

# APA Newsletters

Volume 01, Number 1

Fall 2001

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## NEWSLETTER ON HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

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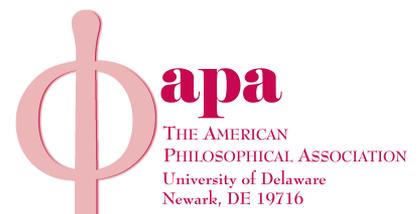
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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

Eduardo Mendieta, Editor

Fall 2001

Volume 01, Number 1

## FROM THE EDITOR

### Eduardo Mendieta

This issue of the newsletter opens with an essay by Jane Duran that visits the thought of famous Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos from the perspective of a comparative analysis. Prof. Duran shows how, notwithstanding Vasconcelos's penchant for onto-metaphysical speculation and highly unorthodox nomenclature, his philosophy shares many concerns and even insights with U.S. pragmatism. Duran focuses particularly on the work of Dewey.

The next article by Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert was first presented at the Pacific Division meeting of the APA, which was held in San Francisco, April of 2001. The APA committee on Hispanics organized a panel on Mario Sáenz's book *The Identity of Liberation in Latin American Thought*. *Latin American Historicism and the Phenomenology of Leopoldo Zea* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), with commentaries by Millán-Zaibert, Manuel Vargas and Patricia Huntington. Because Professor Huntington's contribution turned into a lengthy manuscript dealing with the religious, theological and spiritual dimensions of contemporary Zapatismo in México, her essay will appear in its entirety in a different venue. The main points in Dr. Vargas' commentary were included in his book review, which was published in our most recent issue. Prof. Sáenz's response conveys a sense of their various criticisms, but it can also stand as an independent text.

The essays by Jorge Garcia and Angelo Corlett offer the latest installment of an ongoing debate over the nature of ethnic labels and Latino identity in particular, that began with the publication of Jorge Gracia's *Hispanic/Latino Identity*. In this exchange, Garcia, who has previously critiqued Gracia's account, raises critical questions in regard to the definition of Latino identity defended by Corlett in his recent *Public Affairs Quarterly* article, "Latino Identity" (PAQ v. 13, 1999). In that paper, Corlett argued for a genealogical basis of Latino identity and identified a set of attributes that could determine one's degree of identity. Garcia pushes Corlett for more precision in his account, but is primarily concerned with the very concept of an identity that would admit of variable intensities or degrees.

In his detailed response to Garcia, Corlett underscores the practical and ethical necessity for providing a definition of Latino/a identity. Corlett concedes that setting out the conditions for degrees of identity will always have some

problematic and arbitrary aspects, but he argues that, nonetheless, we need to settle on such conditions for reasons of justice. He develops six desiderata that an adequate account must answer, and he then defends his account against Garcia's objections using these desiderata.

Finally, in this issue is the first installment of a series of interviews that *The Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* will be publishing with innovative theorists working in areas related to Latino/Latin American philosophy and Latino studies. Linda Martín Alcoff has done three interviews, the first with Professor Paget Henry, which appears here, and two others, with Professor Juan Flores from CUNY and Professor Lewis Gordon from Brown, which will appear in future issues. We hope these interviews will help those interested in the development of Latino philosophy to learn from social theorists who have been grappling with the relationship of philosophy to cultural location for some time. We also want to make connections between Latino thought, Caribbean thought, and Africana thought, to explore the connections that already exist as well as to bring them into more explicit dialogue.

We welcome feedback on these interviews as well as suggestions and proposals.

## 2001 REPORT OF THE APA COMMITTEE ON HISPANICS/LATINOS

### Linda Martín Alcoff, Chair

#### 1. Progress on Committee Projects

The Committee has had a very productive year. We produced the first volume of the *new Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, created a listserv for Latinos in philosophy and anyone interested in Latino or Latin American philosophical issues, helped to organize a very successful reception for people of color at the Eastern APA, had at least one panel at each of the APA divisional meetings, and pursued several joint projects with the other diversity committees, as described below, including a successful effort to encourage the APA to form a new standing Committee on Inclusiveness which will work to diversify the profession. Our proposal to the APA Board to sponsor prizes to promote Latino/Latin American philosophy was not successful, but it has not been definitively rejected either, and I will give a report on the status of our discussions with the Board below.

## 2. Newsletter Report

Our new newsletter has been launched with the excellent leadership of Eduardo Mendieta who took on the task of being its first editor. We have many plans to use the newsletter to provide up to date accounts of current debates and the development of publications and translations, as well as to assist those who would like to include Latin American philosophy and Latino issues in their courses. We need next to formalize an editorial committee and establish a review process.

## 3. Reception for People of Color

With the assistance and financial support of the APA National Staff, the committees on diversity this year co-sponsored a special reception for people of color at the Eastern APA, the largest division and the meeting where most of the job interviews occur. The reception was open to all, but provided a space for the small but growing numbers of minorities in the APA to meet, network, and relax. It was very well attended, and very much appreciated by those who came, and we hope it will be repeated.

## 4. New Standing Committee on Inclusiveness

We worked with the other committees on diversity to develop a proposal and rationale for this committee, which can be found on our committee web page. The proposal was put before the APA Board of Officers, who unanimously endorsed it. It was then put to a mail ballot in every division and accepted by a substantial margin. We hope that this committee can now research effective methods for making the philosophy profession more hospitable for all those interested in the field. We are convinced that this will require more than simply opening doors (though this is also important), but that it will also mean assessing the profession as a whole and making reasonable changes where necessary and feasible.

## 5. Panel Presentations

We sponsored a total of four panels this year, three of which were co-sponsored with the other diversity committees or with the Committee on the Teaching of Philosophy. The panels we have organized can be divided into three groups: (1) on Latin American philosophy or philosophical work that is engaged with issues germane to U.S. Latinos, such as the question of ethnic identity itself, (2) on ideas for organizing courses in these areas, and showcasing recent publications that can be used in such courses, and (3) more organizational meetings in which panelists share their experiences relating to some aspect of diversity and we discuss “what is to be done.”

Our panel titles this year were: “Author Meets Critics: The Identity of Liberation in Latin American Thought, by Mario Sáenz”; “Anniversary Symposium: On Being Black, Gay, Latino/a, Female, Asian, etc. in Philosophy Before the Era of ‘Diversity’”; “Incorporating Latino/Latin American Philosophy into Course Curricula”; “Author Meets Critics: “Deliberative Democracy, Political Legitimacy, and Self-Determination in Multi-Cultural Societies by Jorge Valadez.”

