Chapter I

Juana De Asbaje: A few Previously Ignored Antecedents to her Philosophical Work

Emotional Intelligence: A Guiding Thread in Mexican Thought, from Flor y Canto and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to José Vasconcelos

Philosophy seeks out the underlying principles of reality, and a true philosopher struggles to go beyond mere knowledge of currents of thought that happen to be in vogue, going beyond an academic's understanding of the thought of some distant thinker, however important their influence might be. Philosophical knowledge is so radical that it demands deep immersion, a journey beyond the common understanding of a problem. This is how I propose to do philosophy—by tracing the underlying foundations that have sustained Mexican philosophical thought over the centuries. Is there something in common among its doctrines, a transversal guiding thread through the complex weaving of *Mexican* philosophical reflection?

I will begin my study by defining the periods into which this Mexican way of philosophizing can be divided. Throughout the history of Mexican philosophy there has been a consistent approach to the principles of reality and reflection on human truths. Pre-Columbian Mexicans developed a unique form of philosophy, expressed through categories that connect to some of the most relevant thinkers of other eras in our history. If the discovery of America involved an encounter with what was utterly new, what does its absolute novelty mean for astrology, ethnology, geography, history and theology? Will it not imply philosophy is dealing with something entirely new? Recent studies have demonstrated the philosophical importance the conquest of America had for Europe, as well as the importance of Spain's dominion over the native peoples and their evangelization. The teachings of the 16th century School of Salamanca on the rights of conquered peoples have been recognized as important precursors to later thought on human rights. It made the topic of the "other" relevant by defending the full humanity of the indigenous peoples and their corresponding rights. The contributions of Novohispanic friars are widely recognized in the areas of the philosophy of law and society, in particular the work of Bartolomé de las Casas, who developed a libertarian

philosophy of great value. But nothing has been said about the manner in which Latin American philosophical thought developed its own identity. The issue of the contributions of Latin American philosophy has been discussed by authors like David Brading in England and by Lewis Hanke and Edmundo O'Gorman in the Americas, in addition to Mexican thinkers like Enrique Dussel and Mauricio Beuchot. However, nothing has been written regarding the unique manner in which Mexican philosophy found its own space in time. In this introductory chapter I will show readers how Latin American philosophy has come to be characterized by certain persistent traits. I am not claiming that the various ways of practicing philosophy in Mexico all share these traits; rather, I will merely point to a guiding thread that has been a constant throughout the history of our country.

The *Flor y Canto* Wisdom

I will begin my discussion with the ancient Mexicans. They protected their wisdom in *The Black and Red Ink*, a book about Náhua culture preserved by the *Tlamatinime*.[1] This cultural period begins in the 14th century CE. It was a culture that extended its reach beyond the territory of the Aztec Empire, and survived until the discovery of America in 1492. It was further developed in the 16th and 17th centuries by those who preserved the *word*[2] in codices and paintings. It was the fruitful work of Franciscan friars like Bernardino de Sahagún[3] that preserved Nahua culture and history through their writings, paintings and the *Huehuetlatolli* (*Sayings of the Elders*).[4]

Mexican philosophy continued during a second period, the so-called Novohispanic Era, which stretches from the discovery of America and the 16th century through to the final years of the 18th century. This era can be divided into two stages: 1) the political thought of the 16th century and 2) the period of *Criollo* philosophy, which self-identified as Mexican, and which remained a living philosophical tradition over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. Sor Juana was one of the most famous and sofisticated thinkers in this period, sharing the stage with Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, another great *Criollo* intellectual of the 17th century. Finally, there is the philosophical thought developed in Mexico, beginning with the Independence in the early years of the 19th century and continuing through to the Mexican Revolution. It is believed to include contemporary Mexican thinkers.

From each one of these great periods or blocks of Mexican history I have chosen the most representative thinker, in order to see if their thought possesses some guiding thread in common that warrants clarifying the character of Mexican philosophy as such. This chapter takes us on a journey through the history of Mexican philosophy

by investigating whether there is some topic or way of philosophizing common to the Náhuatl wisdom of the *Tlamatinime*, the *Criollo* poetic philosophy of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the organic philosophical system of Vasconcelos. I make the case that all three share poetic-philosophical elements that should be taken into account. This topic has stirred up interest among contemporary scholars. For example, in the book *Las aporías fundamentales del periodo novohispano*[5] (*The Fundamental Aporias of the Novohispanic Period*) I presented the hypothesis; my next step will be providing textual coincidences in the works of the aforementioned major philosophers I have.

The texts of pre-Conquest Mexico have been preserved thanks to the work of Bernardino de Sahagún, Durán, Ixtlixóchitl, Mendieta, and Torquemada,[6] among others. These friars attempted to preserve the codices and collected wisdom of the Nahuas, but the latter's culture lacked a writing system like that of the Europeans. Rather, they employed the ideographic writing of an iconic or figurative type, a peculiar writing system that represented its objects by alternating between paintings, points, and glyphs. They also possessed an oral tradition, which involved extensive memorization by the *tlamatinime* or philosophers in order to preserve their wisdom from robbery or misplacement. This triple combination meant painting alone was insufficient for thoroughly understanding a text; there was also a necessity to decipher its points and glyphs and employ the oral tradition. Nahuatl wisdom would have remained a closed book if its deciphering had not involved the collaboration of those Nahua elders who, invited by Sahagún to the College of Tlatelolco, shared their ancient wisdom or *Huehuetlatolli*. It was through this methodology that Sahagún was able to put the Nahuatl language into writing,[7] and in turn it is by means of these translated works that we have access to the metaphysical and theological ideas of the Nahuas. Those elderly wise men explained to the friars that they knew "the Lord of what is close and what is near, that [being] to which we owe the existence of the heavens and the earth."[8]

You said
that we do not know
the Lord of what is close and what is near,
that one to whom the heavens and the earth
belong.
You said that our gods were not true.

This is a new word,
that which you speak, we are perturbed by it,
we are bothered by it.
Because our progenitors,
those who have been,
those that have lived on the earth,
did not speak thusly.

[Vosotros dijisteis
que nosotros no conocemos
al Señor del cerca y del junto,
a aquél de quien son los cielos y la tierra.
Dijisteis/ que no eran verdaderos nuestros
dioses.

Nueva palabra es ésta,
la que habláis/, por ella estamos perturbados,
por ella estamos molestos.
Porque nuestros progenitores,
los que han sido,
los que han vivido sobre la tierra,
no solían hablar así.

They gave us
their rules of life,
they believed they were true,
they worshiped them,
they honored their gods.[9]

Ellos nos dieron
sus normas de vida,
ellos tenían por verdaderos,
daban culto,
honraban a sus dioses.][10]

They are profoundly conscious of the afterlife, and have reflected on the value of their tradition—what their elders taught them. They defend their own culture, as they did in their dialog with the Spaniards, by saying they are distraught because the Europeans believed that Nahuatl culture could not have authentic beliefs. They speak in the same way of their ethics and moral philosophy, with its uses and customs, in addition to reflecting on the fleetingness of life, as when Netzahualcoyotl asks in a philosophical poem:

Is it true that one can live above the earth?
Not forever on the earth:
just a little time here:
even if it is jade it breaks,
even if it is gold it breaks,
even if it is quetzal plumage it comes apart,
we are not on the earth forever,
just a little while.

[¿Es verdad que se vive sobre la tierra?
No para siempre en la tierra:
solo un poco aquí,
aunque sea jade se quiebra,
aunque sea oro se rompe,
aunque sea plumaje de Quetzal se desgarra,
no para siempre en la tierra:
sólo un poco aquí.]

More important perhaps are the ethical poems, where the work of the *Tlacuilo* is shown to be analogous with the formation of human virtue:

The good painter
The Toltec (artist) of the black and red ink,
Creating things with black water

The good painter: it is understood
that God is in his heart.
He divinizes things with his heart,
he dialogs with his own heart.

He knows the colors, applies them,
applies shades.
He paints the feet, the houses,
sketches the shadows, achieves a perfect finish.
As if he were a Toltec,
he paints the colors of all the flowers.

[El buen pintor
Tolteca (artista) de la tinta negra y roja,
creador de cosas con el agua negra

El buen pintor: entendido,
Dios en su corazón,
que diviniza con su corazón a las cosas,
dialoga con su propio corazón.

