's worse, a justification of temporal interests. When these sub-philosophical schemes coincide with a period of practical fervor we see in history those monstrosities that are called the national philosophies, racial philosophies and imperial philosophies.[21]

Thus, Vasconcelos sees a direct causal relationship between empiricism, the original intellectual sin of the "english speaking world" – and the racism implicit in British and Yankee views of humanity.[22]

### **Yankee Imperialism and the Imperial Cult of Pragmatism**

Vasconcelos' assessment of Pragmatist philosophy from the United States was no less harsh than his indictment of English speaking philosophy in general. Vasconcelos leveled two primary critiques against Pragmatism. The first critique is the one already discussed, namely that it is doomed to failure since it suffers from an errant point of departure by focusing on experience and rejecting that philosophy is a transcendent faculty for achieving a higher mystical understanding of the universe. The philosophies that Vasconcelos counts as *true* philosophies, ones like classical Greek philosophy, modern rationalism and Christian scholasticism, "are supported by postulates that are eternal, logical and mathematical."[23] Empirically based philosophies like Pragmatism, on the other hand "suffer from a dependence on the appetite, on the interests of their age... Of course it is noted that any such subordinated philosophy is not properly a philosophy at all. Instead, it exists generally as a mere sub-philosophy."[24] While he concedes that Pragmatism might serve as a useful apologetic, it is no real philosophy since "it is no longer an unbiased love of the truth nor even less the clarion call that is the highest orientation of beings.[25]

Pragmatism's supposed subservience to appetite and narrow interests leads to his second, more political, critique, that Pragmatism is a gunship philosophy: it is a tool of domination and facilitator of Yankee imperialism deployed by the social ruling class of the United States. This charge against Pragmatism is essentially a stronger version of the famous critique leveled by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell in 1910 when he argued that because Pragmatism supposedly lacks "any standard of truth other than success" it will drag us back to into a kind of Hobbesian state of nature where "ironclads and Maxim guns must be the ultimate arbiters of truth."[26] Vasconcelos was not saying that Pragmatism merely enables violence *accidentally* as an unrealized corollary of its theory of truth. Instead, he frequently compares it to the Imperial Cult of the ancient Romans that propelled their military and economic expansion with missionary zeal.

Where the Romans had high priests singing hymns to Mars, the Yankees have John Dewey singing about the social value of science.

Before examining his claim that Pragmatism's real purpose is to justify the expansion of US power, it is essential to note a few of Vasconcelos' intellectual habits that might seem odd from the English speaking point of view. First, Vasconcelos' pragmatist cannon includes thinkers that most contemporary scholars would not consider to be Pragmatists, including Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, and John Broadus Watson. Second, he treats as equivalent a number of philosophies and theories that he sees as being products of the Anglo-Saxon mind, so that Positivism, Pragmatism, Behaviorism and Darwinism are all essentially different names for the same nexus of flawed ideas. Third, Vasconcelos does not attempt to explain why Positivism is an example of crude *Anglo-Saxon* thinking when the version of Positivism that dominated Latin American philosophy by the end of the 19th century was based on the works of the *French* philosopher August Comte.[27] Finally, his analysis of Pragmatism is unusual in that it omits works of well recognized figures like C.S. Peirce and William James whose works were well-received by many members of the Athenaeum of Youth and were even examined extensively by the earlier Uruguayan philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira in his 1920 work *Conocimiento y Acción (Knowledge and Action)*. [28]

The only conventional pragmatist to receive attention in Vasconcelos' *Ethics* was John Dewey, and the attention paid was not positive. Painting Dewey as a poor philosopher and a partisan hack he writes,

[w]hat is most troubling is that almost all of the pragmatist schools slide inevitably into a painful subordination to factionalism.... A philosopher like [John] Dewey, for example, who in a more enlightened age would not have been allowed to progress beyond being a teacher now gets to be a philosopher and argue that 'philosophy of the future needs to support itself in the conclusions of the social sciences.' [29] What is this but Comtianism made more alarming by the power behind these pretensions. According to his accomplice [John Broadus] Watson, the behaviorist, 'philosophy of the future depends on the necessary growth of the dominant race,' by which he means the United States." [30]

Vasconcelos finds Dewey's invocation of science to be troubling for several reasons. First, it puts the cart before the horse. Recalling the Platonic and Augustinian suspicion of worldly passions and interests, Vasconcelos sees philosophy as having a purpose higher and nobler than those of the servile sciences like sociology, the natural sciences and economics. Dewey and other social philosophers, therefore, repeated the same folly that made Plato condemn democracy and committed the same sin that Augustine said drove Adam and Even from Eden: they made that which was of a higher order (the spiritual) a slave to that which was of a lower order (the material). This essential error by

the Pragmatists in turn produced a series of social maladies like nationalism and class warfare.