We have also worked successfully to have many of our panels published, sometimes in toto. Our panel on Jorge Gracia’s *Hispanic/Latino Identity* was published with *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. The panel on Jorge Valadez’s book will also appear in that journal. A panel we organized

two years ago on Maria Pia Lara’s new book appeared in *Hypatia*. The panel on Mario Sáenz’s book will appear in the next copy of our newsletter. We are now working on finding a publisher for our panel on teaching Latin American philosophy.

## 6. Status of Our Proposal for Prizes

Although the Committee has been pleased with the assistance and support we have received from the Board and the National office, we were nonetheless very disheartened to have our proposal for four prizes in the area of Latin American philosophy and Latino issues turned down by the APA Board. (See our web page or my last committee report for a full description of our proposal). Our proposal came about after many years of discussion and fundraising explorations on our part. We appreciate the thoughtful response of the Committee on Lectures, Publications and Research, who were asked to comment on our proposal. One of their suggestions was that, to quote from their report, “the APA fund outright one of the prizes requested by the Committee on Hispanics/Latinos and then support the remaining three prizes only where the Committee on Hispanics/Latinos secure matching funds.” We urge the APA Board to follow this suggestion.

Our main argument in favor of the prizes is that Latin American philosophy has suffered, and continues to suffer, from particularly egregious discrimination in North America, even in comparison to other philosophical traditions in other developing areas of the world. There is a circular dynamic at work here, in that philosophers in the U.S. who would otherwise pursue these or related topics are dissuaded from doing so, because doing so will not help their career, publishers are often uninterested, and there is only a small audience for sessions on this work. Prizes can be an extremely inexpensive way to encourage work in this area, to confer the legitimation of the APA onto the area of work, and to begin to break the dynamic of ignorance about and inattention to philosophy in this area.

The main concern about the prize proposal, voiced both by the APA Board of Officers and the Committee on Lectures, Publications, and Research, was that if the APA funded these prizes there would be a domino effect with the other diversity committees. The APA would not be able to turn down other prize proposals if they sponsor ours, and the financial burden may become more than the APA can handle, especially if there are lean years ahead. We have several responses to this concern.

We believe that our proposal should be judged on its own merit, without assuming future proposals from other committees which have not surfaced to date. Moreover, the actual financial cost is extremely minimal. If the APA were to fund only one of the prizes that we proposed, the actual amount of financial outlay could be as low as \$250 per year. Our entire prize proposal, involving all four prizes, would cost the APA between \$950 to \$1550 per year, depending on how much support they choose to give. Moreover, we stipulated in the case of three of the prizes that they would be conferred only when worthy recipients come forward, which we doubt will occur every year. Thus, the financial outlay of the APA would likely be significantly less than \$1000 per year.

We have also been told that a proposal of this kind, since it would affect equally each division, would be funded by the

national office. And the revenues directly available to the national office are indeed limited. But we would also like to point out that the funds of the APA as a whole are not limited to those of the national office, since each division has its own revenue and controls its own budget. Moreover, two other points are relevant here: (a) The Eastern Division is very, very wealthy, and (b) there have already been steps taken by the Eastern Division Executive committee to ensure a more equitable division of revenues, and in fact they have even agreed to transfer some of their funds to other divisions as needs arise.

The excessive comparative wealth of the Eastern Division is largely a product of the high number of book distributors who come to the Eastern and advertise in the Eastern program, since it is a much larger meeting. The Eastern invested their larger revenues when the stock market was booming, with predictable results. The Eastern Division does not have higher cost outlays that are proportional to their greater wealth, and it has come to the attention of the Executive Committee of the Eastern Division that other parts of the APA have greater needs than their own revenues can support, so the Executive Committee has already voiced its willingness to find ways to distribute these funds more equitably.

In light of these facts, we argue that the actual funds that the National Office has at this time or that the Board has at its disposal at this time are not the only funds potentially accessible, and in fact there are enormous sums available that the organization has not yet found a use for. We encourage the Board to consider a more rational distribution of APA revenues. If this were done, then, even if the domino effect of future prize proposals were to occur, the APA could easily handle it.

If, as indeed seems likely, the stock market will not continue to boom, and if, as is less likely, the APA were indeed to find itself in danger of a financial shortfall, we would of course expect it to tighten its belt and reduce its various expenditures, and our prizes would likely be affected. We hope that by that time we can secure a source independent of the APA.

### 7. Future Projects

In our co-sponsored panel at the Central Division meetings with the APA Committee on the Teaching of Philosophy, it became clear that there needs to be an easily accessible central location that will provide teaching materials for all those interested in expanding their course curricula to include under-represented groups. The APA Web page is the best and most obvious site, and we will work this year with the Committee on Teaching to set up this link. It could make a major difference to have easily accessible syllabi, bibliography, and other teaching related materials available in one place. There will have to be some guidelines for what can be included under this broad rubric, but we are confident that the new Committee on Inclusiveness can assist in this.

We are also committed to the development of the mentoring project, which the joint committees on diversity have been discussing. The need for mentoring has come up regularly in panel discussions with graduate students and untenured professors, as well as with their need for mentors at other institutions. We have plans to use our listserv and web page to find those willing to mentor and those who would like some mentoring assistance.

### 8. Farewell and Notes of Appreciation

As I come to the end of my three year tenure as committee chair, I am remembering the main goals we set for ourselves during this period: to get our new Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy off the ground, which had begun with the previous chair Ofelia Schutte's efforts, and to find a way to make diversity issues come more to the forefront of the APA organizationally. I made many mistakes and had numerous failures, but we were able to accomplish these two goals, the latter through the formation of the new standing Committee on Inclusiveness.

What comes to mind most vividly as I look back over these three years, however, is the generous assistance and help I have received at every step. Ofelia Schutte was incredibly conscientious and ambitious as the former chair, and she schooled me very effectively. To a large extent, I set my task as one of simply following the path she had begun. All of the committee members have been extraordinarily giving of their time and energy, including flying in for special meetings, organizing panels, bringing in speakers from Latin America, and working on our many projects. I would like to say to all of the committee members over the past three years, too numerous to list here, that I am deeply grateful for their support, and that working with them made this job actually enjoyable. And then there were others, not on the committee, who I drafted for various tasks and who were extraordinarily generous in providing their time, their insight, and their experience, including most especially Eduardo Mendieta, who bravely took on the task of becoming our first newsletter editor, Jorge Gracia who assisted often as my ex officio co-Chair and tirelessly served on our panels, as well as Mario Sáenz, Maria Lugones, Jorge Garcia, Nancy Tuana, Eva Kittay, and Jacqueline Kegley. I also want to express my sincere thanks to all of those who volunteered their time and energy to serve on our panels, every one of whom was conscientious in fulfilling their assignments.

