

ANDEAN PHILOSOPHY RESPONDING TO WESTERN RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES: RENEWED DIALOGUE BETWEEN ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

NICKOLAS CARRILLO¹

One of the fundamental principles of Andean Philosophy (AnP) is relationality. According to this philosophical approach, the relation between cosmological components is prioritized before the components themselves, a statement that seems to correspond to some ontological claims within Western philosophical perspectives. This text attempts to connect AnP with the analytic tradition in philosophy in how they both conceive of relationality. The text includes two main sections. The first will sketch the foundations of AnP, while the second will identify an approach in relational ontology where the relation between entities is ontologically more fundamental than the entities themselves (Wildman 2010: 55), and can be used as an analytical tool to reinterpret AnP. One upshot of my project is the possibility of creating an academic dialogue between two different traditions built from (apparently) distant ontological, conceptual and geographical sources. My aim is to generate foundational dialogue; traditions should mingle and mix so as to come up with more holistic ways of understanding ontology.

1. AnP's ontological maxims

AnP has been historically and erroneously seen as a mere cosmovision rather than a cosmology, as it should be grasped. In fact authors like Estermann have already recognized this issue by stating "This is the state of the debate regarding Andean philosophy". Academia keeps pushing aside its contents to (inferior) categories of "mythical thinking", "religiosity",

¹ Nickolas Carrillo is a graduate of the master's programme in Analytic Philosophy at the University of Bucharest, and Assistant Lecturer ("técnico docente") at Universidad San Francisco de Quito. Contact: nickolas.carrillo0295@gmail.com

“cosmovision” or at the best: of “ethno-philosophy”” (Estermann 2009, 133). Consequently, its involvement in Western academia, philosophy specifically, has not been substantial yet (Lajo 2006, 134). AnP has been tackled by different social sciences such as anthropology and sociology as providing different ways of understanding and “developing” some other concerns such as community management, social structures, decolonial perspectives, history, art history, literature, etc.

Nevertheless, philosophy (at least as far as the scope of my own research has taken me) has not yet encountered AnP as a complementary way for understanding phenomena and some of the problems it has been dealing with, for years. This notion was also accepted by Estermann when he referred to AnP and its relation to Western philosophy in the following manner:

The philosophical problem of the “other” is also the problem of philosophical alterity, that is to say: of the “other philosophy”. In other words: When stating that philosophy is an (exclusive) creature of the Occident that only can expand itself towards other cultures conserving its inherent Occidentalism, the “other philosophy” (a people that has a distinct philosophy) has no reason to be. (Estermann 2009: 134)

The primary authors I will discuss are Rodolfo Kusch, Javier Lajo, Joseph Estermann and Eduardo Grillo. The methods used in this section are the following. First, the interpretation of texts that come from anthropological and sociological studies of the Andes and its communities. Then, the compilation of some of the few attempts to understand Andean thought from a philosophical perspective (Kusch and Estermann). Finally, the interpretation of symbols inside AnP that guide us in the process understanding it better.

One of my main interests with this essay, as it was previously mentioned, is trying to create a dialogue between AnP and Western philosophical approaches. It would be a challenge because the very first ontological *leaps of faith* made by each of them are completely different. Yet, at least some glimpses of coordination can be found and will be explored in what follows. My intention is never to delegitimize Western-

based philosophy and victimize AnP or non-Western philosophical perspectives. Both are needed to understand the current research project and generate far more complex methods and standpoints. Prioritizing just one viewpoint, say AnP, would take us once again to biases and reductionism; that is not the road taken here.

Now that some conceptual and intentional clarifications have been made, I move to the analysis of AnP's ontological maxims. These are all about relationality. Every major principle within AnP is based on the prioritization of the relation between components before, or over, the components themselves. In fact, AnP is based on two main principles which are grounded on relationality and constant flux within and among entities. Throughout this section, I will present these principles as well as other key notions, as a preliminary step to using them in dialogue with some corresponding arguments and views from analytic philosophy.

First consider Rodolfo Kusch's book called *Pensamiento Indígena y Popular en América* (originally published in Spanish in 1970). The title would translate as *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in America*. By the way, the translation to English of this fundamental text in AnP was not made until 2010. The author starts chapter two called *Conocimiento* (Knowledge) by describing an interview made with an indigenous family in which only one of the siblings was able to speak Spanish and translated the questions to the Aymara language for his father. The interview explored agriculture and the lack of "better" methods or tools for watering crops. These methods required a water pump to carry water from the canals and rivers to the uphill plantations and did not require the need for constant raining. The elder just looked at the interviewers (Kusch included) and seemed confused. It seemed that the idea of employing a water pump was absurd so he did not even answer the question. Later on, when the interviewers left, the commentaries about the *indios* being ignorant and not wanting to modernize their working methods emerged among the interviewing team. Nevertheless, Kusch understood the elder's reaction after a while. The use of a water pump rather than a ritual for calling the rain is simply absurd because it would entail the "solution" to crop watering was outside of the *ayllu* (community or family). The ontological commitment that "solutions" and "truth" are situated "outside" of us/them was (maybe even intrinsically)

rejected by the elder (Kusch 1970: 274-8). For AnP, there is no ideal “outside” and consequently nothing to seek in it.

