

*The Problem of Being in Latin America: Approaching the Latin American Ontological *sentipensar**

JUAN CEPEDA H.

Universidad Santo Tomás, Colombia (juancepeda@usantotomas.edu.co)

*In the following, I endeavor to subvert the classical notion of being found in Western philosophy by following the logic of negation found in the work of Rodolfo Kusch. In order to develop a better understanding of cultural feelings as well as appreciate the natural, the rhythmic and the vital in the Latin American context, I propose that we follow the ontological *sentipensar*. By using this methodological framework, I seek to reveal a sense of being germane to Latin American intercultural philosophy.*

Keywords: Ontology; Kusch; Being; Latin America; *sentipensar*

1 Introduction

Philosophy in Latin America
has been taking its own path,
particularly since 1842 with Alberdi¹
and even with much greater strength
since the middle of the twentieth century.

This philosophizing includes:
the history of philosophical ideas,
the philosophy of liberation
(both in its ethical as in its political lines)²,

Amerindian philosophies
(philosophical indigenous thinking)³,

intercultural philosophy⁴,
philosophies of life
(such as the cosmic vitalism)⁵,

analogical hermeneutics⁶,
logics of denial⁷,

and the ontological *sentipensar*⁸,
among other disciplines that have been arising
from Latin America.

Among Latin American thinkers,
we have been building an identity
or, at least, a common agenda
to such an extent that it is increasingly possible

to set research projects in motion,
 which develop the search, identification,
 conceptualization, argumentation and discussion
 of notions and categories
 proper to Latin American thought,
 promoting, in such a way, appropriate methodologies
 for those research processes⁹.

In this text, we look forward to present
 the methodological foundations in the base of which
 the research on the problem of being advances,
 and some evidence of such progress.

The exposition that follows,
 as we see,
 is presented in short statements
 resembling verses
 and attempts to come to different senses,
 which have already been thickening,
 be in talks,
 be in dialogues,
 be in *mambeos*,ⁱ
 or even also in reflections
 on documents
 that traditional philosophy always offers.

2 The Question of Being

The way the ancient Greek people used to think
 was wondering about the essence of things:

What *is* this? What *is* that?
 they would always seek to know
 what is
 this or that.

Classic Greek language
 accounts for this way of wondering,
 of understanding,
 of being.

To wonder about the Being of things
 repeatedly

ⁱ *Mambo* is a South-American indigenous tradition consisting of chewing coca leaves
 (Translator's note).

evidences a way of being.
To ask about the Being of things
is an essential asking,
which looks for a knowledge beyond appearance,
which seeks to go deep in the phenomenon,
which tries to unravel the deep essence of what is asked.
Such a way to ask
ends up taking each question
to a fundamental problem,
to a greater problem
and, if you want, to a more general one:
the problem of Being,
just like that:
the Being
as Being,
and nothing else.

To ontology belongs this way of asking
and this way of being.
The Greeks rather liked to reason
in this sense.
If everything we have in front of our eyes
is (is being),
what is it that *is*?
what is everything that is,
not as something specific being,
but as something that
is
and nothing else?
What is Being?
How to understand the Being?
What sense does [the] Being make?

The Greek language evidences that the Greeks
used to investigate the world
in this direction,
under this horizon.
Probably that is why
among the Greeks emerged those thinkers
who wondered, again and again,
about Being:
Parmenides, Heraclitus,
Plato and Aristotle,
among many others.

But, although the Greeks asked
 so explicitly about Being,
 it doesn't mean that they were the only peoples
 who ever had an essential asking.
 Perhaps the terms are not precisely the same.
 The question of Being, however,
 occurs naturally in every human being
 due to the mere fact that everyone has to deal
 with things (being).
 There cannot be a society that,
 being there in the world,
 doesn't wonder
 about the foundations of reality,
 about that what animates everything that is,
 about the reason of being
 of every being.

3 The Research Method

Between facticity and transcendentalty,
 whether the dialectical method,
 or the analytical method,
 or the phenomenological method,
 or the hermeneutic method
 (presented by Ramón Rodríguez in his anthology
 of *Methods of Ontological Thinking*)¹⁰,
 I prefer to be against any method
 If by "method" is meant
 the rule of objective
 (logical-scientific)
 rationality.

The path we have followed
à la Latin American
 starts with corporal experience,
 with material experience,
 with the affective-sentimental attitude
 of *feeling* the feet on the ground.
 To feel ourselves
 one with each other, palpating us
 naturally, affectionately, spiritually:
 brothers and sisters of the stone, the river, the tree,

the air, the thunder, the *huacas*ⁱⁱ and the spirits,
 the mountains and the skies,
 starting from that natural interconnection
 of one with each other
 and everyone to everyone,
 under the horizon of
sensing sensitivity
 which, as a starting point,
 is basic and fundamental,
 irreplaceable.