I feel that the community of Latino philosophers is beginning to "come out of the closet" and to grow and develop, and I look forward to participating in its growth from now on as a member of the rank and file! We are indeed fortunate to have the excellent leadership of Pablo DeGreiff, who is the new committee chair, in the coming period.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Martín Alcoff, Committee Chair (1999-2001)

#### Committee Members: 2000-2001

Juan De Pascuale (1998-2001)  
Anne Freire Ashbaugh (1998-2001)  
Eduardo Mendieta (1999-2002)  
Gregory Velazco y Trianosky (1999-2002)  
Marcelo Sabates (1999-2002)  
Susana Nuccetelli (2000-2003)  
Adam Vinueza (2000-2003)

#### Committee Members: 2001-2002

Pablo DeGreiff, Chair (2001-2003)  
Eduardo Mendieta (1999-2002)  
Gregory Velazco y Trianosky (1999-2002)  
Marcelo Sabates (1999-2002)  
Susana Nuccetelli (2000-2003)  
Adam Vinueza (2000-2003)  
Jose Medina (2001-2003)  
Gregory Pappas (2001-2003)

## ARTICLES

### *Vasconcelos, Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Mexico*

Jane Duran

University of California at Santa Barbara

#### Abstract

The conclusion that the philosophy of José Vasconcelos, noted Mexican thinker, has more in common with some strains of Anglo-American philosophy (particularly pragmatist) than might at first appear to be the case is developed through two major lines of argument. The first line examines Vasconcelos' well-known *La Raza Cósmica* in light of the intellectual accomplishments predicted by Vasconcelos for the *mestizaje*, and the relationship between these foci and some work by American thinkers. The second specifically contrasts some of Vasconcelos' views with, for example, Dewey's work. The critique of Mexican work by Romanell is alluded to.

Attempts to elucidate Latin American philosophy, or even Latin American thought as a whole, usually emphasize its Continental ties. Such emphasis may in fact seem egregious, for more often than not the cited thinkers focus attention on the ties themselves, and one is seldom tempted to interpret their work in the light of any other philosophical tradition. José Vasconcelos, one of the first Mexican philosophers whose work was known outside that country, also refers heavily to European theorists and, not surprisingly, to the work of the ancients.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I plan to argue for what might be thought to be the somewhat controversial claim that Vasconcelos' thought has more parallels with Anglo-American (specifically, American) work than would at first be imagined. This contention might be deemed to be unusually hard to sustain, given the pronounced anti-English sentiment of some of what Vasconcelos wrote. Nevertheless, my claim will be that, in our endeavor to acquaint ourselves with a variety of philosophical thought in an effort to advance pluralism, Vasconcelos' work represents a rich vein that should be explored not only because of its import to Mexican and Latin American cultural history, but because of some of the strong parallels between his thinking and the work of some American thinkers. My argument will consist of two parts: I will first cite and explicate some of the theses of the work for which Vasconcelos is primarily known in the United States, *La Raza Cósmica*, and I will then compare some lines of argument in *La Raza Cósmica* to the work of American pragmatists.

I

*La Raza Cósmica* is a work which celebrates, philosophically and conceptually, the notion of racial mixing, or *mestizaje* as it is referred to in Mexico. Baldly stated, the thesis of the work—not a philosophical one in and of itself, if one is inclined

to think in the categories of Anglo-American philosophy—is that a new intellectual future, the result of the displacement from cultural hegemony of European thought and the concomitant rise of the culture of a “cosmic” or mixed race, awaits us.

*Cósmica*, as I will refer to it, is a difficult work to read, since while presenting us with a visionary look at a racially mixed future, it also makes racist pronouncements about various groups of people and ethnicities. But the philosophical content of *Cósmica* is more covert than overt (at least insofar as the American ties are concerned), and it is with this content that I will be concerned.

*Cósmica* decries that portion of the Anglo-American tradition which was also the object of Dewey's contempt. That is, if it is fair to claim that a work such as Dewey's 'Theory of Valuation' warns us against the use or value of the traditional means/end distinction in ethics, Vasconcelos' work mounts a strong attack against those very sorts of categorizations in Anglo-American thought.

It is somewhat arduous, as I have claimed, to pull these assertions out of Vasconcelos, since he writes in a tone with which we are unfamiliar, and since much of *Cósmica* is admittedly superlatively speculative. Nevertheless, while attempting to argue for a racially mixed future for the planet, during which a “fifth” or “cosmic” race will emerge,<sup>2</sup> Vasconcelos notes that:

The basis of white [Anglo or British] civilization is fuel... The rude fight against the environment forced the whites to devote their aptitudes to the conquest of temporal nature, and it is precisely this that constitutes their contribution to the civilization of the future... The English, who see only the present in the external world, do not hesitate to apply zoological theories to the field of human sociology.<sup>3</sup>

The foregoing is Vasconcelos' attempt to explicate his thesis that the Anglo worldview is predominantly mechanistic, scientific, and utilitarian. Although Vasconcelos does not employ the latter phrase, it is clearly part of his meaning.

That this is the case is brought home to us more forcefully in some of the commentary on Vasconcelos. Although the commentary tends to emphasize the mystical strain in Vasconcelos—which might well be thought to have little or no natural intersection with pragmatic American philosophy—the remarks of Romanell and also of Crawford, for example, indicate the motivation behind Vasconcelos' apparent desire to transcend natural knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Simply put, the motive is to avoid the dry, analytic mode of philosophy which Vasconcelos associates culturally with the “Yankees” and which he finds to be vapid and devoid of genuine content. Although the mystical strain may be dressed in such garb that comments on Vasconcelos' thought have tended to emphasize it, Vasconcelos clearly sees much of what will constitute “knowledge”, particularly in the future, as related to the grounded, organic sorts of knowing available to persons who descend from or participate in the mixed cultures. In other words, the strain of thought peculiar to the *mestizaje*, even given its idealistic monism in Vasconcelos' final view, is available to them partially because of their willingness to participate in a realm of visual delight in their daily lives. This, according to Vasconcelos, is something that the Anglo-Saxons are unwilling or incapable of doing.

Crawford is on the right track when he attempts to articulate both Vasconcelos' dislike of the North American way of thought and his attraction to a way of thought peculiar, he believes, to the *mestizaje*, which is simultaneously more transcendent and more grounded, as it were.<sup>5</sup> Here is W. Rex Crawford on Vasconcelos:

It cannot be overemphasized that Vasconcelos cared very little for our demands for a careful...narrative...[he is often] damning with faint praise the Yankee who cannot rise to rhetoric, poetry and philosophy... His trilogy is Metaphysics, Ethics, Aesthetics. [He] had never shown much understanding or enthusiasm for scientific method, [and he] finds that aesthetics, not ethics, is the way to truth, for it is super-intellectual... His logic—he calls it organic—coordinates wholes. As psychologically we perceive or experience wholes, so in the highest thinking we coordinate wholes.<sup>6</sup>

What the translator does not spell out, but what is evident in *Cósmica* and indicated here, is that it is the mixed or cosmic race of the future that will have the capacity to perform these intellectual feats, and thus to help override the divorced stance of traditional Norteamericano analytic philosophy.<sup>7</sup> What is termed the “aesthetic” mode in Vasconcelos' thought, although not used univocally, rests primarily on the notion that a more holistic mode of thinking—a mode taking life's daily beauties and pragmatic interactions, and visualizing them in the appropriate way—is available to persons not of white ancestry.