Conoce los colores, los aplica, sombrea.

Dibuja los pies, las casas,
traza las sombras, logra un perfecto acabado.
Como si fuera un Tolteca,
pinta los colores de todas las flores.]

This poem about the good painter is linked to the following:

He who gives being to clay,
possesses a sharp eye, molds,
kneads the clay.

The good potter
puts style in everything,
teaches the clay to tell lies,
he dialogues with his own heart.

[El que da un ser al barro,
de mirada aguda, moldea,
amasa el barro.

El buen alfarero
pone esmero en las cosas,
enseña al barro a mentir,
dialoga con su propio corazón.]

This philosophy, called *Flor y Canto* (Flower and Song), sought to make the human being into "a face and a heart;" that is, to unify and integrally shape the inner person together with his bodiliness. The maxim "a healthy mind in a sound body" was written over the entrance to the *Academy* of the Greek philosopher Plato. The Nahuas too believed in this inclusiveness, albeit in a deeper way, since they sought full identity between the heart and the human sentiments that had to be united to the expressions of the face. This philosophical rationality is poetic and develops via appropriate emotions and affectivity.

Note that references here to Nahuatl culture do not concern the Aztec theory of war formulated by Tlacaelel, councilor of the Aztec king Itzcoatl around 1427, and was later a councilor of Montecuhzoma and Axayácatl.

Tlacaelel modified the version of history held by his people and placed their former tutelary numen Huitzilopochtli at the highest level of the religious pantheon, with the idea of building a great temple in his honor. He dealt out lands and titles, reorganized the army and the *pochtecas* (merchants) and consolidated the so-called Triple Alliance with the lord of Texcoco and the kingdom of what we now call Tacuba—*pelele*, an oppressed people subject to the will of another, which was substituted for the old Azcapotzalco. In addition, he initiated a series of conquests that would bring the Aztecs to Chiapas and Guatemala.[11]

As the Ramírez Codex and the indigenous historian Chimalpain relate, the monarchs did everything Tlacaelel suggested. It was through his intervention that the Aztec Empire was consolidated, albeit at the price of wars and blood in the veneration of the God of war: Huitzilopochtli. Tlacaelel increased the number of human sacrifices and organized the Flower Wars with the nearby kingdoms, which also shared the Nahuatl language and culture, *i.e.*, the cities of Tlaxcala and Huexotzingo.

In Mexico, Tlacaelel gave a mission of war to Tenochtitlan, a mystical mission that would teach everyone that it was the city chosen by the sun, Huitzilopochtli. In the meantime, the residents of the neighboring cities led a peaceful life with their wise men and poets following the doctrine of the ancient codices they had rescued from the destruction imposed by Tlacaelel. These cities had preserved the sayings and tradi-

tions inherited from the Toltecs. The kingdoms of Tlaxcala and Huexotzingo—enemies of Tlacaelel located outside of the Valley of Mexico—blossomed splendidly. In around 1490, their monarch Tacayehuatzin organized a dialog with poets and wise men, where the *tlamatinime* were brought together in order to discuss the origin and nature of poetry. Huexotzingo, on the other hand, was known as the home of music and illustrated books—it ws dubbed the Place of Butterflies. In the Mexican songs translated from Nahuatl by Angel María Garibay, Huexotzingo is compared with flowers:

As though they were flowers,
there the mantels of quetzal were unfurled
in the house of paintings.
This is how they are venerated on the earth and on the mountain,
this is how the one God is venerated.
Like flowery and igneous darts
your precious houses are lifted up.
My golden house of paintings,
is also your house, oh one God.

[Como si fueran flores,
allí se despliegan los mantos de quetzal
en la casa de las pinturas.
Así se venera en la tierra y el monte,
así se venera al único dios.
Como dardos floridos e ígneos
se levantan tus casas preciosas.
Mi casa/ dorada de las pinturas,
también es tu casa, único dios.]

But most of all, it was the elders of Texcoco who articulated the wisdom that united a face and a heart in a Nahuatl *paideia*. Two great kings embodied this emotional intelligence: Nezahualcoyotl, who ruled from 1418 to 1472, and Nezahualpilli, son of Nezahualcoyotl, who ruled from 1472 to 1516. Despite being in a political alliance with the Aztecs, the Texcocans never approved of their use of violence. Instead, the Texcocans studied their paintings and rejected the God of war. They later built a great temple to an unknown God instead. In addition, they were lovers of nature:

May the earth remain!
May the mountains stay on their feet!
Thus said
Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin
In Tlaxcala in Huexotzingo
May the earth remain
May the mountains stay on their feet
May the maize flower be shared
May the cocoa flower be shared
May the earth remain!

¡[Que permanezca la tierra!
¡Que estén de pie los montes!
Así decía
Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin
En Tlaxcala en Huexotzingo
Que permanezca la tierra
Que estén de pie los montes
Que se reparta la flor de maíz
Que se reparta la flor de cacao
¡Que permanezca la tierra!]

Moreover, they had their own image of what it meant to be a sage:

The wise man: a light, a torch,
a thick torch that does not smoke.
A perforated mirror,
a mirror with holes on both sides
to it belong the black and red ink,
to him belong the codices, to him belong the codices.
He himself is writing and wisdom.
He is the path, a true guide for others.
He leads people and things,
he is the guide for human activity.
The true sage is careful
(like a doctor) and keeps the tradition.
To him belongs the transmitted wisdom, he is the one who teaches, he follows the truth,
he never ceases to admonish.
He makes the faces of others wise,
he makes the other take a face
[a personality]
he makes them develop it.
he opens their ears, illuminates them.
He is the greatest of guides,
he gives them their road,
it depends on him.
He puts a mirror before the others,
he makes them sane, careful;
he makes them take on a face
[a personality].
He fixes his eye on things,
regulates their path,
he prepares and he creates order.
He applies his light over the world.
He knows what is above us
[and], the region of the dead.
[He is a serious man].
He can comfort anybody, correct anybody, teach anybody.
Thanks to him the people humanize their desires and receive a strict teaching.
He comforts the heart, comforts the people, helps them, mends, cures all.[12]

[El sabio: una luz, una tea,
una gruesa tea que no ahuma.
Un espejo horadado,
un espejo agujereado por ambos lados
suya es la tinta negra y roja,
de él son los códices, de él son los códices.
Él mismo es escritura y sabiduría.
Es camino, guía veraz para otros.
Conduce a las personas y a las cosas,
es guía de los negocios humanos.
El sabio verdadero es cuidadoso (como un médico) y guarda la tradición.
Suya es la sabiduría transmitida, él es quien la enseña, sigue la verdad
no deja de amonestar.
Hace sabios los rostros ajenos,
hace a los otros tomar una cara
(una personalidad)
los hace desarrollarla.
les abre los oídos, los ilumina.
Es maestro de guías,
les da su camino,
de él depende.
Pone un espejo delante de los otros,
los hace cuerdos, cuidadosos;
hace que en ellos aparezca una cara
(una personalidad).
Se fija en las cosas,
regula su camino,
dispone y ordena.
Aplica su luz sobre el mundo.
Conoce lo (que está) sobre nosotros
(y), la región de los muertos.
(Es hombre serio).
Cualquiera es confortado por él, es corregido, es enseñado.
Gracias a él la gente humaniza su querer
y recibe una estricta enseñanza. Conforta el corazón, conforta a la gente, ayuda,
remedia, a todos cura.]

Through this poem we get to know the Texcocans' vision of a wise man. It integrates intelligence with the senses and connects affectivity with thought and bodily expression. In the Nahuatl culture, emotions are the arrow tip of humanism, of the process of humanization. It is not just a matter of gaining character, for this character must also be consistent with intelligence. This *makes people sane*, while keeping them in touch with their bodiliness *until a face appears in them.* The wise man's task is educational: *he holds up a mirror to others.* He neither imposes nor follows pre-established ideas: rather, the wise man is essentially a facilitator, a *tlamatini*, someone who helps others to set down roots. Far from proposing a theory or rational speculation, the *tlamatinimi* held that the way to speak truth on earth is by *Flor y Canto –in xochitl in cuicatl–*a poetic formulation of wisdom. Did they mean wisdom is only found in poems? For the *tlamatinime*, poetry was not a technique but simply the best way to disseminate truth, which has to be expressed in an inclusive, integral way in order to avoid dividing reality into pieces, which will not lead to the path of the wise man. They believed that natural reality is distorted if it is conceived of as being isolated, and human reality is perverted when it serves isolated interests. According to their criteria, a person will never attain wisdom through reason alone, through passion alone, or through a separation from their bodies.