There is as well in this starting point
 some rational interpretation,
 which offers certain explanations
 also from some
 culturally imposed logic given beforehand.
 This requires some deconstruction
 of the various rationalities
 that originate in our horizons of interpretation
 when we believe we know the world objectively.
 The proper use of reason, of course, is necessary
 but not in a naive way:
 we have to do an exercise of explication
 of the logical apparatus
 with which any possibility of understanding
 is manipulated, consciously or unconsciously,
 behind every rationality.

But without the stubbornness of those who do not want to hear
 ancestral wisdom,
 it is just as necessary
 to be attentive to the voice of the spirit,
 to the strength of the divine,
 which always comes to complement
 every personal effort
 when we approach the essence of things,
 the very Being of the total
 reality.
 No need to say
 That the spirit shows itself precisely

ⁱⁱ A *huaca* is a sacred place/character, a material spirit who takes care of the place, an existential testimony of divinity (Translator's note).

combining the various possibilities of reality:
 corporal,
 psycho-intellectual,
 mythical-mystical...
 corporal-emotional-spiritual.

To discover the path to follow,
 and thereby step in a path that does not close
 the various possibilities that reality itself offers to us,
 we have to *sentipensar*ⁱⁱⁱ the fire:

What a tautology!

Is it possible to feel the fire and not to think about it at all?
 But there are those who are solely dedicated to think of it
 because they fear to be burned!

To feel the whole reality: to do *mambo* with her,
 to speak it by the hearth,
 to seduce it in words
 and verbalize it in emotions,
 shared,
 gifted, offered, embodied.

The ontological *sentipensar*,
 as a *research method*,
 requires the non-pretentious facticity
 of the encounter with others,
 listening
 next to the fire,
 learning with humility
 from the indigenous, the farmer,
 the *taita*,^{iv} the grandfather,
 the popular wisdom,
 paying attention respectfully to their *saying*
 just as respectfully as we read a scientific paper,
 without despising,
 without that rude lust of he who believes
 he is the holder of the objective truth,
 of he who blindly believes that the whole truth
 is in the small scientific truth.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Sentipensar* is a verb composed of the verbs “feel” (*sentir*) and “think” (*pensar*). It is both to think with feeling and feel with thinking (Translator’s note).

^{iv} The traditional male authority in native indigenous peoples (Translator’s note).

The practices of conversation
 with all their simplicity and jocularity,
 with all their wisdom and seriousness,
 evidence the starting point
 of a fraternal, humble, deep
 research method
 out of which a solid wisdom comes
 and distills true, vital, quotidian, necessary
 wisdom.

That is how grandmothers and *taitas*
 weave, instead of knowledge,
 existential wisdom
 nourished by
 the essence of everything that is,
 by a warm and affectionate reason,
 which offers the possibility of meaning
 from the daily Being,
 enriching both the most specific chores
 and the most spiritual reflections...

4 A First Notion

In the *shagra*,^v each seed
 emerges from the depths of the soil
 with a certain strength
 that makes it germinate.

There couldn't be another way.

In the burner, the fire
 remains upright
 with a certain strength
 that prevails with its light and heat.

It has been always that way.

In the storm, the thunder
 does not only come with physical strength
 and gets right into the midst of us
 leaving no chance to flee
 neither from the thunder, nor from the lightning.

When we put pressure on a tree,
 or a stone,

^v *Shagra* is a traditional indigenous or rural garden that serves as familiar source of food and whose caregivers are not only the farmers but also gods and spirits (Translator's note).

or when we hear a truth,
or feel a true feeling,
they are all imposed on us by a strength
that makes them undoubted.
There can be no doubt.
Everything that is
is made up of strength.
And not merely physical strength.

Our first glimpse
of the Being
is found in its strength.

There is strength in the river
And there is strength in the sea.
There is strength in the *ceiba*
and there is strength in the orchid.
There is strength in the jaguar
and there is strength in the condor.
There is strength in the hummingbird
and there is strength in the human being.
There is strength in the thought
and there is strength in the speech.
There is strength in the myth
and there is strength in the miracle.
There is strength in the life
and there is strength in the spirit.
Strength is
everything that is:
Being is strength,
mere effort,
that is it!

The Latin American ontology
gives its first step, then,
with certain aesthetics of effort,
an aesthetics of strength,
says Carlos A. Moreno¹¹.
The poet Porfirio Barba Jacob
had already sensed it
in its judgment:
"to live is to strive"¹².

An effort to listen to everything that is,

attentive and respectfully,
according to ancestral practices of the various
indigenous peoples.