Now it may be somewhat easier to specify the intersection between Vasconcelos' conception of a more organic sort of thought and American pragmatism. Dewey, for example, in a well-known passage from ‘Theory of Valuation’, exhorts us not to fall prey to some of the traditional distinctions in ethical theorizing:

Even if value expressions were ejaculatory and such as to influence the conduct of other persons, genuine propositions about such expressions would be possible. We could investigate whether or not they had the effect intended; and further examination would be able to discover the differential conditions of the cases that were successful in obtaining the intended outcome and those that were not.<sup>8</sup>

Here Dewey urges us toward a view which would see even a value proposition reduced to the status of Ayer's “ejaculatory” as still having a role in everyday life. Dewey has several other remarks in his brief tract on the notion of enjoyment that are in a similar vein; with regard to the experience of beauty he notes (in still another place): “It is as irritating to have experience of beauty...reduced to groundless whims as to have that of truth... Common-sense entertains the firm conviction [that it is an immediate good] because it is innocent of any rigid demarcation between knowledge...and esthetic appreciation...”<sup>9</sup> Is Vasconcelos then a pragmatist? Hardly. But the fact that Vasconcelos' thinking has intersections with the pragmatists is an issue which has not been examined, and one which greatly aids us in our understanding of this important Latin American thinker.

## II

Like most commentators on Vasconcelos' thought, Romanell emphasizes Vasconcelos' “aesthetic monism”, as expounded in his longer works. But the lack of appeal to us of what appears to be a 19th century metaphysics stems partly from the fact that few theoreticians writing about Vasconcelos have taken the trouble to try to make the connection between *Cósmica* and his other work, or if they have made such a connection, the emphasis has been on the longer works. For *Cósmica* not only provides us with a vision of a future race—it provides us with a vision of what the race will accomplish intellectually.

Romanell notes that:

After he had put away the childish things of his positivist days...the basic problem for Vasconcelos was to construct a monistic system of philosophy which would not have the short-comings of the ‘materialistic monism’ typical of the last half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, the Vasconcelian temper showed from the start more of a revolt against metaphysical dualism than against materialism for the obvious reason that the latter at least believed in *one* world.<sup>10</sup>

The salient point here for our purposes is that Vasconcelos is interested in a unity. Although what we might deem the essential feature of his account appears to be an idealist unity, his emphasis on what the “fifth race” will have the capacity to do in *Cósmica* belies the tendencies we would ordinarily have to divorce Vasconcelos' aesthetic from natural human capacities. To cite Romanell again:

On the basis of this statement of social development, it is clear that the mission of the New World is to bring about...an ‘aesthetic state’. Inasmuch as such a society can only be realized by an ‘emotional race’ having a sense of beauty and inasmuch as this gift is possessed ‘to a high degree’ by the hybrid peoples of Latin America, it follows that their responsibility, as well as their privilege, lies in working toward its realization... The principal reason for his forecast—doubtless a keen observation on his part—is that the field of aesthetics provides a real possibility of bridging the gap between facts and values, the *crux philosophorum*.<sup>11</sup>

Here we have an appealing familiarity, for the goals of the hegemony of Vasconcelos' *mestizaje* are similar to Deweyan aims, especially as articulated in works cited here. Although it was apparently difficult for Vasconcelos to sympathize with the overview of any British or American thinker, he reserved his special venom for those engaged in making (as he saw it) useless intellectual distinctions which did nothing to help us clarify our lives.

Most of those who have provided a commentary on Vasconcelos have been so concerned to divorce him from “Yankee thought” that his line has been described as anti-pragmatist. Like many claims with regard to thinkers whose systems are non-analytic, this one is true in a small sense, and false in a larger sense. The pronounced anti-norteamericano tendency of Vasconcelos' thought may have led him to cite various pragmatic thinkers in a negative vein. But the holistic tendencies in his thought are, in their own

way, pragmatic. It is rigid analytic categorization which he is against, and he is against it in particular, as I have indicated above, insofar as it mimics the structure of the sciences, or what he takes to be a mechanistic worldview.

John Haddox, in his work *Vasconcelos of Mexico*, notes that:

The aesthetic method is called a 'concurrent method' by which all of the organs of knowing are harmonized. The senses, the intellect, and the emotions collaborate to achieve knowledge... Thus Vasconcelos clearly distinguishes between knowing by way of reason alone and knowing by the method of an emotion-formed intellect, writing that the first way of knowing separates and analyzes certain aspects of objects known while the second tends to unite and synthesize these aspects.<sup>12</sup>

This quotation takes us back to our original point. The capacity for such a synthesis is one which adheres in the mixed race of the future, and Vasconcelos' descriptions of this race emphasize that capacity.

### III

The commentator sympathetic to Vasconcelos cannot help but wonder what, precisely, the origins of his somewhat radical views are. Little is left to doubt: Vasconcelos' own autobiography, *Ulises Criollo*,<sup>13</sup> recounts unpleasant childhood experiences in the state of Texas where his father worked as a customs official during Vasconcelos' childhood. Incidents of prejudice and discrimination were heaped on incidents coloring his perception of the Mexican school system when he returned to the interior of Mexico.<sup>14</sup> Vasconcelos strove to articulate what he found to be worth preservation in his own culture, a culture somewhat ill at ease with the results of centuries of intermixture between Europeans and Indians. He was far from consistent in his views, and some of his theorizing carries a positively anti-Indian strain.<sup>15</sup> But he retained and attempted to develop the valuable insight that hybrid cultures may be stronger than their antecedents, and this is the psychological lodestone of much of his thought.

Thus his anti-British views stem not only from an innate dislike of British attempts to prevent miscegenation (the Spaniards had the advantage in this regard, of being Catholics), but from a detestation of the mindset which exalts utility and function above all things. Vasconcelos dreamed of a future Latin America united in the way that Bolívar had once planned: in *Cósmica* he notes, "Our liberators, with the illustrious exceptions of Bolívar and Sucre...were dreaming of Balkan glories."<sup>16</sup> The nineteenth century grandiosity of Vasconcelos' thought, and his penchant for unorthodox categorization, make his work difficult for us to follow today, but not, as I have argued, incomprehensible. The motivation behind Vasconcelos' philosophizing is one that stems from both a certain sort of cultural background, and a certain set of experiences in the world. It is an interesting fact about his philosophy that it has a great deal more in common with some strands in American thought than Vasconcelos himself seems to have realized.

