

Latin American Philosophy

Phil 3724

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Course Description: What is “Latin America”? What does it mean to be “Latin American”? What is Latin American philosophy? Can philosophy be labeled culturally or ethnically as “Latin American”? What is the function of philosophy in Latin America? These are our questions for study in this course.

To answer them, we will study philosophy as being closely tied to the history of Latin America. Accordingly, we will read philosophy from pre-Columbian cultures, as well as from the colonial, independent, and contemporary periods in Latin American history.

For example, the war of conquest and the colonization of the Americas by Spain and Portugal led to a series of questions that were debated by Iberian philosophers: What is a human being? What are the characters that make human beings rational and moral? Are all human beings rational and moral? Can irrational or immoral people be conquered for their own good? When is war justified?

Prior to the conquest, in turn, various Native American cultures—such as the Mayans and Nahuas—had developed their own philosophical views about human beings, our nature, and our purpose in the universe. And after the conquest, they had to revisit their worldviews to explain the experience of being conquered and colonized.

When Latin American nations won independence from Spain and Portugal, they had to reinterpret, and even reinvent, their own cultural identity. What does it mean to Spanish-, Iberian-, and Latin-American? Are there distinctive characteristics to demarcate which peoples and cultures fall under these labels? Are cultural identities given or constructed?

As we study these debates, we will read texts from a variety of philosophical traditions, including scholasticism, positivism, existentialism, pragmatism, feminism, and philosophy of liberation. All philosophical readings will be placed in historical context.

At the end of the course students will have a general understanding of what have been the central philosophical concerns in Latin American history and about what is distinctive and what is universal about Latin American philosophy.