AnP’s relationality presupposes that “all cosmological beings are equivalent, these include humans, rocks, rivers, hills” (Grillo 1993: 6). This entails that a teleological vision based on the nature of the existence of beings is completely out of place inside AnP. The *aliveness* of all beings entails that we “should have the capacity to communicate with all these beings (rivers, rocks, stars, plants, animals...) because they all have *knowings*” (Grillo 1993: 11). AnP is based on the “harmony of the cosmos which is maintained by the continuous participation of all the beings that live in it, namely all of the aforementioned ones, because all of us complement each other” (Grillo 1993: 17). This last conception introduces the main principles of AnP, which will be explored below.

The robust ontological interconnection between the Andean individual and the physical and metaphysical realms is strongly present in Andean rituals. For instance, “ritual can be seen as an enactment of relationships tying humans to spirits, gods, ancestors, animals, and objects” (Rosenfeld, Bautista 2011: 6). In addition,

many scholars argue the relationship between religious/sacred and secular/domestic is more complex, and each element cannot be disentangled from the other... “rituals [being] an extension of daily life, a practice that affected the ways artifacts, food, and settlements were formally placed (Rosenfeld, Bautista 2011: 7, in a passage that references the work of many scholars in the field).

AnP is based on parity. Arguably, its first principle is called “Complementary Duality” (Lajo 2006: 81). It is important to mention one of the main legends that introduced this principle inside the Andean world. It is the legend of *Manco Qhapaq* and *Mama Ocllo* emerging together from the Titicaca lake in representation of the *pakarina* which refers to the spark of life (Lajo 2006: 81).

Complementary duality can be experienced in “Andean household dynamics as gender complementarity, a pattern in which women’s and men’s work are distinct, yet equally critical to household function” (Maxwell 2011: 192). In Bolivia and Ecuador, complementary practices

among households can be seen when Bolivian informants told researchers that *everyone does everything* in the hearth, as well as when Otavaleños (an Ecuadorian Andean community) showed that the objective at home is to *get the job done* (Maxwell 2011: 192). Within Andean daily practices in the household and hearth, the division of labor responds to the first principle of AnP.

The second principle is called the “Proportional-Complementarity between the square and the circle”. To better understand the formation of this concept it is necessary to firstly understand the concepts of *Qhapaq Ñan* and *Ch’ekka*. The *Qhapaq Ñan* refers to the path built over the alignment in a 45° inclination between the most important cities of the Incan empire (Cajamarca, Cusco, Oruro, Potosi) and the inclination axis of the rotation of the Earth (Lajo 2006: 77). This relates to the concept of *Ch’ekka* because this can be translated (from Quechua) as “diagonal line of truth” or simply “line of truth” (Lajo 2006: 77-78, 86). Furthermore, the Incan empire has been in constant interaction with the geometric figures of the circle and the square and the complementarity between both of them in what Lajo refers as the *cuadratura del círculo* or “quadrature or squaring of the circle” (Lajo 2006: 88). From this interaction emerges the Andean cross or *chakana* which is a geometric construction derived from the interaction between squares, circles and the *Qhapaq Ñan* or the diagonal line of truth. Another axiom is derived from this principle. According to Estermann (2006), correspondence emerges, which is a crucial term inside AnP. It presents the view that the different aspects, regions or fields of “reality” correspond in a harmonious manner. This principle manifests itself, within AnP, at all levels and in every category. It describes the relation between the micro and macro cosmos “as it is in the big, it is in the small” (cosmic isomorphism). There is also correspondence between what is cosmic and what is human, the human and the non-human, the organic and the inorganic, life and death, right and wrong, divine and human and some other concepts thought from dichotomies as a starting point (136-138). This principle, combined with the concept of *Vincularidad*, which I will expand on below, generates the Andean existential moments: *Hanan Pacha*, *Kay Pacha* and *Uku Pacha*.

Finally, I would like to introduce a concept called *Vincularidad* or “Bonding”² It is necessary to understand not only the principle of complementary parity but also acknowledge the interaction between components, a robust relation which requires both sides working together (one in coordination and reciprocity with the other) as well as mutual nurturing within themselves (Lajo 2006: 99). This interaction generates three important existential moments, called *Uku Pacha*, *Kay Pacha* and *Hanan Pacha* (Lajo 2006: 150-151). It is extremely important to understand how these jointly create *Vincularidad*. *Uku Pacha* can be perceived as the underground world sometimes represented as the sea or death, while *Hanan Pacha* can be seen as the sublime world often represented as the sky, the sun or life itself. The interaction between these two concepts and their *Vincularidad* is what generates *Kay Pacha* which can be represented as the “here and now” or every present moment of existence (Lajo 2006: 150-156). Therefore, *Kay Pacha* can be seen simply as the encounter between the two previous moments.