### Endnotes

1. I will be citing primarily Vasconcelos' well-known *La Raza Cósmica*, in a bilingual edition prepared by a campus of the California State University. Here the translator has helpfully provided commentary on Vasconcelos' various philosophical influences. See Vasconcelos, José, *La Raza Cósmica*, Didier Jaen, trans., Los Angeles: Centro de Publicaciones CSULA, 1979, pp. 84-85 and *passim*.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22, 31.
4. Vasconcelos, José, *A Mexican Ulysses*, W. Rex Crawford, trans., Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963, pp. 16-18. I am quoting the translator's introduction.
5. In this vein, Vasconcelos exhibits some patterns of conceptualization somewhat reminiscent of the current wave of feminist epistemology.
6. Crawford, in *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 18.
7. This theme is so ubiquitous in *Cósmica* that one hardly knows where to turn. That the Egyptians, a mixed race on Vasconcelos' view, were capable of reaching what he considered to be the highest levels of theorizing is stated flatly on p. 21. See also pp. 22, 37.
8. Dewey, John, 'Theory of Valuation', Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1939, p. 51.
9. Dewey, John, *Experience and Nature*, La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1929, p. 113.
10. Romanell, Patrick, *Making of the Mexican Mind*, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1952, p. 108.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.
12. Haddox, John, *Vasconcelos of Mexico*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1967, pp. 14, 18.
13. Vasconcelos, *Ulises Criollo (A Mexican Ulysses)*, p. 13.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 29.
15. He finds that Uxmal and Chichen-Itzá leave him with a "pleasant emotion", for example, but he also describes the sites as having "no sense of beauty". *Ibid.*, p. 165.
16. Vasconcelos, *Cósmica*

### Comments on Mario Sáenz's, *The Identity of Liberation in Latin American Thought. Latin American Historicism and the Phenomenology of Leopoldo Zea.*

Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert  
DePaul University

Sáenz's study of Zea's work is an original and important contribution to the small, but growing field of work done in the United States on Latin American philosophy. Unlike German philosophy, French philosophy, and other breeds of European philosophy, and unlike *Anglo-American* philosophy, *Latin American* philosophy's authenticity and value have been typically questioned. It has been argued that there is no such thing as Latin American philosophy, that there is only philosophy that happens to be done in Latin America, and done in a style that merely imitates European models. Indeed, when I was an undergraduate and expressed to my professors that I wanted to pursue graduate work in philosophy, because I wanted to do work on Latin American philosophy, they informed me that no such sub-field existed. This continued during my graduate education, when I was discouraged from pursuing my research in this area. This is no reaction that a student who wants to study French or German philosophy has to contend with. Whoever is engaged in scholarship of

Latin American philosophy must spend a great deal of time defining what it is and that it does in fact exist as an original and valuable branch of philosophy.

In answering the naïve question, *What is Latin American Philosophy?* we are immediately thrown into deep philosophical/historical waters. And Sáenz comfortably swims in these rather treacherous waters, so before I begin to do what I am here to do, that is, criticize his recent book on Zea's work, I must admit that I find much to admire in it, and my duties as a critic were made difficult because of this admiration. Sáenz's book brings much-deserved attention to the work of Leopoldo Zea, arguably the most influential contemporary Mexican philosopher. The book also highlights themes within the tradition of philosophical work done in the countries of Latin America of which many philosophers of the United States may be unaware, and in bringing these topics to an English-reading public, Sáenz's book will help to open a more productive dialogue between the "two Americas".

In the preface, Sáenz tells us that "[t]his is a book about a period of world history in which Latin American philosophers reflected and developed many of the most important philosophical ideas of the century. Those reflections and developments pertained to socio-economic class analysis, philosophies of cultural identity, and the literature on alterity" (p.1).<sup>1</sup> Sáenz's analysis deals with the related issues of dependency and authenticity, as well as the role of history in Latin American philosophy. These are explored from the perspective of Zea's historicist phenomenology.

To understand the meaning of this historicist phenomenology, we must keep in mind that Zea was strongly influenced by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who claimed that human life must be understood as historical existence and that a primary task of the philosopher is to develop a thought form adequate to this form of historical Being. For Ortega, reality is defined with respect to human life, which in turn is a combination of myself and my circumstances. For this reason Ortega claims that "yo soy yo y mi circunstancia". To understand reality, one must understand one's historical circumstance. Sáenz gives this important insight concerning the circumstantiality of reality its due attention and effectively links it to the development of what he terms Zea's "historicist phenomenology".

Sáenz spends a great deal of time explaining how Zea deals with a major problem facing Latin American philosophers: how is it possible to come to an understanding of the Latin American circumstance, a circumstance that is rooted in a colonial past, in a way that is not *dependent* upon European ideas. In short, how can the move be made back to the circumstance of Latin America which would allow philosophers to capture the plurality of ethnic cultures of Latin America "in their own terms" (p. 231) rather than in European terms? How can Latin American philosophers liberate themselves from the European paradigms of thought? For Sáenz and for Zea, "as long as the circumstantiality of *mestizaje* [that is, the mixing of indigenous and European cultures] is not appropriate and affirmed as the fundamental mark of Latin American identity, human liberation will not be possible" (pp. 237-37). The philosopher must develop a framework for understanding reality that will affirm the mixed heritage that is the "fundamental mark" of Latin American

cultural identity. And Sáenz is careful to monitor Zea's success in doing this.

Sáenz's presentation of Zea's ideas is critical but fair. He raises important concerns regarding Zea's cultural elitism and some of Zea's more problematic claims concerning Latin America's relation to Europe. We are not dealing with a rosy-eyed view of Zea's work, but rather with a sober, nuanced treatment of the strengths *and* weaknesses of Zea's views. And although Sáenz tells us at the beginning of his book that Zea (and the protagonist of Sáenz's next book, Argentine-born philosopher of liberation, Enrique Dussel) stand as "towering, contrasting, and ultimately complementary figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American philosophy" (ix), we are not dealing with an act of deference towards a master who cannot be questioned and challenged. Sáenz's study poses challenges not only to Zea's work, but presents some of the limitations inherent to the very tradition from which it grows. And in keeping with this spirit, I would like to challenge some of Sáenz's claims.

