

## INTRODUCTION

# PHILOSOPHY AND CRITICISM

## CONVERGENCES AND DISJUNCTIONS

The connections between philosophy and criticism are both intimate and undoubtedly problematic. There are differences, interdependencies, and conflicts that mark the relationships between both domains of intellectual reflection that many see as complementary or even inherent. These two practices exist in a competitive relation to one another, and they both involve high levels of discernment and analysis. They both presuppose methods developed on the basis of principles that historically vary from culture to culture and from author to author. Philosophy and criticism also both emerge from conceptual matrices, categories, and terminologies whose meaning is not always universally accepted. In general terms, while philosophy's task is more speculative and universal, more abstract and conceptual, criticism is generally viewed as an activity applied to concrete themes, texts, or practices, resulting in incisive conclusions or judgments. Criticism is understood to be oriented toward evaluation that is more or less balanced by specific aspects related to the construction of the discursive edifice itself, as well as to its contributions to particular topics, even though the objectivity of opinion is always up for debate. It is generally accepted that the subjectivity and ideology of the critic can never be completely separated from the intellectual practice of criticism.

The very definitions of philosophy and criticism have varied over the centuries, rearticulating their internal fields and their relations with other domains of thought and intellectual action. From the very way in which the borders of the spaces of ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology have been historically redefined, the relation of philosophical thought to other disciplines has continued to broaden and hybridize, primarily in relation to historical and scientific knowledge, technology, art, religion, and politics.

The theme of truth is recognized as one of the central concerns of philosophy, although the diverse schools of thought and disciplinary orientations have different approaches to this question, which is located at the very heart of metaphysics, logic, and ethics. In each of these fields of reflection, truth is defined differently, and the ways of approaching it vary substantially. The search for "truth" and the analysis of its innumerable variants reveal both the processes related to the construction of subjectivity, and the emergence of micronarratives that represent multiple versions of the social. In the field of criticism, the process is different, favoring concrete approaches—specific ideas, works, or practices—designed to mobilize thought and motivate forms of social action related to questions of truthfulness and falsehood.<sup>1</sup>

Understood as an "auxiliary" activity to philosophy, criticism has served since Antiquity as a (self-)reflexive, exploratory practice designed to clarify arguments, analyze conclusions, and make sense of the contributions of determinate discourses. Subsequently, philosophy and criticism have frequently become indistinguishable. For Immanuel Kant, both fields are aligned in the concept of "critical philosophy," which denotes the practice of investigating the foundations and limits of reason applied both to scientific knowledge and to the moral realm. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Critique of Judgment* (1790), it is assumed that the very parameters of rational action, including its limits and specificities, should be investigated. From Kant's perspective, the dogmatic practice of reason as well as the diverse forms of

irrationalism constitute deviations and anomalies of understanding in the same way that empiricism causes overestimations of sensory knowledge to the detriment of rational synthesis. Since the Enlightenment, criticism has thus appeared as a practice that is inherent to philosophy insofar as it is focused on discerning the mechanisms of language and reason, attempting to clear discourse of fallacies and excesses, and expurgating preconceived ideas that have not been submitted to conclusive examination. Rhetoric and speech constitute basic tools for transmitting not only perceptions and evaluations of the real but also for persuasion, demagoguery, and the creation of consensus. Hence, politics has close ties to hermeneutics and to the implementation of social control. For Kant, knowledge is oriented toward two conceptual fields: nature and freedom. Therefore, in philosophy, as an activity directed toward those domains, theory and practice are the paths along which it is possible to think experience as a combination of reflection and praxis, thought and action.

As a practice of freedom, the unfolding of reason brought about by the Enlightenment represents the conquest of what were at the time new forms of scientific, humanistic, political, and social knowledge. Supposedly, rational knowledge, which allows for access to undeniable truths, crosses the oceanic (and in this sense almost sublime) space between cultures, languages, classes, and races. However, this universalism constitutes one of the most dangerous traps of modern reason, as it extends categories, values, and moral, political, and economic principles without restrictions, across cultures, classes, and temporalities. This totalizing program conceives the social as an undifferentiated construct that imposes the episteme of power: in so doing, it sanctions and naturalizes the same inequalities that the very notion of universality seems to reject.

In Karl Marx's philosophical works, the concept of criticism became closely connected with the study of social conflicts and the analysis of history, particularly in the areas of law, economics, and politics, directions which materialized in fundamental works such as *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843) and *A Contribution to the Critique of*

*Political Economy* (1859). Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, written in 1845 and posthumously published in 1888, united the concept of criticism with that of social transformation. No longer would the task simply be that of critically analyzing capitalism in its different historical manifestations but rather of turning the critical and theoretical enterprise into a form of revolutionary praxis in which a material knowledge of history and the will of the oppressed classes would converge, with the goal of achieving radical economic, social, and political change. Critical analysis of history and of capitalist production, the deconstruction of the system, and the restructuring of the social through economic and political transformation constitute key moments of Marx's perspective on the process of emancipation in the late nineteenth century. The process of dismantling bourgeois society and the transformation of capitalist modernity is conceived of as a development that will lead to new totalizations. Criticism, as theoretical practice of ethical and political projection, is thus inseparable from the methodology used for the implementation of social change, and it is particularly connected to the idea that a scientific knowledge of history and social struggles is of the utmost importance. Thought, critique, and historicity thus constitute the fundamental core of revolutionary reason; history and the dialectic are understood as inseparable aspects of human development. Up to this point, European critical discourse (several primary tendencies of which can be traced back to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy) had defined criticism as a philosophical category and as an essential component of the knowledge of the real. However, this same delimitation of the practice of criticism can be interrogated and transformed insofar as it takes place in specific cultures and societies, as well as under particular conditions of cultural production. The world is conceived, under capitalism, as a totality that operates according to universal laws. Nevertheless, the very development of the capitalist system requires attention to nuances, relativizations, and innovations that allow for understanding other social realities from different perspectives that reveal their own cultural and historical specificity. The question of universalization thus manifests as a contentious

point in the field of philosophy and in other analyses of non-European social formations that aspire to a non-Eurocentric understanding of their conditions of existence and of their possibilities for transformative action.