Philosophy's subordination to secondary doctrines, like sociology, has paved the way for the arrival of nationalist philosophies. Doctrines of struggle and the domination of a people start as imperialism and end as schemes to foment class warfare as we see in Marxism, or in the recipes for social welfare that we see in pragmatism. But none of this is philosophy.[31]

Also, by associating pragmatism with Comtianism, Vasconcelos linked Pragmatism with the Porfirian regime of the late 19th Century that used Comtian philosophy to justify its policies.[32]

Hardly the original and revolutionary thinker many North Americans think him to be, Dewey, in Vasconcelos' assessment, is a conscious racist and derivative lackey of Anglo-Saxon ideology.

Dewey himself, the philosopher of industrialism, said in Japan a few years back during a class on western philosophy that "philosophy starts with Bacon in England." This puerile admission is interesting, because it reveals the fidelity of the Anglo-Saxon habit of remaining unaware of developments in the world until the appearance of a more or less disfigured version that has been adapted to their own racial mindset can be re-christened as their own national birthright.[33]

Vasconcelos' second charge, that Pragmatism is a racist and imperialist philosophy, rests on his earlier critique of empiricism. He argues that "[i]f philosophy starts this way, submitting its will to the eventualities of external observation, it is natural that the nations that benefit from the contingencies of the moment will look to justify their selfish appetites." [34] Once philosophy draws its postulates from sociology instead of eternal disciplines like math, religion or aesthetics the result is "the appearance of philosophies that are nationalistic, social, economic, racist and vary according to people, era and geography." [35] Contrasting the inherent racism he sees operating within Pragmatism and other English social philosophies with the universalism he sees in Aristotelian, Christian and Rationalist philosophical systems imported by the Spanish, he argues that "it never occurred to any Aristotelian or Cartesian philosopher that there was one philosophical doctrine for whites and another for blacks. With social philosophies, the converse is the case." [36] Even though philosophers like Aristotle justified slavery, they were more humane than the Pragmatists because,

[w]hile Aristotle denied slaves their right to material liberation he did not deny their human capacity. Spencer, invoking Darwinism, denies their capacity to understand philosophy. Pragmatist doctrine does not merely

justify the existence of a material proletariat, but turns the subject races into moral pariahs.[37]

Reflecting his personal movement away from Revolutionary Communism of his youth and back to Catholicism during the 1930's, Christian messianic themes and metaphors color his denunciations of American imperialism and Pragmatist philosophy. He depicts the United States as just the most recent permutation of a global empire that uses military might and self-serving doctrine to oppress morally superior people. The Romans had their Imperial Cult, the British had social Darwinism and the Yankees have Pragmatism and Behaviorism. At the same time, the people of Latin America are the last in a long line of proud and civilized rebels – the Classical Greeks, the Hebrews, the Christians, the Gauls and the Iberians – who resist the corrosive spiritual degradation of Empire.

Just as the British Empire found their ethical justification in the doctrine of natural selection that sanctioned suppression and the submission of the weak, the present American imperialism advances under the poor doctrine of behaviorism. It does not have a social, esthetic or economic direction; it is only certain that the stronger organism must crush or absorb the weaker.”[38]

The greatest sin of the earlier generation of Latin American thinkers who, in the nineteenth century, turned to science and Positivism for respite from three centuries of stifling scholasticism is that they mistook wolves for sheep and welcomed their oppressors into their hearts, homes and schools.

We cannot forgive our elders for making us kneel before that fetish of Anglo Saxon expansion: the theory of evolution. Now the vanquished must offer up their prayers to the Imperial God. The theory of social evolution is an opiate that dulls the rebellious will of the oppressed, just as pragmatism now paves the way for North American invasion.[39]

The elders cannot be forgiven because the Anglo-Saxon empire that they enabled did not portend misery for the people of Latin America alone. Vasconcelos argued that unless the juggernaut of Yankee empire was stopped, humanity would face a terrifying future where all non-whites would be forced to “work 12 or 14 hour days in mines and fields so that Babylonian palaces can be built in New York, London and Chicago.”[40]