Within AnP there is no teleological conception of how parts interact. No concept is “better” or “more desirable” than another. For instance, no state of mind independent of its physical substrate is possible because the terrestrial state or *Uku Pacha* is also necessary in the overall relation and one cannot exist without the other. And the “beauty” of *Hanan Pacha* would not be possible without the relation it has with the *Uku Pacha*.

2. Western perspectives on relational ontologies and its connections with AnP

The concept of “relational ontology” has the ontological presupposition that the relation between entities comes before, or is prior, to the entities themselves (Wildman 2010: 55). This conception can be easily misunderstood

² In order to develop this concept I will not use “Bonding” but “Vincularidad” due to the reductionism the translation generates when approaching the actual meaning of the word. *Vincularidad* presupposes not just the sticking of both components but also the mutual nurturing between them.

as a form of ontological dependence (Tahko, Lowe, 2016). When the concept of ontological dependence is introduced, one key feature is precisely ascertaining what dependence is and how it can be acknowledged. "A being may be said to depend, in such a sense, upon one or more other beings for its *existence* or for its *identity*" (Tahko, Lowe, 2016). Some other varieties of ontological dependence can be analyzed in modal terms which imply the use of metaphysical notions of *possibility and necessity* while yet others demand an analysis based on the notion of *essence* (Tahko, Lowe, 2016). Ontological dependence can be understood through three claims:

- (1) "Sets ontologically depend on their members."
 - (2) "Electricity ontologically depends on electrons."
 - (3) "God doesn't ontologically depend on anything."
- (Tahko, Lowe 2016)

Each of these claims imply a different variety or understanding of ontological dependence. At the surface these concepts (especially (1) and (2)) might seem capable of describing some of the fundamentals of AnP from the previous section. Nevertheless they are not strong enough (in terms of relationality) to correspond with AnP.

Claim (1) states that sets ontologically depend on their members. But what happens when we stop thinking in terms of sets and members and instead we try to embrace an understanding of AnP in which sets imply labeling and categorization? If we realize that sets are merely a type of categorization of different perceived phenomena, that automatically undermines complementary duality and *Vincularidad* inside AnP. We can feel tempted to think about complementary *duality* in terms of ontological dualism, therefore presupposing acceptance of the very basis of set theory. Nevertheless, within AnP, duality should be taken as a concept devised to "elucidate" the workings of relations. What we should look at is not duality but complementarity and the *Vincularidad* that works among it. Sets and members themselves imply a leap of faith that prioritize the components before the relation from the start, and therefore construct a "truncated" relational form within them.

When we state, in claim (2), that electricity ontologically depends on electrons, a stronger sense of relationality emerges, yet it is still not one that can completely enlighten the principles of AnP. If electricity ontologically depends on electrons then the existence of electricity is dependent on the existence of electrons. Yet this is one-sided: electrons do not ontologically depend on the existence of electricity, so mutual nurturing is not present under (2). Within AnP, relationality is not assumed using a teleological mindset, nor is it a one-way ticket that takes us from point A to point B, but rather a constant flux between mutually relevant components.

Claim (3) could imply that God only ontologically depends on her/his/itself. This claim is totally at odds with AnP. In AnP, everything ontologically depends on everything. But this does not imply that an entity can depend on itself alone (as God is portrayed) because that would automatically give it a property of independence. If a single component of the cosmos is understood as independent, the whole system would collapse due to its entanglement. This can be better understood when looking again at the “undulatory cycle” described in the first section. *Uku, Kay* and *Hanan Pacha* ontologically depend upon each other.

The concept of monism proposed by Schaffer is maybe one of the Western-based perspectives that might seem similar to the fundamental underpinnings of AnP. Monism can be understood in various forms, that is why the kind of monism I decided to employ here is Priority Monism, precisely the kind that Schaffer developed throughout his article called “Monism: The Priority of the Whole”. He states that his article will defend monism because “there are physical and modal considerations that favor the priority of the whole” (Schaffer 2010: 32). For instance,

physically there is good evidence that the cosmos forms an entangled system and good reason to treat entangled systems as irreducible wholes. Modally, mereology allows for the possibility of atomless gunk, with no ultimate parts for the pluralists to invoke as the ground of being. (Schaffer 2010: 32)

It is interesting that monism has been catalogued as contrary to common-sense or ridiculed as mystical nonsense (Schaffer 2010: 32)

because epistemic violence of this kind automatically blindfolds us to a whole new ontological perspective to look at the cosmos that could take us to completely different outcomes.