From this point of view, universalization entails global imposition by the privileged center of established knowledges based on dominant perspectives and Eurocentric paradigms. These visions and versions constitute attempts to define *the real* by assimilating some realities to hegemonic categories and models. This category of the real encompasses such vast and varied aspects as the relation between the human being and nature, the position of *being* with respect to spatiotemporal coordinates, the topics of existence and death, interrogations of values, power, history, and time, the value of technology, and many other topics that have been the focus of philosophical reflection since Antiquity. Therefore, in this unequal process of knowledge, dominated cultures are destined to appropriate grand theoretical models through practices that are always deemed incomplete or imperfect with respect to the paradigms of knowledge, interpretation, and representation which were developed in and for other cultural realities.<sup>2</sup>

These dynamics are marked by constant processes of negotiation in which the supremacy of determinate systems of thought are constantly challenged by other visions that dispute the value of truth and the totalizing aims of hegemonic knowledge, as well as their epistemological conclusions and proposals. Appropriation, recycling, adaptation of and/or resistance to certain models of thought, and the reemergence of displaced concepts and visions that return to the philosophical debate are characteristic elements of philosophy and criticism's field of struggle.

Although there have been many advances in the process of opening up and democratizing the polemical space of knowledge, inequalities between subjects and cultural actors undeniably continue to exist around the globe. In social contexts that developed out of the historical experience of colonialism, these distributions of knowledge (of truth, of the right to cultivate different systems of knowledge, interpretation, and represen-

tation, and of redefining the very meaning of the human) constitute some of the more important spaces of contention in which dominant concepts and subalternized (and in many cases, invisibilized) visions confront one another. The disciplining and regulation of the processes of knowledge production are in effect very effective weapons of domination and collective control. Hence, the theme of philosophy in postcolonial cultures has a particularly pointed and always polemical and highly politicized meaning. In these contexts, philosophy often problematizes the rights of nature, as well as the emancipatory role of intellectual knowledge as an alternative to imperial reason. The topic of the distribution and hierarchization of knowledges is also closely linked to debates on the human (political, social, cultural) condition of the subject for whom knowledge, recovery of knowledge, and self-knowledge are aspects of an unstable process of cognition and socialization.

In the study of these questions, philosophical topics are inextricably linked to historical variations. The moments that signal the fundamental stages of Latin American history since 1492 (variously identified as "discovery," conquest, colonization, the viceregal period, independence, the founding of nations, modernization) are relevant for philosophical understanding and historicization because they highlight instances of significant change in the development of cultural production and in the shaping of collective imaginaries. Just as these moments of change denote fundamental turns and ruptures in the processes of the production and transmission of knowledge, the cultural and philosophical history of Latin America is also characterized by continuities and overlaps between the systems of knowledge, methodologies, categories, and thematics, suggesting a rhizomatic rather than linear development.

The reception of European and Anglo-Saxon thought, the processes of appropriation and re-signification of its models of thought, as well as the diverse modalities of epistemic dependence and the phenomena of cultural integration and transculturation began with the first contact between civilizations and continues through today. In fact, one of the

primary challenges for the configuration of Latin American philosophical thought has to do with the survival and permanent regeneration of indigenous and Afro-diasporic worldviews which configure alternative currents of knowledge and reflection. Based in their own categories and associated beliefs about nature, as well as in recognition of their subaltern position, these worldviews are an essential part of the processes of cultural exchange and epistemic cross-pollination that have taken place in the Americas for centuries. The processes of syncretism, transculturation, and hybridization have resulted in reciprocal transformations and influences that affect different elements of cultural exchange.<sup>3</sup> The development of philosophy is thus defined in Latin America as a constant (unequal, asymmetrical) process of tense negotiations between the forms imposed by colonialism and modernity and the survival of indigenous conceptual systems and *criollo* elaborations, which emerged as an amalgamation of European and vernacular elements. Such combination of indigenous perspectives (undoubtedly affected by the imposition of power relations) and canonical thought, is a process determined by the ethno-cultural preponderance of the dominant sectors that have disseminated Western models of thought since the initial stages of colonial rule.<sup>4</sup>

I am less interested here in returning to well-known debates about the emergence or even the possibilities of existence of an independent philosophical thought in Latin America than I am in showing that the fundamental definitions that orient these discussions are not always submitted to exhaustive analysis, nor are they re-signified according to the conditions of cultural production in the Americas or to the characteristics of the subject reflected in the region.<sup>5</sup> To speak of philosophy in postcolonial societies without redefining, from the perspectives of these cultures, what is to be understood by it, is to try to escape a rhetorical circle that has no exit. To use established or highly regarded definitions or paradigms to verify whether or not Latin American thought adapts to its features is a useless, unnecessary, and obsolete practice. The specificity of cultures entails diverse and even antagonistic crystallizations of meaning,

as well as very different forms of social consciousness and approaches to the larger themes of existence, being, ethics, and politics.<sup>6</sup>