Vasconcelos spends the remaining pages of his chapter on “Philosophy and Empires” discussing how Latin Americans and other oppressed people ought to best liberate themselves from the Anglo-Saxon empire. He urges his reader to look to Biblical history saying that “the Jews gave us the answer two thousand years ago when they told Caesar, ‘we will pay your tribute, but we will not worship you; you are the emperor, but you are not God; you can build the bridge but you cannot make the temple rites.”[41] While the Yankee's gunships are too strong to oppose physically, their crude

philosophies are like the giant's feet of clay from Nebuchadnezzar's dream: a profound weakness upon which the empire rests, and therefore the best site of resistance. Vasconcelos makes this point by contrasting Admiral George Dewey's victory at the Battle of Manila with what Vasconcelos sees as the risible deficiencies of John Dewey's Pragmatism. He writes that "the old Hispanic world could not resist the Dewey who was the admiral that sank our squadrons during his capture of Manila, but we can still laugh at Dewey the philosopher." [42] Latin Americans should laugh at Dewey because "if we are to ever take back what is ours, we must start by rescuing our spirit by denying the cult of empire. That is how we will eventually destroy the empire." [43] Therefore, Vasconcelos' plan is for those suffering under Yankee thrall to wage a spiritual, satirical and intellectual guerilla war against the United States. They should accept and use the material and industrial tools from the North – medicine, communication, transportation and the like—while rejecting their philosophy. In his words, "we will take the Roman's bridge, but not their doctrine and from the Yankee we will take their machine, but not their metaphysics." [44]

Vasconcelos' critique of Yankee imperialism and Pragmatism as its gunship philosophy concludes on a point that anticipates Liberation Theology and other political movements that exemplify what Guillermo Hurtado calls the "authenticity model" of Latin American philosophy. These are the various liberating philosophies that emerged across Latin America in the mid 20th Century that Hurtado says were grounded in the idea that "in order to be authentic, our philosophy should not only passively reflect about the conditions of injustice and oppression imposed by the colonial powers from the outside and by the dominant elites from the inside of our countries, but it must also be an instrument of liberation." [45] We readily see Vasconcelos was an early proponent of this idea when he urges his reader to see that their greatest weapon against imperialism is philosophy, because "[p]hilosophy is better elaborated in the conscience of the oppressed and once verified, it becomes the greatest weapon of liberation." [46] However, if philosophy is to be truly liberating, it must be rooted in the material, cultural and political conditions of the consciousness that articulates it. Therefore, the people of Latin America and the rest of the world need to develop their own, fully authentic philosophy.

The time for accommodating foreign texts and exotic theories is over. It is imperative that we create a Mexican philosophy, an Argentinean philosophy, a Hispanic philosophy as least as a bio-social defense mechanism. Doctrine engenders practice and we cannot aspire to social liberation until we liberate our thought. But this ultimate liberation cannot be reached by simply negating that which is foreign: it will be achieved only by creating that which is our own. We shake off imported philosophy so that we might seek out eternal and universal philosophy. [47]

## Inter-American Philosophy in Light of Vasconcelos' Critiques

This paper hopefully contributes to larger project of integrating the philosophies of the Americas, both for the sake of broader, more pluralistic academic discourse and as a means to facilitating the kind of Inter-American civic discourse necessary for establishing truly democratic communities capable of fostering human flourishing and intelligently resolving our shared problems. Discourses and projects that foster such an Inter-American integration cannot only emphasize points of affinity and commonality, but must also address moments of divergence, like the criticism directed at John Dewey by José Vasconcelos. This essay will conclude by examining some of the ramifications of his critique for Inter-American philosophical integration and by suggesting future action.

First, this essay will refrain from defending Dewey's position against Vasconcelos' critique. It refrains from doing so because the purpose of this paper is to open, not close, a discussion. English speaking philosophers have not yet had full access to the full range of Latin American philosophers. Latin American philosophers have not been widely translated by first-rate translators and consequently have not undergone the sorts of long term assessment that would enable philosophers in the English speaking Americas to have a sufficient grasp on the philosophies of the Latin American tradition. So, while I currently *think* Vasconcelos was uncharitable to Dewey and was largely attacking a Strawman, I *know* I do not know enough of Vasconcelos or his contemporaries or the context from his arguments developed to be able to make that charge. If I were to offer this quick assessment of Vasconcelos, even though it were my level best, I think I might be guilty of trying to *assimilate* this Spanish language philosopher within the dominant frame of English language philosophy. For there to be any hope of integrating these traditions, I and other English language philosophers need to approach this critique charitably.