It is Alfredo López Austin[13] who has provided us with all the details of the discourses and ceremonies used in the offering and acceptance of children at the *Telpochcalli* and the *Calmecac*,[14] together with educational discourses for nobles and *macehuales*. This Náhuatl wisdom is known to us thanks to the so-called *Florentine Codex* of Bernardino de Sahagún, also called the *General History of the Things of New Spain*. On the basis of the information provided by the *tamatinimi nahuatlatas*, Sahagún describes each stage in the development of a native boy, from his birth to fifteen years of age, when he begins military training. Thanks to this chronicle we know there are numerous aspects to pre-Columbian education, from instructions on eating and the rules of hygiene and the arts, to the piety and penitence the children had to go through at each stage of their training. What is most interesting about this text is that it also includes instructions on how to speak, key phrases to be used on every occasion, descriptions of gestures that must be made, clothes that must be worn, and ways to paint one's face in order to attain courage in a war, as well as the exclamations of joy needed to celebrate good outcomes. In this educational rhetoric, there was an emphasis on the use of persuasion and moral philosophy. For the elders, movement, clothing and music were just as important as ideas, thoughts and activities. Rites, symbols and metaphors were forms of language, expressions integrated with a deeper reality, a reality neither hidden nor separated—it is a kind of reality that dwells, rather, at the root of things, as what is most radical in the realities in question.

The Nahua vision of ethical and social reality is revealed clearlyty in the famous confrontation between Franciscans and indigenous wise men recorded by Sahagún: the *Huehuetlatolli*.[15] We have the collision of two forms of rationality: the Western-Spanish way, which mixed a medieval mentality with a technical and conceptual capacity characteristic of the Renaissance, whereas Mexicans have a poetic rationality, their mentalities permeated by mythical knowledge and a metaphoric discourse. The collision between these two forms of rationality gave rise to mutual incomprehension between the two parties. These were two contrasting ways of understanding reality, two ways of confronting it.

The Importance of Novohispanic Philosophy

The years following the Conquest were a time when much of this wisdom was lost, with valuable codices being burned and with philosophy in New Spain taken over by Medieval European teachings. In the latter part of the 17th century, however, after the religious orders had long taught scholastic-medieval philosophy in the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico and in their own schools, a new identity for Mexican philosophy appeared in the guise of a woman. She was a Hieronymite nun, *Criollo* by birth, precocious from infancy. She had lived in the viceregal court, and had been examined by a group of chair professors at the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico. After the examination, she emerged triumphant. Her name was Juana Inés de la Cruz. Every Mexican knows a few of her lines:

Stupid men who accuse
the woman without justification,
without seeing that you are the occasion
of what you blame on her.[16]

Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,
sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis.

Sor Juana writes her lines in the Baroque style of the time, which uses contrasts and counterpoints (love, hate, wanting, rejecting) in writing, just as chiaroscuro is utilized in painting.

These lines, my dearest reader
dedicated to your delight,
have but one virtue in them,
that I know how imperfect they are.[17]

[Estos versos, lector mío
que a tu deleite consagro,
y que solo tienen de mío
saber yo que son malos.]

Or, as when she speaks philosophically and amorously:

Let us pretend I am happy,
melancholic thought, for a while;
perhaps you can persuade me, though
I know the contrary is true.

For since on mere apprehension
they say all suffering depends,
if you imagine good fortune,
you will not be so downcast.[18]

[Finjamos que soy feliz,
triste pensamiento, un rato;
quizá podréis persuadirme,
aunque yo sé lo contrario.

Qué pues sólo en la aprehensión
dicen que estriban los daños,
si os imagináis dichoso
no seréis tan desdichado.][19]

Here, in these lines, the protagonist is the thought that arises when her confessor[20] reprimands her for spending time philosophizing instead of obeying and praying—activities more appropriate for a nun. She tells her thought to pretend to be happy when she receives the prohibition:[21]

Let my understanding at times
allow me to rest a while,
and let my wits not always be
opposed to my own benefit.[22]

[Sírvame el entendimiento
alguna vez de descanso,
y no siempre esté el ingenio
con el provecho encontrado.][23]

In this poem, Sor Juana insists that creating poetry for pleasure does no harm to anyone, an opinion the bishop of Puebla did not share.[24] Sor Juana defended the existence of variety in opinions and rejected ideological imposition in the realm of human knowledge:

All people have opinions and
judgments so multitudinous
that when one states that this is black
the other proves it is white.

Some find attractive precisely
what others deem an annoyance;
an alleviation for one
is bothersome for another.

One who is sad criticizes
the happy man as frivolous
and one who is happy derides
the sad man and his suffering.

The two philosophers of Greece
offered perfect proofs of this truth
for what caused laughter in one man
occasioned tears in the other.[25]

[Todo el mundo es opiniones
de pareceres tan varios,
que lo que el uno que es negro
el otro prueba que es blanco.

A unos sirve de atractivo
lo que otro concibe enfado;
y lo que éste por alivio,
aquél tiene por trabajo.

El que está triste, censura
al alegre de liviano;
y el que esta alegre se burla
de ver al triste penando.

Los dos filósofos griegos
bien ésta verdad probaron:
pues lo que en el uno risa,
causaba en el otro llanto.][26]

The philosophical poem *Primero Sueño* was the apex of her production—it is a poem of 975 lines, which even herself said was the only work she had created freely and not at the behest of another. In *Primero Sueño,* Sor Juana recounts her journey of knowledge, a journey of the intellect or reason, and she speaks of how at first she rises proudly, with the goal of knowing all things at once.

Pyramidal, doleful, mournful shadow
born of the earth, the haughty confirmation
of vain obelisks thrust towards the Heavens,
attempting to ascend and touch the stars.[27]

[Piramidal, funesta, de la tierra
nacida sombra, al Cielo encaminaba
de vanos obeliscos punta altiva,
escalar pretendiendo las Estrellas.][28]

In her poem, Sor Juana considers that the claim of reason to grasp everything at once represents an impossible, arrogant goal. The figure of the pyramid represents the impetuous ascent of reason, while also representing the wisdom of the Egyptians as well as other interpretations and cultures. This is typical after the Renaissance, and is characteristic of 17th-century Hermetism. Sor Juana wrote her philosophical poem in a Hermetic mode, that is, via symbols, myths and allegories. This may have been a means of avoiding the Inquisition and speaking directly to a cultural elite, thus evading ecclesiastical authorities. In this intellectual journey, she proposes a noetic experience similar to that of mystics like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Ávila. In her case, however, she was not pursuing a vision of the divine, but rather a philosophical vision of the world of reason. This kind of reason seeks to attain full wisdom but, halfway through the poem, it realizes its goal is impossible to achieve at one stroke, even though it had followed the key steps: being vigilant in using the body, thereby suspending the senses and the imagination.

At this near impenetrable pinnacle,
joyful but marveling,
marveling yet well content,
still, even though content, astonished, the
the supreme and sovereign Queen of all the
earth
—free of the obstacle of spectacles,
the vision of her beautiful and
intellectual eyes,
unclouded by any fear of distance
or resistance of opaque obstructions,
cast her gaze across all creation,
this vast aggregate,

[En cuya casi elevación inmensa,
gozosa más suspensa,
suspensa pero ufana,
atónita aunque ufana, la suprema
de lo sublunar Reina soberana,

la vista perspicaz, libre de anteojos,
de sus intelectuales bellos ojos,
(sin que distancia tema
ni de obstáculo opaco se recele,
de que interpuesto algún objeto cele),
libre tendió por todo lo crïado:
cuyo inmenso agregado,

this enigmatic whole,
although to sight seeming to signal
possibility, denied
such clarity to comprehension
which, bewildered by such rich profusion
its powers vanquished by such majesty)
with cowardice, withdrew.[29]

cúmulo incomprehensible,
aunque a la vista quiso manifiesto
dar señas de posible,
a la comprehensión no, que—entorpecida
con la sobra de objetos, y excedida
de la grandeza de ellos su potencia–,
retrocedió cobarde.][30]

Thus, a repentant reason regresses in its attempt to see the light:

compelled to abnegate its daring
proposition, its immoderate
attempt to vaunt its strength
against the supreme creator of
irradiating beams.[31]

[Tanto no, del osado presupuesto,
revocó la intención, arrepentida,
la vista que intentó descomedida
en vano hacer alarde
contra objeto que excede en excelencia.][32]

Does this dream of reason reflect something of the nun's biography? Sor Juana was prohibited from going to the University because she was a woman, and was similarly banned from pursuing the things of men, such as the attempt to attain wisdom.