In a multicultural and multilingual space like the Americas, philosophical reflection can only manifest as a hybrid (fluid, impure) practice related to the profound and undeniable cultural heterogeneity that constitutes it. This reflexive practice defines itself as a system in which philosophizing reveals the subjectivities that were affected by the initial trauma of the Conquest and by the perpetuation of structures of domination that, as historical wounds that remain open, still impact Latin American societies. This social body, first victimized in the colonial era by slavery, resource extraction, and genocide, was later to suffer the effects of modern imperialism, dependency, depredation of natural resources, and capitalist exploitation. The problems endemic to *criollo* domination were thus perpetuated in the new republics, prolonging the colonial structures of discrimination, authoritarianism, and inequality. Therefore, achieving the levels of abstraction and metaphysical, ontological, and ethical speculation that seem to be required by the classical definition of philosophy appear to be neither possible nor desirable, at least in the colonial era or during the struggles for independence, when critical thought appeared to a large extent as a fragmentary exercise, always determined by empirical conditions. Philosophical thought was thus disseminated in chronicles, political speeches, essays, sermons, literary works, treatises, and manuals in which *lo americano* stands out—sometimes in an extremely essentialized way—as a concrete topic that challenged Old World models of knowledge and representation.<sup>7</sup>

It was in the essay as a hybrid and open genre in which many of these tendencies in Latin American thought first manifested. Both in colonial texts and oratory and in the manuals of conduct that were common in the period of the foundation and consolidation of nations, just as in journalism, opinions were expressed on themes of common interest, such as the organization of society, issues related to social order, political change, and the like. With the emergence of national



projects, the nation, citizenship, social participation, the role of women and ethnic minorities, the advancement of modernity, the importance of science, technology, education, and other such topics became areas of philosophical speculation and public debate.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in philosophical investigations, many authors tend to include the essay as evidence of speculative and humanistic reflection in Latin America.<sup>9</sup> If this canonical disposition to a large extent dissolves the borders between essay writing and philosophy, it also puts into question the limits and characteristics of such cultural practices in postcolonial societies.<sup>10</sup>

The objective of this book is not to recognize once again the sources of pre-Hispanic Amerindian or Afro-Hispanic thought in different regions and historical moments—a task that other critics have already accomplished admirably. Nor does this book attempt to return to the debates around the existence of a *properly* Latin American philosophy—a question that has also been thoroughly addressed. Rather, I intend here to offer timely contributions to the process of conceptualizing a Latin American specificity and its forms of integration in larger contexts, both on the level of thought and the level of political and social praxis.

Among other topics, the question of the decolonization of thought informs many of the analyses collected here. What has interested me above all is to offer some reflections that might serve as conceptual intersections in which philosophy and criticism mutually question one another in the context of a cultural space that has moved beyond disciplinary compartmentalizations and resulted in convergences and articulations that would have been unthinkable at other stages of Western thought.<sup>11</sup> This does not in any way mean that we have moved beyond the inequalities, marginalization, or invisibilization of nondominant cultures, epistemes, and forms of life and representation. These asymmetries persist, rearticulated and to a large extent intensified by the processes of globalization that have promoted new forms of centralization, hegemony, and marginalization for which effective responses have not yet been elaborated. However, it is precisely in the context of these problematics in

which the local, the regional, the national, and the transnational continue to be re-signified and in which emancipatory processes are redefining their agendas, that it is particularly important to revisit the contested topic of Euro/Anglocentrism and the debates on the positions that should be considered representative of these traditions.

The tensions between "central" and "peripheral" knowledge are undeniable. They are inherent to a history of domination and resistance that has required both to integrate subordinated epistemes and to struggle for the recognition of nondominant perspectives. For some critics, the reaffirmation of the specificity of particular agendas was obscured or disqualified in many cases by the cultural and political power of hegemonic systems. Thus, many arguments have been developed in favor of the need to prevent peripheral thought from contamination by hegemonic visions. This position constitutes an attempt to interrupt—or at least, to *intervene* in—the process of the reproduction of established knowledges that are disseminated and imposed on different levels, based on the privilege of having originated in "powerful" cultures. That being said, without denying that within these systems of thought there circulates a partial and even ideological (in the sense of false consciousness) version of the place of *lo americano* and of the thought produced in the Americas from the discovery of the New World through the present, I believe that, rather than removing those legacies from intellectual exchange, such traditions should be disseminated and debated. This position entails a firm rejection of any form of self-marginalization, as well as the emphatic defense of the right to dialogue, dissensus, and polemic. It is a matter of reaffirming the right to the critical appropriation of all knowledge and, whenever necessary, an epistemological resistance to exclusion. This critical engagement can also contribute to familiarizing the postcolonial subject with the systems of thought that perpetuate its submission. According to the Bolivian philosopher Juan José Bautista Segales:

Lo primero que hay que hacer es apropiarse del modo más sustancioso posible del lenguaje de la dominación. Uno tiene que cono-

cerlo a fondo, solamente conociendo a fondo uno puede mostrar la contradicción en la que este tipo de lenguaje cae y puede mostrar la pertinencia de lo nuevo.... no basta con partir de lo propio: si uno parte de lo propio se torna ininteligible; la única forma que eso sea inteligible es poniéndolo en diálogo con los grandes maestros y pensadores. ("Uno tiene que tener claro..." 2)

What is essential in the questions that have been presented thus far is the multifaceted notion of the subject, whose philosophical, ideological, and political avatars are part of a significant number of Latin American debates. The Other, the victim, the enemy, the people, the dominator, and the subaltern are some of the names by which the notion of the subject is known. The main line of inquiry that runs through the question of the subject in Latin America has to do with the historical and cultural conditions of society that, forming part of the Western, Christian world (as Enrique Dussel emphasizes in his work) maintain a position of alterity with respect to these civilizing domains. This position is often conceptualized in terms of foreignness, belligerence, or antagonism. To a large extent, this notion of alterity is associated with the continuity of non-Western traditions, beliefs, and imaginaries. These traditions, which were subject to the traumatic experience of colonialism, survived to a great extent as an integral part of modernity, although they represent dissident visions that impact the collective construction of identity and otherness.<sup>12</sup> In this case, it is not through synthesis, which supersedes antagonisms, that it becomes possible to approach the ethical dimension of history. In this respect, Enrique Dussel has proposed other forms of perceiving the condition of the subject and its forms of social, affective, and intellectual connections to the project of modernity.