In a few words, monism is usually interpreted as the view that exactly one thing exists; so there are no particles, pebbles, planets or any other parts of the cosmos; furthermore monism is not that the whole has no parts, but rather that the whole is prior to its parts (Schaffer 2010: 32-33). Until this point Schaffer's view on monism goes hand to hand with some of the concepts exposed in the first section concerning AnP. For instance, if we look at the first principle of AnP and specifically at the concept of the *pakarina*, we can identify that this spark of life comes precisely from not prioritizing *Manco Qhapaq* and *Mama Ocllo* as initially important in the relation but the whole. The whole is seen as a relation based on complementary duality in which none of them could be capable of crafting the *pakarina* alone. The whole is crucial for AnP.

I previously stated that Schaffer's view on monism has glimpses of similarity with AnP. I said glimpses because the similarities appear quite uncommonly. Hence, it is necessary to expose in which point I had to abandon Schaffer's monism. First and foremost because he does not seem to fully embrace his own view on monism: this could be identified in his uses of the words *cosmos* and *world*. In fact, he

will assume that there is a world and that it has proper parts. More precisely, I assume that there is a maximal actual concrete object – *the cosmos* – of which all actual concrete objects are parts... When I speak of the world – and defend the monistic thesis that the whole is prior to its parts – I am speaking of the material cosmos and its planets, pebbles particles and other proper parts. (Schaffer 2010: 33)

within AnP the term *world* is not grasped in any way other than as a product of an ontological view that prioritizes the entity before the relation. When the *world* is introduced many objects are ignored. More specifically, all the abstract ones that for AnP are equally necessary. This is precisely what Schaffer is defending explicitly when he says "I am only concerned with actual concrete objects. *Possibilia*, *abstracta*, and actual *concreta* in categories other than object are nor my concern (deities

and spirits, if such there be, are nor my concern either)" (Schaffer 2010: 33). This is the main reason I would suggest that he is not using the concept of *cosmos* operative in AnP.

As mentioned in the first section, AnP recognizes that all parts of the cosmos are conscious and alive in their own particular way. This commitment carries significant ontological presuppositions. Ontologically committing to accept that rivers, rocks, mountains, etc. are alive forces us to think in new or different ways of understanding life itself, alternative to standard ways of conceiving physical phenomena. Deities and spirits may sound silly in the Western analytic tradition, but they are crucial to AnP. This is the very point of the concept of *pakarina*.

To conclude, it might be helpful to review those Western-style ontological notions that I found most aligned to AnP. Firstly, claims on ontological dependence are not significantly similar to AnP. Secondly, Schaffer's view on monism actually shows important matches with AnP. The fact that monism recognizes the importance of looking at the cosmos (remember the analysis about the use of "world" and "cosmos" for Schaffer) as a whole, which implies a robust ontological interconnection between its parts is fascinating. Even more so when each conception came from distant ontological, conceptual and geographical sources. The recognition of similarities between indigenous and Western views and their respective ontological claims would reinforce even more the conception of an entangled cosmos full of relations in every small object or event we feel or look at. Of course, this is only a start, to be supported or undermined by further research.

REFERENCES

- Estermann, Josef, "Andean Philosophy as a Questioning Alterity: An Intercultural Criticism of Western Andro- and Ethnocentrism." In *Worldviews and Cultures: Philosophical Reflections from an Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Nicole Note, R. Fernet-Betancout, Josef Estermann and Diederik Aerts, 129-148, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009.
- Grillo, Eduardo, "Visión Andina de Siempre y Cosmología Occidental Moderna." In *Desarrollo o descolonización de los Andes?* PRATEC : Lima, 1993.

- Kusch, Rodolfo, "Pensamiento Indígena y Popular en América." In *Obras completas*, 2nd vol. Rosario: Editorial Fundación Ross, 2007.
- Lajo, Javier, *Qhapaq Ñan: La ruta Inka de la sabiduría*, Quito: Abya-Yala, 2006.
- Maxwell, Keely, "Hearth and Household Economy in an Andean Village." *Human Organization* 70, no. 2 (2011): 189–199.
- Rosenfeld, Silvana, and Stefanie Bautista, "An Archaeology of Rituals." In *Rituals of the Past: Prehispanic and Colonial Case Studies in Andean Archaeology*, 3-20, Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017.
- Schaffer, Jonathan, "Monism: The priority of the whole." *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 1 (2010): 31-76.
- Tahko, Tuomas and Jonathan Lowe, "Ontological Dependence." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/dependence-ontological/> . Winter 2016 version.
- Wildman, Wesley, "An Introduction to Relational Ontology." In *The Trinity of an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, edited by John Polkinghorne, 55-73. Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.