An effort to be
present, steadfast,
such as the descendants of African peoples,
brought to our lands
forcibly and contemptibly.
An effort to bury the plough
and urge on the oxen,
to know how to sow the seed
and care for the harvest,
and to be patient
to wait for the fruit,
whose example the farmers teach us,
year after year.

And also a daily and humble effort
by the women who, in the neighborhood,
wash clothes, clean floors,
by the sweat of their brow, of their life,
to have means to feed
their children.

This may be a populist effort
(according to the academics
who sitting in mighty desktops
know how to argue their ideas and practices),
but it is a real, existential effort,
truly embodied,
it is not mere abstractions
rationally developed to be written in publishable texts,
and nothing else!

Our first notion
is a sensing notion
that beats, that hurts,
that knows our history
and the truth of our existence.

Just as birth:
no pain, no birth.

Being
is strength,
mere
effort,
and nothing else.

5 The Melody of the Concept

Every word has its music.
Every statement has its melody.
But what is said
does not have a rhythm of its own
just because of being a word, a statement,
but because it *expresses* the reality
that produces that melody.

One must be able to listen,
to make silence,
in order to chat with the things
and understand their own rhythm,
their musicality.

Every word has its music,
which is the music of the verbalized.

Music of truth.
True music.

When asking for the Being
a smart effort is needed
to capture the pace of every single thing,
of the total reality,
of everything that is.

When asking for the Being
and attending to it with simplicity,
you start to perceive its melody:

The total
Being
is a symphony
formed

by the pace that the stone keeps in its heart,
by the pace that the river croons in its flow,
by the pace that the tree cracks in its soul,

by the own pace of all animals,
by all those paces invented by all human beings,
and the pace of angels, deities and gods,
which at every step walk with us and watch over
our actions,
but also by all the paces
of each and every one of the chemical elements,
and each and every one of the planets,
and stars, and constellations,
of all the possible universes,
and the sky's as well as the earth's paces,
and, yes, also,
including the silences
all of them,
without losing any,
including
the pace of nothing.

Then, and only then,
what is heard in the heart?

Being
is
rhythmical
strength.

It is just that,
nothing else:
rhyth-
mi-
cal
strength...

Everything that is
is its melody,
the melody of what it is.

Everything that is
is verbalized,
not with mere words
but with the pace
of that what is being.

The essence of the concepts
is not in the mere logic of its argumentation

but in the musical truth
that they suggest.

We must learn to listen.

We must learn to feel.

To feel:
the soul of things,
the touch of words,
the pace of essence,
the symphony of the total
Being.

When our elders,
our *taitas* and grandparents,
do *mambeo*,
when our grandmothers, mothers and women
talk
next to the hearth,
they spin, weave, taste, dance
sensing concepts
in which an existential wisdom
becomes concrete.

The genus and specific difference
is nothing but a formality
that can wisely be left aside.
The essential condition
of concepts
is their musicality:
the intrinsic rhythm that nourishes it,
that feeds it,
that vivifies it
and makes it say
what-it-is.

That is why
the understanding of being
requires a very particular attitude,
perhaps one of the most demanding
for the human being.
It is not only
about the mind,

unless it is
 in the whole body...
 and is conceived also spiritually,
 as explained by Francisco Varela¹³.

The symphony of Being,
 already perceived by José Vasconcelos
 in his *Treaty on Metaphysics*¹⁴,
 requires proper acoustics
 in order to listen to its entire musical complexity,
 to sense it in its entire natural
 rhythmic.



6 Vital Sense

So, what is the sense of the Being?
 What is the sense of being?
 Where does *everything that is* points at?

Being is seed.

The ontological sense is the life.

Life.

Germ.

Vital-origin.

Vital sense.

The whole-total-
 Being
 is the cradle of life;
 its whole sense
 offers the vital
raison d'être.

What is *everything that is* for,
If there is no life?

Life is there!

Life is there
because there is Being.
Being and life
come together
being
vitally made.

The universe as a whole
—with all of its universes—
has fixed on life.
There you have its meaning:
ontological sense,
vital sense.

Being
is a rhythmical,
autopoietic,
total
strength...

Life emerges from everything that is,
it feeds from Being
and nourishes Being.
Life is the act of being,
nanovitally
constituted
and spiritually
oriented.

The ontological autopoiesis
puts down its roots in Being
and offers him its entire sense:
ontological sense,
which is vital sense.

Between the *Muisca*
there was the ancestral tradition of
Gué,
vital ontological principle
infinitely giver of Being,

personified in *Chiminigagua*,
 the primary deity
 which creates from the heart everything that is.

That is why the nature of *sentipensar*
 requires a connection *from the heart*
 with nature as a whole;
 understanding the cosmos
 with all its meanings and senses
 implies not a pure and simple reasoning
 —only reasoning—
 But a reasoning-with
 (with-everything-that-is and with-the-heart),
 that is to say: to co-reason:
corazonar^{vi}.