As several critics have already noted, Dussel's work, largely a critique of ontology, is oriented toward the reformulation of a metaphysics of alterity, an orientation that is based in his philosophical, ethical, and anthropological vision of analectics. As an alternative to and a correction of the dialectical method (which, according to Dussel, is "the path that materializes within totality itself"), analectics begins from the Other as

that which is beyond totality. In this sense, it constitutes a turn toward the Other, which, perceived anthropologically and politically, is seen as the subject whom the task of philosophy is meant to address. In Dussel's words, "lo decimos sincera y simplemente: el rostro del pobre indio dominado, del mestizo oprimido, del pueblo latinoamericano, es el 'tema' de la filosofía latinoamericana" (qtd. in Barón del Pópolo et al. 154).

These processes of redefining and reshaping the category of the subject emerge from and strengthen attempts to reaffirm the localization and role of philosophy and ethics in postcolonial societies, where the theme of justice is essential to the notion of being. For Franz Hinkelammert, for example, the role of the human being as subject develops precisely out of its antagonistic relationship to the system that seeks its annihilation. It is this resistance to the destruction and negation of its intrinsic humanity that converts the human being into a subject who struggles for control of its own history, becoming a part of the larger social system that contains it, and which it helps shape and define.

In turn, Dussel studies the theme of the exteriority of the subject which, based precisely on this distance of the subject from the oppressive system, can develop liberatory actions that could radically change the existing "order" and point to alternative forms of existence and human development. In this sense, Santiago Castro-Gómez has recently turned to the theme of universalism to examine the sovereign and transcendent forms of particularism. One wonders if it is possible to think identities as pure, almost monadic particularities, or if instead one should retain a relational and differential dimension that allows for considering identities in larger contexts that inscribe and give meaning to their singularity.<sup>13</sup> All of these proposals demonstrate that the condition of the subject is revealed more and more as a relational and unstable category: the subject is defined by interhuman and intercultural relations and by the connections these relations establish with power and nature. Therefore, the notion of the subject is not inevitably based in an abstract universalism but rather is necessarily linked to historical, social, and political instances

that crystallize, strengthen, and materialize universalism. The immanence of subjectivity is thus constitutive of the transcendent dimension in the same way that both immanence and transcendence shape the mutually conditioning and inseparable aspects of the process of the empirical subject's construction and re-signification.<sup>14</sup>

In turn, these directions in thought point to different paths—to the analysis and redefinition of the very meaning of existence, as well as to the study of the relation between life and the environment. They are also conducive to the examination of the relations between life, power, and the body, and to the study of the interconnections between humanity and technology, to mention just a few of the more salient issues at stake. Philosophy has a fundamental role in the analysis of culture, and in the articulation of other disciplinary approaches, such as those of archeology and history. Conceived of in this way, philosophy presents multiple integrated and complementary approaches to the questions of being, life, time, and nature, and to problems related to sensorial, intellectual, and affective knowledge.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, but especially since the fall of the Soviet Union, Western cultures have undergone a series of transformations that have stimulated the production and dissemination of philosophy, in connection with a series of fields, from the interpretation of culture (visual arts, literature, urban space, commodified flows of symbolic goods, migration, and technology) to contemporary politics and economics, all as a consequence of the transformations of capitalism and the processes of globalization. There is an immense repertoire of themes and approaches related to the representation of subjectivity, and its connections to violence, as well as to the transformative relations between local, regional, national, and global dimensions. This demonstrates that the very notions of life, death, and humanity have changed in radical and irreversible ways in relation to transformations in social structures like the family, free time, identity, public/private space, and nationalism. Consequently, many aspects of the critical and philosophical agendas

of the past have been revised, and many others eventually emerged as new processes challenges for the understanding of current forms of collective subjectivity.

To give one example, the problem of identity has changed profoundly, abandoning the statist essentialism that it presented in the context of national projects. At the current stage of its development, the study of the cultural, institutional, and social politics dominates the processes of social recognition. Identity politics demonstrate that the relationship between the individual and power is linked to multiple unstable forms of institutional affiliation, personal and community interrelations, engagement with the environment, and so on. This does not forestall the continuation of philosophical debates on the question of social being, such as Charles Taylor's classic and exhaustive book *Sources of the Self* (1989), in which the author explores from an Augustinian perspective the construction of modern identity. Additionally, new studies incorporate questions that take into consideration aspects specifically related to social changes in recent decades.<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, along with the problem of identity, the question of human rights constitutes one of the most important axes of Latin American thought, beginning with the debates between Bartolomé de las Casas and Ginés de Sepúlveda, which constituted the tip of an enormous iceberg with far-reaching political and theological connotations. Since the viceregal era, the relations between colonialism, doctrine, race, life, and labor have given rise to multiple ideological, political, and religious confrontations in a variety of historical contexts.<sup>16</sup> Both identity and human rights, reconfigured in the context of globalization, are closely connected to emancipatory agendas with different characteristics and objectives. The very notions of subject and subjectivity have varied over the years, expanding and connecting in different ways to diverse materializations of cultural and political power. Questions of race, gender, and class give shape to the system of domination that, with some variations, has been passed down from colonial society to the present

day. The battles waged across Latin America, with the objectives of pushing the limits of the majority's political and social participation and modifying the law and (in general) collective imaginaries in order to achieve greater representation of minority groups, could not help but produce a profound reflection on human nature, power relations, the role of the state, the importance of humanistic knowledges, the impact of European epistemologies, and the content and methods of education. Philosophy and criticism have worked in tandem in such scenarios.