...castigating, blow after blow, both
that ancient, arrogant, once daring but
now lamented challenge,
(the demented experiment of
Icarus, who, for his audacity, drowned
in the sea of his own tears),
and, just as insistently, understanding
conquered no less by the immensity
of such a massive machine
a sphere of multifarious, conglobed
entities composed,
than by the properties
of each of them; and thus it acquiesced,
so awestruck that,
surrounded by such bounty, afloat upon
the neutrality of a sea of wonder;
and by observing everything, it saw nothing.[33]

despreciando, castigan rayo a rayo
el confïado, antes atrevido
y ya llorado ensayo,
(necia experiencia que costosa tanto
fue, que ícaro ya, su propio llanto
lo anegó enternecido)–, como el entendimiento,
aquí vencido
no menos de la inmensa muchedumbre
(de tanta maquinosa pesadumbre
de diversas especies, conglobado
esférico compuesto),
que de las cualidades
de cada cual, cedió; tan asombrado,
que– entre la copia puesto,
pobre con ella en las neutralidades
de un mar de asombros, la elección confusa–,
equivocó las ondas zozobraba;
y por mirarlo todo, nada vía].[34]

Instead of following reason in its arrogant search for sudden illumination, Sor Juana proposes in the second part of the poem a method or path whereby it can obtain knowledge gradually. She compares this effort with a boat on high seas, whose captain

struggles against storms until he discovers the proper sailing techniques that will enable the boat to enter a safe harbor. The poem ends with the rising of the sun—having begun at night (ceasing vision, breathing and imagination so that the unencumbered intelligence can rise up), but now the world is illuminated and she wakes up—thereby concluding her noetic experience.

Over the course of the poem, the various philosophical schools of the West are introduced: Plato's myth of the cave, Aristotle's theory of science, the Thomist problem of induction and deduction, Cartesian skepticism, and the methodological solution; all of them are gneological approaches, together with others propose a path for reason to pursue wisdom. However, with the method proposed by Sor Juana, what is interesting is that the search is formulated as a poem written in the first person— not as a treaty. Just like the philosophical poems of the ancient Mexicans she cites, her piece employs metaphors, myths, symbols, and allegories.

Primero Sueño is not the only philosophical text in Sor Juana's complete works. Little remains of the nun's prose works, but this does not make it less important. In *Carta Antenagórica* as well as in *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz,* she reveals she knows the philosophy of the Jesuit philosopher Suárez and the theology of the great theologian of her times, the Portuguese bishop Vieira. Possessing a knowledge that enabled her to cite the greatest intellectuals of her time in prose, Sor Juana decided to do her philosophizing in poetry on her own initiative. This was the reason the great Mexican humanist Alfonso Méndez Plancarte—who earned the right to become the editor of her complete works, in the edition published by Fondo de Cultura Económica—classified her poetry not just into romances, sonnets, *ovillejos,* and *silvas*, but also defined them as philosophical or erotic romances, philosophical satires, and historical-mythological sonnets, among other classifications.

In all of these categories, beginning with *Romance*, where there is a prologue from Sor Juana to the reader, we perceive that the nun's preferred format of doing philosophy was in verse. In the lines below she complains that she is not allowed to think freely, which is documented in her *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, where she disobeys the order of silence imposed on her. She replies with the following lines:

Nothing enjoys greater freedom
than the human understanding;
if God does not violate mind,
then why would I even try?[35]

[No hay cosa más libre
que el entendimiento humano;
pues lo que Dios no violenta,
por qué yo he de violentarlo?][36]

In her *Romances filosóficos y amorosos,*[37] Sor Juana criticizes the rationalist urge, which is a characteristic of decadent philosophizing:

A proof is found for everything
a reason on which to base it
and nothing has a good reason
since there is reason for so much.

All people are equal judges,
being both equal and varied
there is no one who can decide
which argument is true and right.
(…)
Discursive reason is a sword
quite effective at both ends
with the point of the blade it kills
the pommel on the hilt protects

If you, aware of the danger
wish to wield the point of the sword
how can the steel blade be to blame
for the evil acts of your hand?

Knowing how to create subtle,
specious reasons is not knowledge,
true knowledge consists only in
choosing salutary virtue.[38]

[Para todo se halla prueba
y razón en qué fundarlo;
y no hay razón para nada,
de haber razón para tanto.

Todos son iguales jueces;
y siendo iguales y varios,
no hay quien pueda decidir
cuál es lo más acertado.
(…)
El discurso es un acero
que sirve para ambos cabos:
de dar muerte, por la punta,
por el pomo, de resguardo.

Si vos, sabiendo el peligro
queréis por la punta usarlo,
¿qué culpa tiene el acero
del mal uso de la mano?

No es saber, saber hacer
discursos sutiles, vanos;
que el saber consiste sólo
en elegir lo más sano.][39]

Sor Juana became so dissatisfied with the vacuous speculations of arrogant reason that she wrote a canto to ignorance:

How blithesome is the ignorance
of one who, unlearned but wise,
deems his affliction, his nescience
all he does not know, as sacred!

The most daring flights of genius
do not always soar assured, when
they seek a throne in the fire
and fine a grave in copious tears.

For knowledge is also a vice:
if it is not constantly curbed
and if this is not acknowledged,
the greater the havoc it wreaks;

and if the flight is not brought down,
fed and fattened on subtleties
it will forget the essential
for the sake of the rare and the strange.[40]

[Qué feliz es la ignorancia
del que, indoctamente sabio,
halla de lo que padece,
en lo que ignora, sagrado!

No siempre suben seguros
vuelos del ingenio osados,
que buscan trono en el fuego
y hallan sepulcro en el llanto.

También es vicio el saber,
que si no se va atajando,
cuando menos se conoce
es más nocivo el estrago;

y si el vuelo no le abaten,
en sutilezas cebado,
por cuidar de lo curioso
olvida lo necesario.][41]

Instead of being arrogant and dogmatic, Sor Juana proposes a faculty of reason able to doubt and even be left speechless. For Sor Juana, wisdom is poetic because it is open to dialog, rather than be motivated by the raw desire to emerge as the winner of a debate. Her philosophy—just like Platonic philosophy—is expressed in a discourse that, by means of myth, goes beyond the predicamental level of truth and falsehood. It thus opens itself to a style that aporetically expresses the meaning and problems of reality. This is Plato's solution, as it is Sor Juana's, expressed in myths and poetry.

In addition, the poem integrates sound with metrics and words with metaphors and symbols in a structure that evokes the work of the ancient *tlamatinime*. In both cases, Sor Juana shows she is proposing a reason that is inclusive, since *Primero Sueño* is about the journey of reason and the vicissitudes it must undergo for not behaving in a manner that integrates diversity into unity.