The first step to intelligently integrating Vasconcelos' critique of Pragmatism from his *Ética* into the larger project of Inter-American philosophical dialogue is therefore to simply make this critique available to English speaking philosophers! The fact that his searing critique of Pragmatism and Dewey written by one of the most influential thinkers of the Americas is still virtually unknown eighty years after it was published underscores, yet again, the lack of adequate academic exchange across the Americas. It also illustrates the need to end the structural prejudice against Spanish as philosophical language by putting it on par with French, German, Latin and Ancient Greek when it comes to things like mandatory language requirements for graduate schools. Editors, publishers and faculty committees need to recognize the enormous unrealized value of Spanish-to-English translation work in philosophy so that Vasconcelos' works, along with those of dozens of other Latin American philosophers, can be made available through English versions by trained translators.

Second, once English language American philosophers have access to Vasconcelos' critiques of pragmatism they can begin to place Vasconcelos' voice in dialogue with the wide range of other thinkers that address related points. To mention

just one relevant comparison, Vasconcelos' critique of Anglo-Saxon civilization as a thoroughly immoral and self-serving phenomenon resonates deeply with the critique of the "White Empire" made by W.E.B. DuBois in his work *The Dusk of Dawn* and many other places. Vasconcelos' charge that Anglo-Saxon philosophy is a poor philosophy and a barely veiled apology for white global domination is echoed by DuBois when he writes, "This is white and European civilization... as a system of culture it is idiotic, addle-brained, unreasoning, topsy-turvy, without precision; and its genius chiefly runs to marvelous contrivances for enslaving the many, and enriching the few, and murdering both." [48]

How might Vasconcelos' critique affect contemporary arguments that pragmatism is either ignorant of or possibly complicit in problems of racism and colonialism? Perhaps Vasconcelos' work will bolster David Kim's argument that "Dewey's work reveals a structured absence of reflection on the expansion of American racial hegemony." [49] Or perhaps it will add weight to Tommy Curry's criticism that "American philosophy, in its present state, [is] unable to recognize the actual themes of racism, much less contribute to race theory." [50] Conversely, would his work problematize or be refuted by scholarship that sees pragmatist philosophy as a powerful resource for solving these very problems? [51] The only way that we can know is for Vasconcelos' critique of pragmatism – along with countless works by other prominent Latin American philosophers like Carlos Vaz Ferreira, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Risieri Frondizi and Eugenio María de Hostos that are variously sympathetic towards and critical of pragmatism— to be fully included in the English speaking philosophical discourse.

A third step to strengthening an Inter-American discourse by including Vasconcelos' unexamined critique would be to offer a full and fair rejoinder on Dewey's behalf. While Vasconcelos' critique might well hold water after a careful scholarly debate, it needs to be directed at a charitable and robust version of pragmatism. Dewey and other pragmatists have careful arguments supporting many of the positions that Vasconcelos criticizes but it is not apparent, at least at first glance, that Vasconcelos' critique includes these full arguments. Would Vasconcelos' claim that pragmatism inevitably gives way to selfishness and crass materialism stand if it charitably addressed Dewey's chapter on "The Construction of the Good" from *The Quest for Certainty* (LW 4: 203-228)? Would the charge that pragmatism is a gunship philosophy be refuted by Dewey's criticism of US imperialism in Mexico in "Imperialism is Easy?" (LW 3: 158-162)? Again, these are the sorts of rich problems and questions that need to be addressed as part of an Inter-American philosophical discourse.

Fourth and finally, philosophers need to address the fact that, from Vasconcelos' point of view, pragmatism and positivism were birds of a feather. This insight could affect an Inter-American discourse in at least one of two ways. First, perhaps Vasconcelos was warranted in treating these schools of thought as more or less equivalent. If this were the case, it would drastically reconfigure the dominant reading of the history of English speaking American philosophy. On the other hand, if Vasconcelos was wrong to treat these as equivalent, and the agonistic history presented by scholars

like Richard Rorty, Cornel West and John McCumber is in fact accurate, then Vasconcelos' potential error inadvertently highlights an important point of misunderstanding between the two philosophical Americas.[52] In short, it becomes important for English speaking American pragmatists to communicate to Spanish speaking philosophers that they don't get on with positivism any better than Vasconcelos did! Perhaps Hurtado's hoped-for communion of North American pragmatism and Latin American ratiovitalist philosophy can be ushered in by demonstrating that both schools of thought have had their problems with positivism.[53]

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## Notes

[1] Gregory F. Pappas, "The Latino Character of American Pragmatism" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 34.1 (1998), Gregory F. Pappas, *Pragmatism in the Americas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) Guillermo Hurtado, "Two Models of Latin American Philosophy," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20.3 (2006) pp. 204-213, Eduardo Mendieta, *Latin American Philosophy*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), Risieri Frondizi, "On the Unity of the Philosophies of the Two Americas." *The Review of Metaphysics*. 4.4 (1951).