In the case of Latin America, the issues of economic, political, and social inequality and the consequent asymmetry of subjects, epistemic spaces, collective projects, imaginaries, and spheres of social participation are so acute that they have permanently marked all processes of the production and dissemination of knowledge, including philosophy and criticism. Replicating the methods practiced in the old metropole, the *criollo* Republic has operated on the basis of the exclusion, negation, and denigration of the Other. This can explain the fact that this area of study has recently begun to define itself around the concept of the "epistemology of ignorance" (Martín Alcoff). In this sense, it involves the study not only of the actual limits of knowledge and the causes that restrict or prohibit its elaboration and dissemination, but also of the strategies that produce and perpetuate ignorance as a form of control of collective imaginaries. The "oblivion," negation, displacement, incomprehension, or "disappearance" of the Other functions as a resource for the legitimization of politics, habits, and regimens of exploitation and collective control. We could say that *criollo* domination has systematically supported itself since the colonial era on the transmission of partial discourses and forms of knowledge that primarily represent elite interests, strategically exercising the power to marginalize and invisibilize the Other, not only within Latin American national or regional contexts but also in relation to the totality of cultures. This domination explicitly promotes the idea that European, and later Anglo-Saxon, centrality is "natural" and that its knowledges, values, and principles are endowed with universal validity and legitimacy, a privilege that *criollo* culture, as the dominant, mediating

segment of Latin American society, has inherited through the formation and consolidation of nation states.

The epistemology of knowledges, such as it is presented by Linda Martín Alcoff, for example, is also related to the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, for whom the concepts of the “epistemology of absence” and “epistemicide” denote the same situation of systematic (and systemic) exclusion of nondominant forms of knowing, conceptualizing, and representing the world. This type of focus demonstrates a critical sensibility that does not depend (at least not exclusively) on the observer’s geocultural or institutional location but rather on forms of social consciousness and on identification with or against struggles, subjects, and agendas that deserve to have a primary position in the production and global dissemination of knowledge. Undoubtedly, the recognition of such subjects as producers and not only as consumers or recyclers of knowledge shakes the foundations of Western rationality, which was traditionally built on the monopolization of truth and the alibi of universalism. At the same time, this recognition “contaminates” discourse—whether critical, philosophical, political, or disciplinary—with categories, mixtures, borrowings, and ideological, emotional, and political enclaves that alter established protocols and oblige radical revisions of analytical methods, fundamental principles, objectives, and presuppositions. Today, the field of critical philosophy must confront the challenges that make up the agendas brought about by globalization, technological advances, religious resurgences, and the presence of the Other in a world that resists homogenizing totalization yet also demands unforeseen but indispensable forms of integration and mutual (re)cognition in a regime that claimed to be based on the principles of equality and justice.

Addressing these questions, the essays collected in the present book, written at different points in time, were all conceived of as contributions to specific debates on topics related to the field of cultural criticism. They cover such issues as decolonization, the revalorization of the local in the face of the destructive dimension of the global, the notions of citizenship,



power, memory, and others. By their very nature, the authors, texts, and problems considered here are inscribed in the field of philosophy, which, as with other branches of knowledge, has expanded beyond its traditional parameters, permeating cultural and political reflection on all levels. Today it is impossible to separate literary criticism from cultural criticism, philosophy from criticism, criticism from politics—all extremely broad fields that are shaped by transdisciplinary reflections on power and institutions and preoccupied by ethical, economic, ideological, and social questions. With the intention of addressing these topics, the essays that follow present a critical approach that productively converges with European philosophy and the contentious problematic of Latin America. In them I have attempted to analyze from the perspective of Latin American thought the contributions of different authors on various themes that include questions related to colonialism and national consolidation as well as broader philosophical themes like humanism, modernity, melancholia, affect, biopolitics, and precariousness. In all these texts, my approach has been *critical* in the sense that the discourses of European thinkers have been submitted to analyses that explore the way in which their ideas illuminate or obscure specific areas that are of particular concern to intellectual practice in postcolonial societies, which continue to be affected by the perpetuation of colonial domination, the persistence of traditional and new modalities of dependence, and the implementation of various forms of cultural marginalization and invisibilization.

Beginning with this introduction, which discusses several of the primary themes covered in the essays that follow, this book has been organized in two different yet complementary parts. The first, titled “Biopower, Coloniality, and Emancipation in Latin America,” includes studies of authors and questions from Latin American contexts in dialogue with some of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. These texts analyze the contributions of these authors to debates on such topics as the problems of colonialism and coloniality, the critique of modernity, and violence. Discussions of these issues give rise to other

questions linked to the notions of freedom, social change, post/trans/modernity, biopolitics, and other topics that are particularly relevant for interpreting the processes of national formation and modernization and for understanding the developments that have taken place in the decades following the end of the Cold War. These analyses focus on central figures of Latin American thought, beginning with the work of José Carlos Mariátegui, whose heterodox Marxism constitutes the first and most articulate alternative to liberalism in Latin America. Beginning by reestablishing the agenda of social, economic, and political problems in the Andean region and through a careful analysis of the structure of power since the colonial era, his focus allows him to go beyond the ideological horizons of *criollo* nationalism—a reality fractured and overrun by conflicts that could not be addressed by earlier perspectives. In contentious conversation with both populism and the center-left politics of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana [American Popular Revolutionary Alliance], Mariátegui connects the proposals of internationalism and a critical reading of traditions dating back to the Inca Empire to questions of the nation and the national. Philosophy and criticism mutually assist and challenge one another in Mariátegui's thought, which is based in a reading of Marx alongside Antonio Gramsci, Georges Sorel, and others, always with an eye toward the specificity and cultural multiplicity of Latin America.