The Guiding Thread flows into the 20th century with the Organic System of Vasconcelos

Now we will move on to the 20th century and the modern philosophical thinking of José Vasconcelos. Later on we will join together all the pieces of this puzzle and reveal the philosophical guiding thread encountered in all three of the Mexican philosophies analyzed. As José Gaos pointed out in 1950, Vasconcelos was the first Mexican philosopher to attain universal relevance. This is not because Sor Juana had not been published in Europe—even in her lifetime her works were published in Spain a number of times—but because she was known fundamentally as a poetess. It is only in recent years that people have understood that Sor Juana is also a noteworthy philosopher.[42]

Vasconcelos, however, pursues truth by developing a philosophical system that arises from what he calls an identity proper to Latin American philosophy. As Vasconcelos says, what is interesting about this identity is that it does not arise from the philosophy imposed by Church and Crown in the colonial era. Rather, Vasconcelos develops a harmonious synthesis out of the totality of all Latin American philosophies. His own system of thought is synthetic-emotional, that is, a system that ascends through distinct levels: the metaphysical, the ethical, and at the end, like a coronation, the aesthetic. Philosophy comes to its culmination with aesthetics. In his work *Estética* (*Aesthetics*), Vasconcelos proposes a revolution of knowledge inspired by Kant's Copernican revolution, as expressed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The Vasconcelian revolution consists of a *revulsion* of energy; following the scientific advances of his time, Vasconcelos extends physicalist theses about energy to the philosophical domain. Instead of saying the starting point of knowledge is the image, where what is

concrete in natural reality elevates itself by abstraction towards conceptual realities, philosophy must begin with the concrete and the emotional. Vasconcelos formulates the starting point of philosophy in his early work *Pitágoras, una teoría del ritmo* (*Pythagoras, a Theory of Rhythm*).[43] In this work he claims that philosophy can be understood in the light of Pythagoras' proposal, and that the problem was in the doubly bad interpretation of his thought by later thinkers. The first erroneous interpretation was the mystical path, which attributed an irrational knowledge to Pythagoras and ignored his philosophical aspects; the second held that for Pythagoras the first unity was number, as Philolaus and Aristotle assert. Vasconcelos gives a third possible interpretation, that of the musical Pythagoras who made rhythm into the first principle of things. He explains the origin of wrong interpretations:

The aesthetic interpretation of Pythagoreanism implies a radical change of criterion. Nearly the entire tradition sought to identify the concept of number with that of harmony, and ultimately with the notions of truth and the absolute. This links Pythagoras with Parmenides, and Pythagoreanism becomes a mechanics of the stable, a static mechanics...[44]

Vasconcelos declares the authentic spirit of Pythagoras was different: he proposed a musical conception of the universe. Rather than seeing things as physical entities subject to measurement, weight and a description of their relations and trajectories, they are described from the point of view of rhythm. This is a "rhythmic movement that in the end is indefinite movement,"[45] a position that in fact was closer to Heraclitus: "Pythagorean dynamism becomes mobile, like the life of the non-static spirit, in a word, aesthetic and not mechanical."[46]

For Vasconcelos, "Pythagoras sought to explain nature neither by the experience of the senses nor through intellectual postulates, but rather by the secret affinity existent between it and us, by the disposition that inclines us to choose, from among the multitude of external phenomena, those that coincide and are mixed with the intimate flow of our consciousness. We are told Pythagoras applied a criterion not merely intuitive, but also aesthetic: he practiced philosophy with the notion of music and beauty."[47] Vasconcelos begins with this idea taken from Pythagoreanism, an idea which, in his opinion, was first noted by the Seer of Crotone in the *Phaedo*. Before dying, Socrates expresses his ideal "to develop a philosophy that is musical, to discover the joint expression of beauty and truth." According to Vasconcelos, Pythagoras claimed the initial education of the human being should consist in music and in certain melodies and rhythms that act as a remedy for the passions and habits of the human soul. He claims the success of Pythagorean moral education was due, as Iamblichus described in his *Life of Pythagoras*: "[to] the mixtures of diatonic, chromatic and harmonic melodies, through which he easily succeeded in transforming the passions and orienting them in a circular manner, in better directions, when they had originally

developed in a clandestine and irrational way."[48] In Vasconcelos' view, this access to reality leads to formulating a *paideia*, that is, a philosophy that educates the student integrally: this is what he termed "musical." Vasconcelos proposes a process of natural, civic and ethical humanization, where rhythm is the axis. One allows oneself to be carried along—eliminating restrictions, prohibitions, moral codes and ideologies—but not in a way that promotes an anarchic, irrational expression of the passions. Rather, these passions need to be channeled, kept in tune with a rhythm that should determine their flow in the human being, as a part of the cosmos. Vasconcelos' philosophy recognizes a plurality of operant faculties in the human being, as being one with the cosmos (a point which communicates a clear ecological message by anticipating today's ecological emphasis on being one with nature, respecting it and recognizing that the human being is part of a greater whole, nature).

In his work *La Revulsión de la Energía* (*The Revulsion of Energy*), a prelude to his *Metaphysics*, Vasconcelos studies the cycles of force, change and existence, proposing that human wisdom is a new organ or faculty:

> *Reason and the senses do not explain the totality of existence—consciousness also possesses a faculty for extending one's attention beyond the zone of the physical, penetrating other levels of the world and of being, a penetrating attention that is either thought or intuition or a metaphysical gift. It is a new organ, perhaps of perception, perhaps of relation, with an existence that is different from our own, situated on planes that the senses will not be able to perceive.*[49]

What is Vasconcelos refering to? For him there are two modes of perception:

> *[...] one that is subliminal, that connects with the senses and gives us the laws and existence of the physical world, and another super-scientific perception that reveals a different universe alongside the ordinary processes of evolution. This is the universe of consciousness, neither chronological nor linear, which does not respond to the laws of physics. This universe possesses an energy and a force, a revulsion of energy that turns back on itself and ascends in a spiral.*[50]

Using the scientific terminology of his time, Vasconcelos establishes a metaphor to reveal the path of human growth, which at the level of consciousness is not transitive; rather, it turns back upon the same perceiving subject, thus perfecting it. "And for consciousness, liberating itself from the forms would be the same as overcoming limits, the same as penetrating into many universes at the same time, into all of those

universes that coexist with our daily life […]."[51] The discovery of his metaphysics is the discovery of existence and of other possible manners of being. Having attained the basis of existence, Vasconcelos now crowns his philosophical reflection with his last work, entitled *Estética* (*Aesthetics*).[52] In its prologue he states that "Mexican thinking, due to its Iberian roots, separates itself from Latin intellectualism and seeks to root itself in the facts […] our system is the deepest of all."

Vasconcelos proposes three main criteria that struggle for the attention of the thinker: deductive empirical science, deductive science, and the intuitive method, which sees the facts as linked for a purpose, as a well-ordered unity in their totality. He clarifies that this does not mean he does not use other mental forms; rather, in working with those other forms, it is artistic, religious, symbolic and poetic reason that is privileged. He explains this by opposing two binomials: dynamicist realism as opposed to idealist objectivism.[53]

Vasconcelos recognizes that intuitive knowledge is rational, but with an emotional principle. In his prologue to *Estética*, Vasconcelos pushed this knowledge too far towards the sacred and the religious. I believe this was what annoyed the Mexican academics of his day. During his lifetime he gained fame for his educational ideas and cultural relevance. However, he has never been read as a philosopher, nor have his philosophical works been subjected to serious analysis. He was misunderstood by the generation that came after him. Still, he merits optimism: perhaps the postmodern youth of the 21st century will be able to connect with his thought, provided they are able to get past his more impetuous affirmations. For him, "myth is valid in poetry, but not in science." He believes intellectual reason is "intellective-emotional, composed of sensation, the objective idea, impulse and reaction." Just as soon as intention appears, "knowledge is tinged with emotion. After acting, emotion discerns the intention, just as the intelligence discerns the forms of sensation. One always thinks with sense and meaning, and not in the abstract."[54]

As the reader can see, in Vasconcelos' view, emotional knowledge lies at the core of his philosophical theses. I believe he is correct about Mexican emotional intelligence, even without having performed research into the history of philosophical ideas. Vasconcelos' philosophical texts take up more than 3,000 pages, many of them quite complex, and in addition an analysis of his texts demands knowledge about the state of science in his day. Drenched in passion, his writings have given rise to prejudices among present-day Mexican academics, who are irritated by how he stumbles over his own words and his vehemence, or by the colloquial approach that his essays usually feature. To understand him, he must be appreciated from a place higher than his rhetoric. Vasconcelos has the merit of proposing a philosophical system for Latin America, based on a rationality that generates emotive syntheses out of what is heterogeneous.[55] A kind of analogy is at work in this faculty, which allows communication

between the subjects and the world via an intimate-qualitative order that he calls "aesthetic" (*estético*). This kind of reason is neither instrumental nor objectivizing. Harmony is based on knowledge as a whole, avoiding analysis and preferring the synthesis of diversity. Counterpoint is crucial to this way of seeing the world. For our philosopher, "writing for various simultaneous parts, according to certain rules, in order to produce harmony, is key."[56]

Here, our exploration of Vasconcelos' aesthetic theory can come to an end. We can see how his idea of *contrapunto* coincides with the analysis of Sor Juana I have just presented and with ancient Mexican thought. It is clear now there is a permanent Mexican approach to philosophy that includes an emotional faculty. In Sor Juana's case, speaking of the convergence of the Baroque, of *Criollismo* and of Catholic Counter-Reformation implies an analysis of problems that are inseparable. In the architecture of the great churches and convents of the era, in the sacred paintings that employ chiaroscuro and in the metaphors and learned language of poetry, counterpoint was the aesthetic resource which permitted the Baroque to blossom. Perhaps today we can find a deep answer to the question of why it was *Criollismo* that gave rise to a philosophical movement that sought the eventual emancipation of Latin America. Perhaps it was only in this era that the poetic conditions were appropriate for Mexicans to shape their own point of view.

