

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF *LA RAZA CÓSMICA*

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La raza cósmica is undoubtedly the most famous and impactful book from the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos. Published in 1925 after Vasconcelos's tenure as Secretary of Education in Mexico's post-revolutionary government, the book has influenced not only various generations of Mexican philosophers but also other scholars in areas such as Latinx and Latin American Studies, Chicanx Studies and Spanish literature in virtue of its philosophical and literary richness. Indeed, *La raza cósmica* is well known for articulating in an enthralling language a compelling—albeit also quite controversial—philosophical vision that threads a narrative of Vasconcelos' journeys and encounters throughout South America (particularly throughout Brazil and Argentina) as a representative and spokesman of Mexico's revolutionary experience, his analysis of the complex relation between the two Americas, his emphasis on the central importance of *mestizaje* (or race-mixing) as a tool to combat white supremacy and his prophetic depiction of a harmonious future of humanity. Because of this, *La raza cósmica* remains today an important work that is often assigned in courses focusing on Mexican philosophy, Latin American history or Chicanx studies. However, despite its enduring popularity, there are still gaps in our understanding of *La raza cósmica*. Some of these gaps are because *La raza cósmica* is often read in a fragmentary manner—only the prologue and the first section on *mestizaje* have been translated into English, and even in Mexico or in other Spanish-speaking countries the book is often not assigned in its entirety in college courses—while other gaps stem from the fact that, though *La raza cósmica* has been widely read by various Latinx and Chicanx scholar-activists and has deeply influenced them, their work has often not been properly engaged with and valued due to persistent racism in academic philosophy circles.

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication of *La raza cósmica*, Emiliano Salomón and Manuel Vargas organized, with the support and sponsorship of the

Department of Philosophy of the University of California-San Diego on September 12th and 13th 2025, an international conference that gathered numerous scholars interested in *La raza cósmica* and on Vasconcelos' philosophical legacy. The papers presented at the conference aimed primarily at addressing some of the gaps while also attempting to showcase why some of Vasconcelos' positions and ideas in *La raza cósmica* still remain attractive and fruitful a century after their publication. Considering the deep unity of the papers presented at the conference as well as the insightful ways in which they illuminate previously unexplored aspects of Vasconcelos' thought in *La raza cósmica*, I volunteered to edit and publish a selection of the papers. Given the theme of the papers, the suggestion was made to the editors of the *Journal of Mexican Philosophy*, Robert E. Sanchez and Carlos Alberto Sánchez, to have a special issue of the journal devoted to commemorating the 100th anniversary of the publication of *La raza cósmica* and to further scholarship on Vasconcelos and the complicated philosophical legacy of his most famous book. The resulting special issue of the journal thus displays some of the rich work that was presented at the conference and will hopefully function as a resource for current and future scholars in fields such as philosophy, literature, Latinx and Chicanx studies to have a better and deeper understanding of Vasconcelos' ideas and views in *La raza cósmica*. Here is a summary of the articles in this special issue.

In "From La Raza Cósmica to Aspects of Mexican Civilization: Discrepancies or Continuities in Vasconcelos' thought?", Sergio Armando Gallegos Ordorica offers an interpretation of *La raza cósmica* that involves reading it in juxtaposition to another text authored by Vasconcelos: the three lectures that he offered at the University of Chicago and that were published along with three lectures offered at that same institution by his fellow countryman, the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, under the title *Aspects of Mexican Civilization* in 1926. Gallegos Ordorica contends that, though *La raza cósmica* appears to present at a superficial level the relation between Anglo-Saxon North America and Latin South America as a zero-sum conflict of continental proportions that can only result in one side defeating and dominating the other, a careful reading of *La raza cósmica* together with the three lectures in *Aspects of Mexican Civilization* reveals that Vasconcelos views the relationship between the two Americas as crucially marked by a spiritual opposition rather than a material conflict. Because of this, Gallegos Ordorica argues that Vasconcelos really views the two Americas in both works as being capable of transcending in a dialectical fashion their spiritual opposition and, given their similar psychological profiles as well as the common democratic vocations of their respective populations, to build collaboratively a harmonious hemispheric civilization that incorporates the best aspects of each cultural lineage.