In a complementary way, the work of Enrique Dussel opens another, rather different approach to articulating theory and praxis, thereby offering alternatives for philosophical reflection in the fields of ethics and politics. Through an epistemological analysis that delves into Western history, he proposes a radical rereading of the position occupied by European cultures since Antiquity and the role this played in the discovery of the New World and in the processes of capitalist consolidation that have taken place around the world since the sixteenth century. Analyzing this historical event as the cause of the re-centering of Europe, Dussel sees the "discovery" of the Americas as that which, as the driving force behind modernity, constitutes its exterior, the space of the Other that makes

possible the consolidation of European culture as the “natural” center of history and knowledge. This perspective is essential for analyzing the imaginaries of Latin American otherness and for the construction of a subjectivity that has been represented in multiple figures: the colonized, the victim, the dispossessed, the subaltern. These representations are objects of analysis and criticism, since they themselves emerge from struggles for power, conflicts between opposing systems of domination, and diverse ideas about the place occupied by *lo americano* in the broad philosophical and discursive space of Occidentalism.

If Dussel’s work is essential for the study of the origins and developments of modernity, the Ecuadorian-Mexican philosopher Bolívar Echeverría’s work constitutes another landmark of Latin American criticism with regard to multiple themes connected to the relationship between Europe, America, and the United States. His works engage with questions of identity, *mestizaje*, violence, whiteness [*blanquitud*], and other issues, but they also offer, like Dussel’s, a meticulous and illuminating rereading of Marx’s writings, which not only adds fundamental analyses to the study of Marxist ideas but also incorporates a Latin American perspective as an original and specific expression of critical thought. This reflection takes up the notion of the subject through an articulation between European thought and the postcolonial condition of Latin America on the terrain of philosophy and politics. Strongly influenced by the Frankfurt School and particularly by the work of Walter Benjamin, Echeverría’s work offers a penetrating analysis of the iconic German thinker, who has had an enormous influence on multiple disciplines. In fact, Benjamin’s incisive criticism has impacted the study of modernity, art, memory, and literature, and helped to develop rigorous and imaginative approaches to understanding multiple ideological, philosophical, political, and social issues in Latin America. Above all, it presents an alternative method for the reading of history, which pays particular attention to everydayness, “minor” histories, and popular symbolic strategies. These materials offer versions that complement, and in many cases refute, official history. Centered on interpretation by and for dominant social groups, official

history is indifferent to the dynamics of everyday life, the world of images, and the symbolic system that constitutes the language of modernity. Echeverría undoubtedly provides an "open agenda" for Latin American studies by establishing new questions that address interculturality, globalization, and social movements. In addition, his work helps to re-signify a series of themes and perspectives of social and cultural analysis. For example, in Echeverría's view, it is fundamental to rethink the role of historical materialism in the new contexts of the twenty-first century, but it is also necessary to approach the study of violence and the emergence of new social actors and the dissolution of civility that currently impacts Latin American societies. Hence, Echeverría's work merits special attention today since it offers us new critical tools for thinking modernity, the relation between the two Americas, the problem of hegemony, and the relations between Latin America and Europe, especially in his rigorous readings of philosophical proposals that illuminate our present, despite having been conceived of in other latitudes.

Mexican anthropologist Roger Bartra's critical and philosophical work offers an acute focus on the melancholic aspects of modernity through a very novel elaboration of the theme of identity. From an interdisciplinary perspective that is always haunted by the political and aesthetic connotations of identitarian representation, Bartra analyzes the theme of otherness as the obverse of official discourses on national being. From the medieval *homo sylvestris* to more contemporary forms of othering, Bartra studies the development of the theme of barbarism as an ideologeme that makes it possible to discern the ideological profile of the systems of political and epistemological domination on which they are founded. In an implicit dialogue with psychoanalysis and with Slavoj Žižek and other exponents of Western philosophy, Bartra reflects on the place of mourning in the constitution of that melancholic vision of modernity. The images of the savage and the barbarian express a feeling of loss through the sacrificial relation between the individual and nature, which reveals a consciousness tormented by the limitations of rationality.

Another level of reflection is that of biopolitics, a critico-philosophical orientation that analyzes the relations between life and power in its institutional, discursive, and political manifestations. Biopolitics refers to the convergence of power, knowledge, and populations, as well as to the articulation of the human body and the body politic, thus opening up multiple avenues for the exploration of diverse systems of domination, from slavery to modern forms of political violence.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault proposed the concept of biopower as a term that names “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (143). Out of this central concept, biopolitics has been developed with distinct orientations in the work of contemporary philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri, Judith Butler, and other authors who propose diverse connections between philosophy, criticism, and politics. In Latin America, this line of thought has had significant repercussions for the study of strategies of social and political control. Laws based in eugenics, policies about sexuality and public health, birth control, physical and mental disability, and homosexuality and transgender issues depend on specific conceptualizations of life, power, human rights, the body, and civil society. Biopolitical studies allow for a deeper investigation of this intricate discursive, ethical, legal, and political web, as well as for a greater understanding of its operational dynamics.

The second part of this book, titled “Critico-Philosophical Rereadings and Debates,” brings together texts that cover the work of philosophers whose ideas have strong links to Latin American thought. Benjamin, Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu are all quite different thinkers, but they have in common the objective of deconstructing the discourse of power from different angles, providing forms of social consciousness that are in dialogue with Latin American critical and emancipatory projects on multiple levels. In addition to the above-mentioned philosophical directions, Peter Sloterdijk’s undeniably polemical thought opens up a

new path for the critique of humanism. These approaches are studied in the present book in texts that constitute moments of critical reflection which, while recognizing these authors' contributions to the development of critico-philosophical thought in peripheral areas, analyze aspects of their thought that can be interrogated and even challenged from a Latin American perspective. In this sense, this book suggests that, from the vantage point of Latin American cultural and political history, European philosophy, in spite of its claims of universality, clearly lacks satisfactory approaches to issues related to post/neo/colonial realities.