This topic leads us to a philosophical reflection on the rationality of the Mexican soul: in his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle held that educating meant teaching the pupil to become sad because of what is due, and to be happy because of its opposite. This coincides with the educational and formational task Vasconcelos has in mind, since, just as with the Stagirite, his great educational project is fundamentally an emotional task. For the former, any moral revolution in Mexico must have a metaphysical base: "understanding the cosmos musically," that is, uniting the good and the true with beauty in order to obtain a radical kind of knowledge. Emotional intelligence consists of attaining a kind of knowledge that goes beyond differences and beyond every part of reality. Just as with musical scores, truth seen from the Vasconcelian aesthetic-philosophical dimension consists in penetrating into reality in a synthetic and intimate way, penetrating the global sound acquired by a measured and complete rhythm. Similarly, human knowledge is not found in the analysis of the parts of things—even though the approach the particular sciences employ is validly scientific—because to philosophize is to reach the deepest root, where differences are harmonized: philosophizing does not mean a sum of the truths of the various sciences, but rather a subjective penetration of reality.

The faculty or emotional organ Vasconcelos calls *antennal* is an intelligence which is able to contemplate things in their aesthetic-integral value, a focus proper to *unity in a rhythmic and metrical diversity*. Subject and reality are, from this perspective, insep-

arable. With this as our basis, it is possible to say Vasconcelos' proposal is ecological and moral in its highest sense. It is an aesthetic proposal that indicates the connection of the whole with the fragment and the connection of forms and figures with the ground that integrates them.

With this in mind, the investigative hypothesis I began the book with can be rounded off: for the ancient Mexicans of the Nahuatl culture, the most profound wisdom consists, as in the work of a craftsman, in forging a face and a heart. For Sor Juana, true wisdom consists of the formulation of contrasts and paradoxes. She therefore writes without scientific demonstrations in an aesthetic fashion—in her poems she works with symbols and metaphors, where the protagonist is a rationality that collapses when it seeks to know the entire universe in one fell swoop. In turn, the greatness of Vasconcelos was his formulation of a system of knowledge peculiar to Latin America, in order to penetrate philosophically into the deepest realities of the human being and of the cosmos. In this system, Vasconcelos proposes the principle of rhythm as the starting point through which the Mexican soul makes itself one with the other.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: from Childhood to Philosophy

Juana de Asbaje was born in San Miguel Nepantla in 1651. When she was only forty-four years old, a deadly epidemic took her life while living in Mexico City. Ever since she was young, she had the desire to study philosophy and theology at the University of Mexico; sadly, she never saw that dream fulfilled, for women were not permitted in the universities. This situation forced Sor Juana to become an autodidact, a virtue few people can acquire. She learned to read Latin at a very young age due to her desire for knowledge and her dedication to read and study. Her Latin skills meant that even as a child she was able to access numerous texts other women could not. Her childhood readings bore fruit when, at seventeen, she demonstrated her erudition in the presence of the professors at the Royal and Pontifical University, in a ceremony convened by viceroy Mancera.[57]

In 1669, she professed as a novice in the Hieronymite convent in Mexico City, where she put together a library containing many volumes—some say that she amassed a collection of four thousand before her death.[58] In her prose work *Carta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*,[59] Sor Juana tells of the passion for wisdom that characterized her entire life, even as a religious sister. In this letter, she reveals she was three years old when she learned to read. To fulfill her dream of attending the University, at age seven she pleaded with her mother to let her dress as a man. In order to live alone and devote herself to studying, she decided at the age of 19 to join a convent as a nun. It was there that she found space for "reading, reading and more reading, without any other teacher than the books themselves."

In the drama *Los Empeños de una Casa* (*The Trials of a Noble House*) the nun painted herself into the story that Ms. Leonor composed:

Such was my eagerness to learn
from my earliest inclination,
that studying far into the night
and with most eager application
I accomplished in a briefer span
the weary toil of long endeavor.[60]

[Inclíneme a los estudios
desde los primeros años
con tan ardientes desvelos
con tan ansiosos cuidados
que reduje a tiempo breve
fatigas de mucho espacio.][61]

It has been demonstrated that Sor Juana maintained, from her convent, a fecund academic relationship with another great Novohispanic philosopher of the 17th century, Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, with whom she exchanged books of philosophy and science.[62] She was familiar with the latest developments of science in her era, although this was not where her heart lay.[63] Instead, she worked to acquire a tremendous knowledge of Thomist philosophy[64] that characterized every philosopher of her time.

Octavio Paz, Nobel awardee in Literature, has shown in his work *Sor Juana o Las Trampas de la Fe* (*Sor Juana, or the Traps of Faith*) –a work catalogued by philosopher Ramón Xirau as "the most original book ever written on Sor Juana"[65]– that the nun had extensive knowledge on Hermetism and Renaissance Humanism, like Atanasio Kircher or Pico de la Mirandola. Xirau, together with other present-day philosophers, has demonstrated that Sor Juana had extensive knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy. This knowledge was not merely theoretical, for the nun put it to work in some of her poems, and especially in her *Carta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*.[66] Paz remarks that Kircher's Hermetism traces its roots to the Renaissance. He includes texts from the Stagirite because of the Peripatetic philosophy the nun professed. Irving Leonard has revealed another trustworthy channel for Aristotle's influence on Sor Juana,[67] with his theory of the Novohispanic 17th century as a neo-medieval world.

The Philosophy of Aristotle in Sor Juana[68]

Based on her own texts and the interpretations of others, it can be safely said that Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz knew the philosophy of Aristotle. The Stagirite's influence on the nun has two dimensions: one direct and the other indirect. In the first dimension, of direct influence, we can safely state that she knew Aristotle from her own readings. The second dimension reveals she also encountered the Philosopher via the Peripateticism of humanists like Las Casas, Thomists like Vitoria, and Hermeticists like Kircher.

Sor Juana's direct knowledge of the philosophy of Aristotle can be demonstrated by the presence in her works—especially in the philosophical poem *Primero Sueño*—of issues such as the categories,[69] substance and accident,[70] the speculative syllogism and the scientific demonstration,[71] being and essence,[72] the topic of induction and deduction,[73] and hylemorphism.[74] Other indicators of direct knowledge are a vast Aristotelian cosmology[75] and the influence of the *De Anima*,[76] among other works.[77]

Both Don Alfonso Méndez Plancarte[78] and Mauricio Beuchot have written on various indirect influences on the nun.[79] In Sor Juana's texts the two have noted, for instance, the presence of Thomist theses influenced by Aristotle. The topics that ap-

pear in her works include the causes, the teleology of the living being, the differences between natural and artificial form, the intrinsic union of soul and body, the logical and ontological point of view on substance, and the issue of the accidents.

From poetry to philosophy and back again

Primero Sueño, Sor Juana's most famous poem is a philosophical one—it is a poem only considered to be aesthetic in a secondary sense. To prove this, we must first assume that there is no formal or conceptual correspondence between Sor Juana's works and the contents of the poem *Soledades* (*Solitudes*) by the Spaniard Luis de Góngora, although they are contemporaries. In the frontispiece to her philosophical poem, the nun dubs it as follows: "First Dream, which Madre Juana Inés de la Cruz entitled and composed in imitation of Góngora," but this is just a recognition of the Baroque style of both poems, an indisputable point in view of their meter, vocabulary and the use of hyperbaton. In contrast, the topics she touches on and her use of concepts and metaphors, are not borrowed.