### What does the label 'Latin American Philosophy' cover-up?

Sáenz begins his study with mention of the two strands of Latin American philosophy of liberation, the historicist current and an ontological-metaphysical current. Throughout the book he discusses the historicist current that runs throughout Zea's work. The ontological-metaphysical current is not ever fully explained, except by pointing to Enrique Dussel as one whose work is representative of this current. I suppose this is justified insofar as Sáenz tells us that, "in a forthcoming text on the liberation of identity, [he] will concentrate on the analectical thought of Enrique Dussel" (p. 1). But perhaps more could be said about the differences between these two currents, for through this promising contrast more light would be shed on the nature of the historicist current of the philosophy of liberation.

One move that brightly illuminates part of the nature of the historicist current of the philosophy of liberation is the challenge Sáenz raises against Dussel's claim that the philosophy of liberation appeared in Argentina during the 1960s, "for the first time in the twentieth century". Sáenz points out that "[a]lthough it did not define itself with such a demanding terminology, the Mexican philosophy of *liberation* rode the wave of the emerging nationalism of the colonized and neocolonized worlds and their struggle against *dependence*. Also, it developed intimate ties, for better and for worse, with the "institutionalization" of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917" (p. 3). In the course of challenging Dussel's claim concerning the origins of liberation philosophy, Sáenz outlines a trajectory of thinkers in Mexico who articulated the first formulations of the critique of colonial and neocolonial cultural and social dependence in Mexico, giving rise to the first formulations of a liberation philosophy. Mexican thinkers such as José Vasconcelos, Samuel Ramos, Spanish émigré José Gaos, and of course, Leopoldo Zea, each contributed to the development of a movement that Dussel would have us trace to Argentina. So, this move is a helpful and welcome one. Yet, there are some problems: it is not clear in what sense the Mexican philosophy of liberation "did not define itself with such a demanding terminology", the terminology at issue here is being compared to the terminology used by the thinkers in Argentina, but not enough

has been said of that terminology to make this claim clear. What was demanding about the terminology used by the philosophers in Argentina? Why was the terminology used by the Mexican thinkers not as demanding? Also, within the context of this claim, it is not at all clear why the Mexican philosophy of liberation would be riding the wave of “the emerging nationalism of the colonized and neocolonized worlds”. Doesn’t a consciousness of the need to begin to reassess the past and break free of an uncritically deferential attitude towards European intellectual history, and the accompanying development of theoretical models for bringing about this liberation begin during the *post*-colonial period, that is, in the wake of independence?

After drawing our attention to the Mexican origins of liberation philosophy, Sáenz, tells us that he will present a “reflection on the cultural being of Latin America as it radiated through the prism of Zea’s interpretations, including his accomplishments, developments and, like anything human, limitations” (p. 3). There is a problem here, which I hoped would be resolved or at least addressed in the study, but which was not. How can Zea, speaking from the circumstance of post-revolutionary Mexico, speak for all of Latin America?

The countries that constitute Latin America have different political systems, different currencies, different languages, and significantly different histories (Simón Bolívar was the “liberator” of most of contemporary Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and British Guiana, but he did not liberate Mexico or Argentina from the clutches of Spain). Obviously, each of the nations of Latin America shares a common past of colonization and an ensuing struggle for independence, but Brazil’s relation to Portugal was quite unlike the relation that the Spanish colonies had to Spain. The nations of Latin America did not deal with the condition of colonization in identical ways, nor were they colonized in the same way. I wonder, then, whether in using the term ‘Latin American philosophy’, we are not guilty of covering the diversity and uniqueness of the philosophical traditions that emerge from the various countries of Latin America with a blanket, like the one that bothers Sáenz. Consider the following claim:

Even the term ‘American’ is a blanket with which we cover the term ‘Indian’. ‘Indian’ in turn was a term which not the Indian but the European meant for the conquered peoples. Columbus used ‘Indian’ indiscriminately to refer to the Taínos; Amerigo Vespucci applied it indiscriminately to the Tupi Guaraní in his “field work” of 27 days, and with it referred to a whole continent. Later, in honor of Vespucci, ‘America’ was the term given to what is today South America. Its reference was then extended to the whole continent, only to be suctioned by the United States, in part because the latter ended up representing for the Europeans what the promise of the Americas was *for them*. From the beginning of the conquest until today, terms such as these have been used to establish an identity imposed by a dominant other (p. 24).

Is it not the case that the term ‘Latin American philosophy’ too, is a kind of blanket that covers up important differences that a less totalizing term would not? And is not the very term ‘Latin American’ a vestige of the colonial past,

is it not a kind of blanket thrown upon the intellectual territory of the colonized people to cover the “barbarism” and bring in a kind of “civilization”? What do we gain by speaking of Latin American philosophy that we would not have in speaking of Mexican philosophy? Or Argentine philosophy? Or Venezuelan philosophy? Is it possible to speak of national philosophies in Latin America? And if so, is not something of their uniqueness lost when we subsume them under the general term ‘Latin American philosophy’?

To further define my criticism, let me draw attention to what I take to be a valuable point that Sáenz raises against Zea’s account of the formation of Latin American cultural identity. Sáenz finds problems with Zea’s assumption that Latin American cultural identity was built of the relation that the New World had with the Old World, or Europe, and that therefore “the Latin American of today finds more vital resonance with the Europe of today than the pre-Columbian cultures of 500 or more years ago” (p. 80). Sáenz reminds the reader here that there is a strong indigenous culture in certain Latin American countries, pointing to the Mayans of Chiapas, Mexico and the Náhuatl-speaking weavers in Guerrero, Mexico to support his empirical point. Then Sáenz develops the more theoretical claim that the Amerindian culture influences the sense of identity that many inhabitants of Latin America feel, “particularly in the peripheral and marginal areas of the continent. In more subtle, underground ways, it [this Amerindian cultural influence] has penetrated as well some of the urban centers, particularly in those countries with large Amerindian populations, such as Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay” (p. 81). Sáenz, following Zea, characterizes Latin American philosophy as consumed with the issue of cultural identity. Yet, if some countries have large Amerindian populations, while others have small ones, couldn’t it be argued that this would give rise to a substantially different response to the question: Who are we? Is it not the case that a Peruvian philosopher concerned with capturing or attempting to provide an analysis of social reality have to take the Amerindian culture into consideration whereas a philosopher in Argentina with the same philosophical task might legitimately be more concerned with the ways in which various waves of European immigration have influenced the social reality of Argentina? The popular and rather humorous saying that, “the Mexicans descend from the Aztecs, the Peruvians from the Incas, the Argentinians from the ships, and the Venezuelans from the oil” has some truth in it insofar as it points to the unique historical circumstances of each of these nations, a truth that might be overlooked with the blanketing term ‘Latin American’.