Without a doubt, Benjamin's work constitutes an immensely rich repository of ideas for Latin America, both insofar as what he teaches us about the aesthetic, ideological, and political deconstruction of modernity. His texts' heterodox dialogue with Marxism and other currents in German philosophy have been particularly influential for the understanding of the connections between politics and aesthetics, technology and humanism. With his fragmentary and poetic style, Benjamin provided not only a method that refuses to sacrifice rigor for lyricism, or political content for imaginative reflections. Rather, he provides a series of interpretations of history and art that, oriented against the grain of traditional historiography, emphasizes the micronarratives of everydayness and what lay between the lines of the grand narratives that are consequently revealed to be relative, eroded, and defenseless. Benjamin thus instructs us on how to read discontinuity, remainders, fragments, and ambivalence as signs of an evasive and unstable truth that reveals the invisible and unexpected meanings of social experiences and historical narratives.

Foucault's work is also indispensable for comprehending the Western episteme and the forms in which the intricate webs of power extend to all levels of social interaction. Constituting one of the most influential philosophical systems in Latin America, Foucault's work has been read as an illuminating body of ideas that makes it possible to forge a powerful approach to cultural development, particularly in modernity. At the same time, his rigorous critical perspectives are tested and interrogated in this

book by placing them in dialogue with postcolonial histories, particularly in reference to issues that Foucault does not directly address. The themes of race and coloniality, for example, incisively interpellate his work, generating re-elaborations that challenge his thought from horizons that are specific and essential to postcolonial realities. The present book focuses precisely on some of these points of interrogation, in which a Foucauldian critique of philosophy is undertaken from perspectives that are particularly attentive to modalities characterized by power relations that derive from colonialism.

Among the philosophical orientations that have impacted Latin American thought, we cannot overlook the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who is the subject of one of the essays collected here. Bourdieu has had a broad reception in Latin America, where his readings of method, which combine sociology, philosophy, and criticism, have been particularly influential. His prolific output, which has found a home in many different disciplines, has been subjected to close scrutiny, which has opened up important lines of inquiry that the sociologist himself did not consider due to his primary focus on European society and culture. Although Bourdieu intensified his participation in political activism in the later stages of his career, his work was read in Latin America, particularly at first, mainly for his theoretical and conceptual contributions. It was only later that Bourdieu's work began to be thought in relation to concrete social and political problems and conflicts and was applied to the understanding of Latin American realities, mainly with regard to education and organizational programs. Latin American readings of Bourdieu's work have paid special attention to his definitions of cultural field and symbolic capital, as well as to his considerations of the role of the intellectual and the power struggles that develop within academic and political circles. In many cases, these readings challenge the limits of Bourdieu's theory, subjecting it to criticisms that enrich his undeniable contributions to the study of culture, ideology, and institutions. The critical reception of this author in peripheral regions has thus been particularly productive because it enhances his work while

also placing it in dialogue with perspectives that he did not develop in his sociological work.

The essay on scarcity, and the precariat also included in this volume connects in different ways with other texts focused on critico-philosophical discourses that have for several decades contributed to the critique of modernity. Some of these topics include the concept of the subject; the primacy given since the Enlightenment to Eurocentrically defined reason (to the detriment of other forms of knowledge); the notion of progress and linear temporality that produces the utopia of a world saturated by the fetishized power of the commodity and encouraged by the desideratum of the infinite reproduction of capital; and the consolidation of democracies characterized by limited participation and based on exclusion, inequality, and a lack of social justice. Along with these radical questions, we must consider the emergence of projects and discourses of resistance and emancipation that express the subjectivity of groups that are not integrated into the structures of power. The philosophical development of the idea of scarcity/precariousness and its counterpart, the notion of abundance, are inherent to theorizations of capitalism in connection with issues such as the distribution of resources, exploitation, and social stratification. The essay in this book devoted to these problems takes into consideration current debates which have redefined political and philosophical positions in the context of globalization.

The question of affect, one of the most important areas of theoretical study in recent decades, has been incorporated into the critico-philosophical landscape as a fundamental element for comprehending contemporary cultural, political, and social dynamics. As a complement and alternative to sensible and rational knowledge, affect (which includes passion, feeling, emotion, and desire) is a way to understand the intricate webs of everydayness and collective subjectivities. It also constitutes one of the registers that most productively informs the processes of symbolic representation, thus becoming one of the primary forces that guides, and explains social behaviors. Affect is one of the most complex and



productive areas of study when analyzed in connection with gender, violence, urban subcultures, language, and youth. It reveals the way in which subjectivity is linked to power, the market, the family, time, space, and community. The theorization of affect as a cognitive element presupposes a reconsideration of the body as the center of the interrelations and processes of self-knowledge involving memory, desire, perception, and imagination. The philosophical dimension of affect (particularly in its psychological, ethical, and epistemological expressions) is based in the work of authors like Henri Bergson, Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Slavoj Žižek. From these foundations it has developed into a broad transdisciplinary space with applications in many fields, including political discourse, the visual arts, literature, identity politics, market relations, interculturality, publicity, and so on. There are multiple philosophical contributions to the study of affect from Latin America that have enriched the debates around this concept, and which are critically deployed in the understanding and interpretation of culture.