> Pyramidal, doleful, mournful shadow
> born of the earth, the haughty confirmation
> of vain obelisks thrust towards the Heavens,
> attempting to ascend and touch the stars.[80]
>
> [Piramidal, funesta de la tierra
> Nacida sombra, al Cielo encaminaba
> De vanos obeslicos punta altiva,
> escalar pretendiendo las Estrellas.] [81]

That is why Karl Vossler, a German philosopher and a specialist in this poem, has shown that "externally, *Primero Sueño* appears to be an updated version of the *Solitudes*. But at its deepest level, one might say that this is a case of the urgency of scientific research."[82] For Sor Juana, intellect arises and searches for a supreme light, knowledge at its peak, whereas Quevedo and Góngora describe the beauty of the apparent movement of the sun through the mountains. Sor Juana, in contrast, describes the journey of reason.

Sor Juana's philosophical poem is clearly an abstract and conceptual text that speaks of the journey of the soul, "the adventure of the spirit" in the words of Ramón Xirau:[83] "Sor Juana suggests, even states outright, that we can come to a relative knowledge of the universe via Aristotelian categories."[84] Additionally, *Primero Sueño* must not be classified as the story of a mystical experience, like the poetry of St. John of the Cross. The subject of *Primero Sueño* is reason, while mystical poetry uses metaphor to express something ineffable: the presence of divinity. In the nun's text she explores the noetic sense of reason. The topic is the Aristotelian *intellect agent* and the experience of human understanding that comes when one realizes pure intuition

is not sufficient for knowledge. By this, Sor Juana means that intellect must proceed deductively in order to attain the supreme *prâxis*: contemplation.

The itinerary of the rational part of the soul reveals an almost unintelligible circularity –unintelligible because its principles are rooted in a preconceived knowledge– that can only be fully communicated through poetic categories, despite the fact that the concepts themselves are highly logical and abstract. So, when the soul is dealt with, she treats it as being sovereign:

The soul, therefore, suspense	El alma, pues, suspensa
of the exterior government - in which occupy	del exterior gobierno —en que ocupada
in employ material,	en material empleo,
or good or bad assumes the day spent–,	o bien o mal da el día por gastado—,
only dispensed,	solamente dispensa
remotely, if all separeted	remota, si del todo separada
no, to the temporarily opressed death	no, a los de muerte temporal opresos
languid extremities, sedated bones...	lánguidos miebos, sosegados huesos...[85]

A dominant soul of the vegetative part:

the segments of vegetative heat,	los gajes del calor vegetativo,
the body being, in serene calm,	el cuerpo siendo en sosegada calma,
a cadaver with soul...	un cadaver con alma...[86]

Describing the vital parts of human body subordinated to the heart, the master organ that functions mechanically:

dead alive and to death live,	muerte a la vida y a la muerte vivo,
of the latter giving delayed signs	de lo segundo dando tardas señas
of the human clock	el del reloj humano
vital wheel that, without a hand,	vital volante que, si no con mano,
with arterial concert,	con arterial concierto, unas pequeñas
some little samples, pulsing,	muestras, pulsando, manifiesta lento
slowly states of its well regulated movement,	de su bien regulado movimiento. (vv. 192-209) [87]

As Zubiri[88] has demonstrated, the legitimacy of the *pulchrum* is a path for metaphysical exploration, and *Primero Sueño* is a sample of that path, something nearly unheard of in the 17th century.

Much has been said about the influence of Luis de Góngora on the nun's writings, in particular because of the similarities between *Primero Sueño* and *Soledades*. The differences between the two poems stem from the fact that the former contains clear-

cut concepts, concepts about knowledge, with an intellectual language that recounts the experience of the spirit. Octavio Paz emphasizes the opposition of content between this pair of poems,[89] and claims Sor Juana's poem is in "black and white," while Góngora's has "colors".

...And in the still contentment
of the silent empire,
submissive only voices consented
of the nocturnal birds,
so obscure, so severe,
still the silence was not interrupted.

[...y en la quietud contenta
del imperio silencioso,
sumisas solo voces consentía
de las nocturnas aves,
tan obscuras, tan graves,
que aún el silencio no se interrumpía.] (vv.19-24)[90]

In the first composition, the formality of the philosophical argumentation is due to the act of knowledge. On the contrary, the second composition's topic and argument are sensual and aesthetic, communicating the psychology and emotion of solitude.

Primero Sueño describes a reality that by definition is not visible: it is a reality seen by the soul. "It is not intellectual poetry," emphasizes Paz, "it is poetry of the intellect as it confronts the cosmos," that is, it is reason's exploration of the ground of the physical (the principle of the cosmos or metaphysics) by the act of knowing.[91] "The content of the poem is an abstraction of that we think"[92]; a travelogue of a 'spiritual journey.'"[93] Xirau sees *Primero Sueño* as "a poem of maturity, a true confession, in which Sor Juana narrates her spiritual adventure and subjects it to examination."

Sor Juana's longstanding hunger for knowledge led her to ultimately crown her studies and reflections with this magnificent philosophical text: "this is the best philosophical poem in the Spanish language."[94] Sor Juana transforms the Spanish Baroque into images and concepts. "What was metaphorical in Góngora here becomes a paradox of reason."[95]

Aristotle and his reflection in *Primero Sueño*

The contents of the poem are as follows. In *Primero Sueño,* Sor Juana narrates the nighttime journey of the soul, of human understanding, on a search to capture the meaning of the entirety of creation either in a single intuitive act, or else in a gradual process of analysis, as taught by Aristotle.[96]

Noûs is fundamental for the human soul, since it permits the illumination of the agent intellect; however, Sor Juana will show that this unceasing illumination is insufficient for human knowledge. In *De Anima* Aristotle holds that intellect cannot orient itself without the assistance of an image.[97] This story demands the inclusion of the

possible intellect (also known as the patient intellect), which also requires the reception of an image. The drama grows with the necessity of *empeiria* for abstraction, while induction remains insufficient for fully achieving the intuitive vision.

The poem connects the difficulty found in the anthropological structure of the human being with a relationship to the organic potencies and functions of the soul. Here, Sor Juana draws an analogy with a boat that plows through the waves and winds. The external and internal senses are initially required for knowledge, but later must be suspended and put aside in order to achieve illumination. In turn, the organic functions (vegetative and sensitive) must be suspended without being halted completely. Breathing is not fully suspended, nor is the beating of the heart or the use of the tongue (language), vision, or hearing.

Nevertheless, the experience of the spirit is not sufficient to adequately follow these steps. It is impossible that intellect alone, or *noûs*, could achieve a total vision, and thus the fall of the intellect comes to pass.

Neither gnoseology nor psychology suffice to find the first truth. This is what the collapse consists in: the intellect penetrates the deepest truths through the exercise of reason, but it is impossible for *noûs* to grasp the vision of the cosmos in its totality. Instead, the soul must have recourse to deduction. Intuition may be superior to deduction but, nevertheless, human reason can only penetrate to the truth with the formulation of syllogisms. Human knowledge is aspectual, partial; thus, one must proceed by parts, going from less to more.

Sor Juana has expressed the circle of Aristotelian reason in a poem: at its origin it demands the agent intellect, since without its illumination nothing would be knowable. Nevertheless, this primitive dignity is subordinated to exterior reality, to the sense datum, to the phantasm and to the patient intellect. Nor do illuminative abstraction and the act of knowledge suffice. One must instead follow the itinerary of the *corpus* of the Aristotelian *Organon*: start from the categories, and from there spin, interlace, infer, penetrate and deduce the truth.

Here one arrives at the main philosophical focus of the poem: the search for knowledge. The course of reason does not refer just to the intellect or *noûs*: it is also *epistéme*. Human reason cannot function any other way.