Subsequently, in “Imagined communities beyond nationalism: from the Florentine Codex to mestizaje”, Sofía Ortiz Hinojosa presents a characterization of *mestizaje* in *La raza cósmica* as a form of nationalism and situates *La raza cósmica* within a long string of other works produced throughout the history of Latin America from the beginning of the colonial period that exemplify various forms of nationalism. *Contra* Benedict Anderson who argued in his book *Imagined Communities* that nationalism only emerged in the 18th century with the rise of the idea of nation in the social imaginary of various populations, Ortiz Hinojosa defends the view that we find in Mexican—and, more broadly, Latin American—history various examples of works (in particular, Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex*, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s *Theatro de Virtudes Políticas*, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s *Neptuno Alegórico*) before the 18th century that articulate forms of nationalism and that Vasconcelos’s *mestizaje* in *La raza cósmica* can be appropriately considered, despite its Pan-American rhetoric, as a form of racial nationalism. Ortiz Hinojosa argues for this claim by showing that Vasconcelos’ *mestizaje*, which echoes some claims of the *criollista* positions articulated by Sor Juana and Sigüenza and which crucially involves a mixed Iberian lineage that brings together other racial groups within the territory of South America, incorporates both elements of a *jus sanguinis* and a *jus solis* into the prophetic vision of the union of the two Americas into an hemispheric nation. Because of this, Ortiz Hinojosa’s essay provides solid evidence that Vasconcelos’ views in *La raza cósmica* demonstrate that Anderson’s conception of nationalism as a product of the 18th century must be revised.

In the third article, which is titled “Hijos de la raza cósmica: a Chicano theology and philosophy of liberation”, Alex Stehn provides an extensive and masterful analysis of how *La raza cósmica* played a crucial role in the development of the vague concept of *la raza* into the central category that structures and animates a vibrant Chicano theology and philosophy of liberation. Focusing on the book *A Chicano Theology* (1987) by Andrés Guerrero—which involves a series of interviews made by Guerrero of nine prominent Chicano/a leaders from the 1960s and 1970s, Stehn shows how Guerrero and his interviewees—which include civil rights luminaries such as Lupe Anguiano, Dolores Huerta and Reies López Tijerina as well as religious figures such as Monsignor Lonnie Reyes and Bishop Gilbert Chavez—relied on some of Vasconcelos’s ideas to articulate a powerful Chicano theology and philosophy of liberation centered on a life of love as the key element to combat successfully racism and to achieve justice, equality and fraternity. In particular, two of the central lessons that Stehn derives from his analysis of Guerrero’s book consist in showing how Guerrero and his interviewees were, on one side, able to use the concept of *la raza* to better understand and voice their experiences of oppression in the US and to devise an effective counternarrative centered on the

notion and the practice of Christian love and, on the other side, also able to use the concept of *la raza* to ground and situate their particular anti-racist struggle as Chicano/as within a cosmic movement aimed at universal human liberation.

Finally, in “How to read *La raza cósmica*”—which is the fourth and final article of the special issue, Guillermo Hurtado offers an exhaustively thorough inquiry of the different discourses that Vasconcelos deploys *La raza cósmica*, showing not only that the book involves multiple discourses but also that these distinct discourses—or discursive levels—interact with each other in subtle ways, sometimes reinforcing a particular claim or view that Vasconcelos stresses and at other times introducing further complexity to a seemingly simple position. In particular, Hurtado distinguishes in Vasconcelos’s book five distinct discourses: (i) a discourse centered on the relationship between the two Americas, (ii) a discourse revolving around the human and geographic potentialities of South America, (iii) a discourse addressing the nature of various distinct races and *mestizaje*, (iv) a discourse offering a philosophy of history and (v) a discourse focused on a series of travel narratives which convey the experiences and encounters that Vasconcelos had in South America. When *La raza cósmica* is read in this fashion—i.e., as an elaborate synthesis of multiple overlapping discourses, Hurtado argues that we can appreciate various things. For instance, one of the key lessons that Hurtado draws from his analysis is that one cannot make sense of why Vasconcelos stressed so much that only the Ibero-American lineage could bring into being the cosmic race in the territory of South America through *mestizaje* and thus usher a higher stage of humanity—which is one of the key ideas of his philosophy of history—if one does not understand his views about the relation between the two Americas and the differences between them. Because of this, Hurtado recommends that, to get a much better grasp of the richness and the complexity *La raza cósmica*, one should not only read the book in its entirety, but also focus on the original 1925 edition.