As Sáenz makes abundantly clear in his analysis, the issue of cultural identity is a political issue, and it is clear that each of the nations of Latin America have varied political pasts to deal with, therefore, does it not follow that something important is lost when we generalize our philosophical investigation of cultural identity and speak of the cultural identity of all Latin Americans as if it were the same whether one is a Náhuatl speaking weaver in Mexico or a cattle rancher in Argentina?

What I am after here is a clearer account of what counts as the Latin American circumstance, and a response to the concern that the term ‘Latin American’ may become a kind of blanket to cover the particular intellectual histories of an entire continent. (To be geographically accurate, I should say

of one entire continent and a large part of another one, referring to South and North America.) Sáenz clearly and convincingly shows the relation between Ortega's philosophy, particularly the notion of circumstantiality, and the development of Zea's historicist phenomenology. According to Sáenz, "Zea thinks that the possibility of developing a Latin American philosophy lies precisely in the circumstantiality of all thought. Latin American philosophy has emerged from a historical reflection on the history of Latin American ideas" (p. 89). This point is clear enough, but as Sáenz himself goes to great lengths to remind us of the great cultural distinctions between various Latin American nations and indeed within certain nations (e.g., think of the gulf separating the Náhuatl-speaking weaver of Guerrero and Carlos Fuentes), I begin to have trouble articulating a clear account of what would count as "the history of Latin American ideas." Given the radical circumstantiality of all thought, if we use a label like "Latin American thought" to cover the tradition of an entire continent, aren't we moving away from the cultural uniqueness of each country that belongs to that continent, and don't we lose sight of important aspects of what the cultural identity of the individual nations may be?

On p. 91 we are told that according to Zea, "It is precisely because of the circumstantiality of philosophical ideas..., that a Latin American philosophy is possible." Latin American philosophy is simply a philosophy of the history of Latin American ideas, yet the nature of "Latin American ideas" remains unclear.

My first objection can be summed up along the following lines: what do we need to do, as philosophers and as human beings who are concerned with social injustices, to deal with and to accurately capture the social reality of Latin American nations? Sáenz provides us with important hints, taking us to the insights of Roger Bartra and his use of the axolotl (an aquatic animal that reaches sexual maturity in its larval stage, that is, before metaphorising into a salamander, hence never becoming a salamander but remaining in its last stage of development, "imprisoned in a frustrated adulthood") as a metaphor that helps to capture the frustrated sense of expectation that Mexicans must face, and giving an account of Ernesto Maiz Vallenilla's phenomenological description of the Latin American as in a state of not-being-yet-always (*no-ser-siempre-todavía*). Both philosophers are pointing to the same state of being, that of frustrated expectation, yet there are differences in their point of departure. The axolotl is used by Bartra to represent the "expectative" state of being that will never fully develop, the state of being that all Mexicans suffer. In contrast, Maiz Vallenilla is arguing that expectation is the *American* mode of being. One philosopher is speaking for his nation's culture, the other for the culture of the entire continent. Sáenz, when discussing Bartra's metaphor, claims that "the myth only reaches bigger quantitative proportions when one extends it to the whole of Spanish Latin America" (p. 153). But Sáenz never considers whether there might be certain myths that fit one nation and its culture while being virtually unintelligible to another.

What speaks in favor of a continental rather than a national approach to the philosophy of this region? Are there certain aspects of social reality that can be addressed continentally and others that are best dealt with via a nation by nation approach? Might we not more fruitfully uncover the social reality of the nations of Latin America if we approach

the reality of post-colonial Latin American countries one by one, giving each their proper place of cultural, historical, and political significance? Certainly, some of these countries are the colonial remains of artificial, European imposed borders, but not all of them are so. There were pre-conquest differences between the caribes and the yanomami, between the Incas and the Mayans, etc. Certain work, and Sáenz places Zea's work, in this category, "obviously transcends" (p. 153) the frontiers of individual nations, but why? And is this a mark of good philosophy, when philosophy is understood to be a search for cultural identity?

### Why Hegel and not Humboldt?

My first set of concerns cluster around the presence of a term that I suspect may cover certain differences that might be of help in forming an accurate understanding of the philosophical traditions of the countries of Latin America. My next concern has to do with an absence in Sáenz's book.

In a recent issue of *Cuadernos Americanos* (Vol. 4, Nr. 76, 1999) on the occasion of the 200 year anniversary of Alexander von Humboldt's voyages to the New World, scholars from various countries of Latin America met with scholars in Germany to discuss the impact of Humboldt's visit and descriptions thereof. Humboldt was one of the first Europeans to express an open, appreciative attitude for the diversity of flora and fauna (he was, after all, among other things, a botanist), and also for the cultures there, both colonial and indigenous. In fact, he begins one essay on Mexico with the bold claim that "Mexico is the country of inequality."<sup>2</sup> Humboldt was not shy about commenting on the unjust distribution of land and wealth in Mexico. Yet, he saw more than just social injustice. He observed the rich cultural traditions and solid scientific establishments, which were not merely the result of the "civilized" culture imposed by Spain, but of the merging of Spanish and indigenous contributions to a new American culture.

Zea's admiration for Humboldt is openly expressed in his short piece, *Humboldt en la modernidad*.<sup>3</sup> Zea contrasts the objective and fact-based accounts of Humboldt with the subjective and ignorant accounts of the New World that had been offered by the French thinker Buffon, the Dutch thinker De Pauw, and other Europeans who spoke of the inferiority of the land, flora and fauna, and inhabitants of the New World, without having knowledge of the region. It took a thinker like Humboldt to introduce to Europe an accurate picture of the New World.

Zea lauds Humboldt for his ability to observe not only the richness of the land, but the accomplishments of the people of the New World. For Zea, Humboldt is much more than an excellent botanist, geographer, geologist, that is, he is much more than a man of the natural sciences, he is a man of the human sciences. Zea claims that Humboldt's experience in America was the beginning of Humboldt's development of a complete cosmology, a vision of the world that attempted to capture it in its totality, both natural and human. The German participants at the conference resisted Zea's reading of Humboldt, claiming that his work *Cosmos* had been a failure and that, moreover, the Humboldt honored in plazas, libraries, and street names throughout Latin America is some kind of Latin American invention, a Humboldt of mythic proportions with whom the Germans are not acquainted. Zea responded to the Germans by claiming that

the Humboldt revered in the countries of Latin America is a person who is mythic because of his very real vision of a world in which diversity, be it natural, racial or cultural, had a real value. Zea sees in Humboldt's reception of Latin America the best and most broad expression of modernity.