This discovery of reason implies the use of the Aristotelian method, justifying the Stagirite's logic and theory of science. The noetic and epistemic trajectoryof reason is the path of wisdom. Some interpreters of the poem have seen, in the fall[98] of the intellect, a gnoseological skepticism on the part of Sor Juana, the philosopher.[99]

However, interpretations like these betray an incomplete understanding of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge and logic. Aristotle himself notes that it is impossible for the intellect to reach the full vision of the principle by itself,[100] and states that there is another act of reason that provides knowledge of principles and causes.[101] For the St-

agirite, *the fall of the intellect* points to the greatness of deductive reason. It is through this type of reason that the soul achieves the *"vision"* of things.[102]

The philosophical poem *Primero Sueño* begins with the symbolism of *noûs* in the pyramid, since the intellect tends towards the infinity of being (the stars). Nevertheless, the poem does not conclude with that vision, because the direct ascent to the absolute is overwhelming, producing blindness.[103] The nature of human knowledge prohibits any vision of the cosmos that comes about by a sudden illumination of the sphere[104] The fall gives way to the search for another path whereby the intellect can achieve a complete vision of the world. This plunge from a great height does not imply skepticism or defeat, but rather the inclusion of the method and of a second act of reason. In the second part of the poem, after the *fall,* light appears and with it, an awakening:

> *in the poem the spirit is unlinked but subjugated to the body... it seeks to interpret creation, the unknown night in which the human being lies sleeping. But when daybreak comes, the half-consciousness that precedes awakening, and, with this, in the end, there is an abandonment of that intellective temptation, the pure day in which only the senses are able to touch the appearances of things, and the soul is grateful to the work of the light.*[105]

Collapse entails the possibility of authentic illumination. In the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, contemplation is "the supreme form of *prâxis*";[106]but it cannot be attained by a single act separated from the *noûs.*[107] In this way, the trajectory of the rational soul implies passing from one to another.[108] That is, from the categories[109] to composition or predication, and from statements or premises to the deductive inference.[110] Penetration to the first truth is only possible through syllogisms –this is what learning about the fall concludes in–because it is there that one obtains knowledge.[111]

Saying this does not mean that Aristotle and Sor Juana place deduction above the dignity of *noûs*. Still, for both authors the *noûs* penetrates and illuminates vision when the third act of reason concludes that something is necessarily mediating the essence in a deductive inference.[112]

The paradox of the pathway of reason (a paradox that leaves the soul "speechless")[113] arises because this deductive knowledge, in turn, is founded on an intellective pre-knowledge that is derived from *epagogé.*[114]

Seen in this way, the poem is a dialectic, circular journey of the soul due to a regress in the acts of reason.[115] This movement of the intellect, however, is not tautological, for it is a penetrative illumination, an unceasing flow from simple apprehension to judgment, and from judgment to reasoning. It is an increasingly penetrating illumination

of the cause and of the principle, always guaranteed by the constant act of the *noûs*, which moves on through method and process.[116]

First Dream does not have as its object the emptiness of knowledge; rather, it celebrates the joy of the act of knowledge. Its novelty relies on the fact that it recounts the act of the adventures and misadventures of knowledge.[117]

These are the misadventures of knowing, because while knowledge is an act, it is not the supreme act of intellection (*noesis noeseos*)[118] that marks the path towards the light. There is an explicit reference and analogy between *Primero Sueño* and the Platonic Myth of the Cave. In this myth Plato is unsurpassed when he writes of human knowledge as being a feat of the soul.[119] In the darkness of the cave, misfortune lies in thinking that the reflected shadows are the true essence of things. Only the collapse of reason's certainty allows an escape from the darkness of the night[120] in order to rise to true knowledge, to the light. [121]

We must sustain a rational caution about infinity and let go of the arrogant presumption[122] that the vision of the intellect is all-encompassing. The Aristotelian interpretation of *First Dream* is similar to Plato's explanation of the cave. The vision of the stars—the true reality, the principle and ground of being[123] —requires the dialectic of *epistéme.*[124]

First Dream is the story of a failure: a search that ends in the impossibility of knowing... What kind of dream is this? Is it one of impossibility and failure? It is a strange dream. It is an intellectual dream that leads us (as much as it too is led) to the world of the intellectual categories. In the first place, *First Dream* invites us to distinguish clearly between vision and knowledge, *qua* conditions or dimensions or qualities of the soul. For in this poem by Sor Juana there is vision, or better, an astounded gaze: the soul, "in seeing everything, saw nothing." This gaze, upon transmitting to the intellect what has been looked at, does not understand the meaning, the order or the causes of what it sees a seeing that is, of itself, vision[125]

The Aristotelian Theses in the Sor Juana's Philosophical Poem

The analysis of *Primero Sueño* up to now throws light upon the poematic structure of the work. It demonstrates that the text by Sor Juana is philosophical, and that it contains Aristotelian theses about the theory of knowledge, logic, and anthropology.

If *Primero Sueño* is read attentively, the reader will see that it contains 975 verses. Indeed, Sor Juana inserted an explicit division in the meter of the text.

This division marks the two great conceptual and thematic axes of the text—it separates the poem into two sections: one from line 1 to line 487, and the other from line 487 to line 975. It is exactly in line 487 that the poem announces "the fall of reason."[126]

In the first part of the poem the primary topic is intuition and the vision of the truth, within which there are certain subtopics that Sor Juana develops:

1. Reason *qua* intellect or *noûs* open to the infinity of knowledge, symbolized by the pyramid and the stars.[127]
2. The agent intellect and its illumination, topic that is anticipated at the beginning of the poem: a proud pyramid symbolizing knowledge and consequently the necessity of *empeiría*.
3. Possible intellect is what receives the forms from the exterior world through external and internal senses.[128]
4. Abstraction as contact with the world, the sphere and the objective level of knowing.[129]
5. The connection between theory of knowledge, psychology and anthropology.[130]
6. The soul in its rational and irrational parts.[131]
7. The topic of pre-knowledge by intuition alone.[132]
8. The fall by looking at everything, the intellect sees nothing, nor can it discern anything.[133]

The thesis I advance here—and which, it appears, other commentators on the work have not taken into account—refers to the second part of the text. The philosophical issue at the center of the second part of the poem is of rational discourse or deductive inference—necessarily, human knowledge proceeds in stages and employs a certain method.[134]

The inclusion here of the Aristotelian categories marks the starting point for the itinerary of the *Organon*, *i.e*. Aristotle's logic: simple apprehension in *Categories*,[135] composition, and division of judgment[136] in *Peri Hermeneias*, and reasoning or passing from one judgment to another in the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*.[137] It is by discursive reason that one journeys from the necessary to the probable[138] and, in turn, to dialectic and poetic questions[139] concerning reason.[140]

The secondary topics touched on in the second part of the poem are the following:

9. The ascent after the fall, and the necessity of deduction.[141]
10. The Aristotelian categories and the necessary connection between logic and existence.[142]
11. Reasoning.[143]
12. Scientific reasoning.[144]

13. Wisdom and vision.[145]
14. Practical reasoning and, with it, biographical knowledge of Sor Juana.[146]
15. The dream and awakened reason[147]: in order to awaken, one must sleep, for dreams produce light.

In conclusion, the main topic in *Primero Sueño* is the path to contemplation. It is the passage from the dream state to the waking state of reason. It is a conceptual story that describes—poetically and metaphorically—the course of the operations of the understanding that lead to the contemplation of the truth and the principle of the cosmos.

The aim of the poem is the theory of knowledge and of rationality.

While I have already investigated the possibility of an Aritotelian interpretation of *Primero Sueño*, no interpretation of the poem can be exclusive: as with any poem, Sor Juana allows multiple interpretations. This multiplicity is a virtue possessed by every great poetic-philosophical text, just as in the philosophy of classic authors such as Plato, who philosophizes through myth. The poem has been interpreted in various ways and can be seen through a Platonic standpoint,[148] from a Presocratic-atomist point of view,[149] and through the Hermetic and humanist vision of Renaissance authors.[150] Furthermore, it can be seen as clearly influenced by the theses of Thomas Aquinas[151]; it has also been considered a scientific treaty,[152] a dissent from the Inquisition,[153] a psychiatric text,[154] a text about mysticism and religiousness,[155] feminism,[156] and Cartesianism.[157] This is the greatness of the work. Here I have analyzed a clear dimension of the gnoseological theses presented by *Primero Sueño*, but there are many other paths suggested by the poem.

Primero Sueño is, without a doubt, the first great synthetic work of Mexican philosophy. The text contains major Novohispanic philosophical influences together with the incipient philosophizing of Latin American *Criollismo*.[158] It exemplifies a way of thinking previously unbeknownst to the West, one which reveals the face of a new philosophical identity: the Mexican one.