[2] Jorge J.E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "General Introduction," *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 18.

[3] Linda Martín Alcoff, "Alien and Alienated" in *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy*, George Yance, ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 34.

[4] Greg Gradin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

[5] Enrique Krauze, *The Redeemers* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 53.

[6] Jane Duran, "Vasconcelos, Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Mexico" in "Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy." *American Philosophical Association Newsletters* 01.1 (2001): 82-84.

[7] Samuel Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, Peter Earle, trans. ([1934] Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 86.

[8] Jorge J.E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "General Introduction," *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 17.

[9] For an excellent account of Vasconcelos intellectual evolution see Enrique Krauze, *The Redeemers* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), pp49-86.

[10] Guillermo Hurtado, "El diálogo filosófico interamericano como un diálogo para la democracia," *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* (October 2010) 1:1, p13.

[11] Vasconcelos, José, and Didier T. Jaén. *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, 10.

[12] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 2nd Ed, 1939), 26. All translations of this work in this essay are by the essay's author.

[13] Vasconcelos uses the terms "Anglo-Saxon" and "English" to include all inhabitants of the British Isles and their descendants and does not bother to distinguish them from people whose ancestors were not Anglo-Saxon, but Celtic. Among the ranks of Anglo-Saxons imperialists he even includes the Irish socialist writer Bernard Shaw, whom he derides as a clown and an imperial apologist, (*Ética*, 25).

[14] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 15.

[15] Readers from the United States and England are likely to find curious Vasconcelos's penchant for speaking of England and the United States as a single entity.

[16] José Enrique Rodó, Ariel, F.J. Simpson, trans. (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co, 1922), 64.

[17] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 15.

[18] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 16.

[19] Jorge J.E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "General Introduction," *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 268.

[20] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 17.

[21] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 17.

[22] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 24.

[23] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 18.

[24] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 16.

[25] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 17.

[26] Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays* ([1910] New York: Routledge, 2009), 109.

[27] Stephen Calogero, "Why Positivism Failed in Latin America," *Inter-American Journal Of Philosophy*, 3.1 (2012), 34-58.

[28] Carlos Vaz Ferreira, *Conocimiento y acción*, (Montevideo: El Siglo Ilustrado, 1920).

[29] Vasconcelos makes a parenthetical note that this Dewey quote comes from "an article in the *New York Times* published the last Sunday in July of 1930, but there is no such article by John Dewey on or even near that date.

[30] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 20.

[31] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 22.

[32] Krauze, *Redeemers*, 54.

[33] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 22.

[34] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 19.

[35] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 18.

[36] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 18.

- [37] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 18.
- [38] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 21
- [39] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 24.
- [40] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 27.
- [41] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 27.
- [42] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 30.
- [43] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 28.
- [44] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 29.
- [45] Guillermo Hurtado, "Two Models of Latin American Philosophy," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20.3 (2006), 208.
- [46] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 30.
- [47] Vasconcelos, *Ética*, 31.
- [48] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Dusk of Dawn*, ([1940] New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 143.
- [49] David H. Kim, "The Unexamined Frontier: Dewey, Pragmatism and America Enlarged," in *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire*, Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 47.
- [50] Tommy Curry, "Concerning the Underspecialization of Race Theory in American Philosophy: How the Exclusion of Black Sources Affects the Field," *The Pluralist* 5.1 (Spring 2010), 58.
- [51] Just a few works that argue for pragmatism's usefulness in addressing problems of racism and colonialism include Paul C. Taylor, "Pragmatism and Race," in *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race*, Bill Lawson and Donald Koch, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 162-176; Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Guillermo Hurtado, *Mexico sin sentido*, (Mexico DF: Siglo XXI Editores, 2011); Shannon Sullivan, *The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
- [52] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, ([1979] Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch*, (Evanston Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2001).
- [53] Guillermo Hurtado, "Two Models of Latin American Philosophy," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20.3 (2006): 212.