Finally, the theme of humanism is approached here both from a historico-cultural perspective and in relation to the work of Peter Sloterdijk, one of the most complex and challenging representatives of contemporary European philosophy. It is necessary to review from the horizon of the present the transformations that have taken place with regard to the notion of the human and humanistic knowledge as a totalizing and universalizing perspective. Humanism derives from epistemological models associated with a variety of forms of cultural, economic, and political power. Despite its diverse meanings and localizations, the notion of humanism has maintained its centrality for several centuries. The debate on humanism, in all its philosophical manifestations, is based on a very broad range of ideological connotations and directly confronts us with the topic of knowledge, as well as with the historical forms of conceptualizing and producing a rational understanding of the world. It also brings about questions related to the production and dissemination of cultural capital, as well as the problem that Jacques Rancière called the "distribution of the sensible," a notion that focuses on the visibility

and circulation of cultural contents depending on determinations of race, class, and gender.

Starting from this connection between political power and humanistic knowledge, Sloterdijk develops an extended response to Martin Heidegger, returning to the themes of lettered culture, writing, intellectual leadership, the role of technology, and ideas about the improvement of the species. All of this has powerful ideological and social connotations which inevitably evoke (particularly in Germany) the traumatic experience of fascism. Through dense, provocative, poetic, and sharply political thought, Sloterdijk addresses the problem of reformulating the roles of culture, intellectuals, cultural elites, and technology in a world that faces the enormous challenges presented by the progress of science, the dehumanization of the social, and the transformation of the representational registers established by Western culture during its centuries of domination and exclusion of the Other.

By the very nature of the topics they discuss, and because they were composed as contributions to debates at particular points in time, the texts collected here are necessarily tentative. These critico-philosophical studies are part of a longer reflection on culture in peripheral areas that I have established in earlier works. I thank the colleagues, students, and editors who have encouraged me to offer these texts as part of a larger project of revising Latin American theoretical and philosophical categories. To produce a critical reading of philosophy while also developing a philosophy of criticism is essential in cultures that continue to struggle for the decolonization of both thought and life.

## NOTES

1. On the relations between philosophy and criticism, see, for example, Marsh and Morris.
2. On epistemological questions and alternative epistemologies, see Martín Alcoff, *Epistemology*. This concept has not only been used to refer to the models of knowledge, categories, and values of subalternized ethnic groups since the Conquest, but also to those of Latinos, women, and other groups whose marginal position in relation to dominant powers and discourses reveals different perspectives and requires particular, radical strategies. See also Schutte.
3. Susana Nuccetelli devotes several chapters of *Latin American Thought* to the topic of indigenous epistemologies, using concepts like "relative rationality" and "cognitive pluralism" which might be able to guide an introductory discussion of these themes.
4. This tension has been taken up again by some authors who ascribe to the formula "Philosophy in Latin America versus Latin American philosophy" (Nuccetelli, *Latin American Thought* 243). Nuccetelli also addresses the difference between *philosophy* and *thought*. For her, both terms are used, if not as synonyms, as very closely related concepts whose nuances are expressed in the particular context of how each term is being used.
5. With regard to the possibilities of existence of Latin American philosophy, Eduardo Mendieta argues in his introduction to *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*: "The possibility of and need for a Latin American philosophy is a meta-philosophical question, one that puts the very forms of crystallization of philosophy in jeopardy not just in Latin America, but also in the Western world" (3)
6. In this regard, see Nuccetelli, *Latin American Philosophy*.
7. Jorge Gracia opts for the expression "ethnic philosophy" to refer to Latin America's hybrid, syncretic philosophical thought: "an ethnic philosophy is the philosophy of an ethnos, and insofar as it is so, and members of the ethne do not necessarily share features in common, the philosophy of a particular ethnos will not require any properties in common with other philosophies outside the ethnos or even within the ethnos everywhere it is located and throughout its history. This, I claim, is the best way of understanding the unity of Latino philosophy" (Gracia, *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity* 140).

8. For an overview of the history of critical and philosophical thought in Latin America, see Arias.
9. For example, see Nuccetelli, Vallega, Gracia, and others.
10. For an example of this historiographical strategy, see Gracia and Milán-Zaibert, as well as Dussel, "Philosophy in Latin America."
11. I am referring to articulations and convergences, not to syntheses, in order to avoid the connotations this term has had, since Hegel, of entailing the resolution of an antagonism or even its overcoming as a unified whole. The idea of articulation includes and emphasizes the provisionality of encounters between ideas, maintaining the individuality of conceptual bodies that engage with one another.
12. Of great importance here are Enrique Dussel's considerations on the relations between Christianity and the systems of domination imposed in the Americas and on the way in which these components have been integrated into modernity from its earliest stages. In this regard, see Barón del Pópulo, et al., who analyze the notion of the people-subject in Dussel's early work, particularly in *El humanismo semita*, *El humanismo helénico*, and *El dualismo en la antropología de la Cristianidad*.
13. Castro-Gómez refers to Grosfoguel (among others), who transitions from "un rechazo (correcto) al universalismo...a un rechazo (incorrecto) a la universalidad."
14. On these aspects of the construction of the subject in Latin America, see Acosta, "Pensamiento crítico, sujeto y democracia en América Latina."
15. In this regard, see Linda Martín Alcoff's *Visible Identities*, particularly chapter 3, "The Philosophical Critique," where the author develops an excellent analysis of the Hegelian tradition, existentialism, and postmodern otherness in relation to the theme of identity. On identity and liberation, see Vallega, who discusses works by Dussel, from whom he takes the concept of "radical exteriority." In this regard, see the texts collected in Moraña (ed.), *Sujeto, descolonización, transmodernidad*.
16. In this regard, see L.F. Restrepo's analysis of colonial thought. On several aspects connected to critical thought in the colonial period, see Moraña, "Formación."