To understand is *corazonar*.
 To learn is to sharpen the ear
 until you hear clearly the heart of the cosmos.
 To know is to sink into the heartbeat of nature.
 You only understand while you are being.
 To understand is to be one with the other,
 one with others.
 We are brothers and sisters *with* the river and the sea,
with the *ceiba* and the orchid,
with the jaguar and the condor,
with the hummingbird and the spirit.

The whole life connected with everything that is.
 The whole being vitally understood.
 This is the *first wisdom*
 discerned by Latin American philosophy,
 a *philosophy* which knows how to listen to ancestral wisdom
 and which talks to *the people*,
 feeding thereby not only on cultured and pure traditions
 but—also—on the *stench* of geo-culture
 typical of the simple, the small, and the humble ones,
 habitually collected by word of mouth for centuries.

^{vi} It is a play on words trying to resemble “co-reason” with the Spanish word for “heart”: *corazón*. It is also related to the word *corazonada* (in English “hunch”) (Translator’s note).

Juan Cepeda H. is doing his doctorate at the Universidad Santo Tomás (Colombia). The topic of his dissertation is ‘The Ontology of Rudolf Kusch.’ He is director of the Tlamatinime Research Group on Latin American Ontology, and SEMillero METaphysics and ONtology (SEMEyON). Cepeda leads the Ch@ski: International Network of Ontology Researchers. For more information, see the micro-site he maintains at the Universidad Santo Tomás (<http://ontologia.usta.edu.co>). Cepeda works on the ontological *sentipensar*.

-
- 1 Juan Bautista Alberdi, “Ideas para un curso de filosofía contemporánea,” in *Fuentes de la cultura latinoamericana*, ed. Leopoldo Zea (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995), 143–51.
 - 2 Véase particularmente Enrique Dussel, *Política de la liberación. Historia mundial y crítica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007); *Política de la liberación II. Arquitectónica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009); *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Madrid: Trotta, 2011).
 - 3 Mario Mejía Huamán, *Anti yachay mayllukny. Filosofía andina* (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma, 2011); Josef Estermann, *Filosofía andina. Sabiduría indígena para un mundo nuevo* (La Paz: ISEAT, 2006); Flores Quelopana, G., *Los amautas filósofos* (Lima: Instituto de Investigación para la paz, 2006); Juan Cepeda H., *Ontología indígena. Aproximación filosófica a saberes filosóficos que posibilitan una ontología latinoamericana* (Rosario, Argentina: Ross, 2013), 15–42; Guiovaney Púa, *Filosofías amerindias: búsquedas de lo propio en América Latina* (Bogotá: Universidad San Buenaventura, 2011).
 - 4 Raúl Fonet Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía* (Bilbao: Descée, 2001); Dina Picotti, *Una propuesta interlógica ante los desafíos del pensar contemporáneo* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2010), 61.
 - 5 Darío Botero Uribe, *Vitalismo cósmico* (Bogotá: Corteza de Roble, 2007); Damián Pachón Soto, *Preludios filosóficos a “otro mundo posible”* (Bogotá: Desde Abajo, 2013).
 - 6 Mauricio Beuchot, *Hermenéutica analógica. Aplicaciones en América Latina* (Bogotá: El Búho, 2003).
 - 7 Rodolfo Kusch, *La negación en el pensamiento popular* (Buenos Aires: Las Cuarenta, 2008).
 - 8 Juan Cepeda H., *Sentipensar ontológico* [Texto inédito del curso seminario dictado en la Maestría en Filosofía Latinoamericana] (Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 2015).
 - 9 SEMillero METafísica y ONtología: SEMEYON. *A lo profundo de Kusch. Tras una ontología latinoamericana* (Bogotá: Nueva América/Tlamatinime, 2013).
 - 10 ed. R. Rodríguez, *Métodos del pensamiento ontológico* (Madrid: Síntesis, 1996).
 - 11 Carlos Moreno, *Los conceptos griegos de Ser y tiempo. Aproximación al pensar ontológico de Heidegger* (Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 2012).
 - 12 Porfirio Barba Jacob, *La divina tragedia. En: Poesías* (Bogotá: Círculo de Lectores, 1984), 45.
 - 13 Francisco Varela, *En: El fenómeno de la vida* (Santiago de Chile: Dolmen, 2002), 149–365.
 - 14 José Vasconcelos, *Tratado de Metafísica* (México: México Joven, 1929).
 - 15 Juan Cepeda H., *Ontología desde la música andina. En: Tras del sentido del ser. Aproximaciones a una ontología en perspectiva latinoamericana* (Saarbrücken: Editorial Académica Española, 2011), 77-104.