Sáenz discusses at length the problems with Hegel's dismissive view of America as a land of the future with no past to ground it and Zea's responses to this. Of course, Hegel fits squarely in the canon of philosophy, whereas one has to make a case for why we can consider Alexander von Humboldt to be a kind of philosopher. Yet, Sáenz does treat of other thinkers who are not canonized philosophers, especially in Chapter One, where he provides an excellent account of some of the European myths generated by the biases and feelings of superiority that thinkers like Buffon, de Pauw, and Voltaire shared vis-à-vis the "Americans." These thinkers can do no better than approximate the natives of the "New World" via the unrealistic and condescending metaphor of the "good savage." Why is no mention made of Humboldt, a European thinker who did not fall prey to the Eurocentric lens, who never sunk to the level of replacing the cultural identity of the natives with the ridiculous myth of the "good savage?" A discussion of Zea's esteem of Humboldt's just approximation to Latin American natural and cultural reality would have strengthened and balanced an already strong picture of the European images of the New World, images that, as Sáenz convincingly demonstrates, greatly affected the development of cultural identity in Latin American nations.

### Challenging the use made of the term "romantic"

Now, as Sáenz correctly indicates, "[t]he formation of the good savage was not an invention of the European Enlightenment. Rather the Enlightenment received it uncritically from the unilluminated transition from medieval thought towards the decentering of the human universe during the renaissance" (p. 50). The thinkers that Sáenz discusses in order to present us with the uninformed racist and elitist views that the Europeans had of the Americans are Enlightenment thinkers. And Humboldt is better characterized as a romantic thinker, for he demonstrated an ability to see value in the particular cultures, languages, customs, etc. of the world. The typical Enlightenment thinkers viewed the world through the lens of an ahistorical, universal reason (which the Romantics hold as only an ideal to be approximated). This "light" was unable to illuminate the diversity, both natural and human, that was to be found in the New World. Humboldt can be considered a "romantic" thinker insofar as he traveled to the New World with a diversified light, understanding reality as composed of difference, different species, cultures, languages, each with a value of its own. Hence Romanticism has to do with an enlargement of the Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason. The Romantics call for a critical assessment of the past, an assessment that does not bury difference under the blinding light of a universal reason, but diversifies this light of reason.

Much more could be said regarding the meaning of Romanticism. Indeed, Romantic philosophy shares with Latin American philosophy a need for constant definition and defense, as both of these areas of philosophy have been marginalized and sorely misunderstood. In Chapter Three of his study, Sáenz provides us with an account of Zea's reading of the influence that Romanticism had upon the development

of Latin American philosophy. Earlier in the book we are given an account of how the term "romantic" is used by Zea; "Zea uses the term "romantic" to name several generations of Latin American philosophers from the 1830s through the 1860s" (p. 147). Sáenz indicates three reasons why the term "romantic" is used to characterize these generations of Latin American philosophers (which include Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, José Victorino Lastarria, José María Luis Mora, and José Antonio Saco): 1) the influence of French and German Romanticism; 2) a shared concern with the values proper to América in ways that resonated with the European Romantics' preoccupation with the discovery of the values proper to a nation and an accompanying "mistrust and disappointment" with the Enlightenment views concerning the conditions necessary for social change; 3) a shared concern with national destiny and history. Now, the first reason for regarding a given group of Latin American philosophers as Romantics, namely because they have been influenced by French and German Romanticism, is too vague to be useful in characterizing this group of thinkers. The nature of the influence must be explored. Something of this influence is hinted at in the second reason Zea gives to justify classifying the group of thinkers as Romantics, for we learn there that they are influenced by the "mistrust and disappointment" with certain Enlightenment views, yet this "mistrust and disappointment" take place within the context of América and not Europe. So, these first two reasons when read together are sensible and can be used to come to an understanding of the group that Zea is calling "romantic." The third reason that Sáenz attributes to Zea for counting certain Latin American philosophers as "romantics," while sensible on the surface, becomes puzzling when it is penetrated more deeply. For according to Sáenz "the Latin American romantics' concern with *national* destiny was different in an important sense from European romanticism...while European romantics affirmed the past as a justification of their destiny, Hispanic American romantics saw in either Spanish or European history, and in Latin America's own past, the negative elements of their destiny. Nevertheless, the concern with history was a concern shared by the "romantics" on both sides of the Atlantic (pp. 146-47). Sáenz attributes this "obvious and glaring" difference between European and Latin American Romanticism's relation to the past to the fact that the former influenced the latter, but not vice versa. And the ideas imported from Europe had to be made to fit the Latin American social reality, a reality that included a colonial past. This colonial past led thinkers to negate the past, a past which, it was argued, did not belong to them as American but as subjects of the Spanish or Portuguese crown. Sáenz refers us to Andrés Bello's description of an "original despair" that "prepared the ground for the "romantic" negation of the Latin American past" (p. 148).

Given these qualifications, what counts as "romantic"? Sáenz gives us Zea's answer: "Zea believes that the formal negation of the past was characteristic of all of these thinkers [those Zea is calling "romantic"]. That is, they sought as a solution to the problems besetting the continent the amputation of an integral element or characteristic of the Hispanic American being, namely, its cultural identity" (p. 149). According to Zea, those thinkers he dubs "romantics" believe that what Latin Americans are because of their past conflicts with who they want to become, hence the past must be negated.

Zea's account of the "romantic" Latin American philosophers as negating the past makes it hard to reconcile this with the first two reasons Zea gives for considering these thinkers to be Romantics in the first place. One seems to be able to classify as "Romantic" a group of thinkers guilty of negating the past only on pain of contradiction.

### Conclusion

In the very same spirit with which Sáenz approaches Leopoldo Zea's philosophy, I have challenged some of Saenz's claims. Hence, I hope it is clear that my challenges are not meant in any destructive way, but are rather meant to broaden the rich horizon of thought that Sáenz's study opens. As more work is done in the field of Latin American philosophy, we must be careful not to level important distinctions and blanket particularities with terms that may be too general to capture the uniqueness of various strands of the histories of thought to be found in the countries that comprise Latin America. One early thinker who was careful to avoid such mistakes was Alexander von Humboldt, to whom Zea pays serious attention. As Humboldt's open curiosity regarding the countries of the New World grew out of German Romanticism, a serious study of the impact of this movement upon the development of various Romantic movements in Latin America is called for. The fact that Sáenz's book leads to a discussion of these important points, in addition to doing justice to the historicist phenomenology of Zea's work, makes it a valuable contribution to the field.

### Endnotes

- 1 All references are to Mario Sáenz, *The Identity of Liberation in Latin American Thought. Latin American Historicism and the Phenomenology of Leopoldo Zea* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999).
- 2 Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, trans. John Black (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1811), Vol. 1, p. 134.
- 3 Leopoldo Zea, "Humboldt en la modernidad", *Cuadernos Americanos* 4, Nr. 76 (1999): 11-15.

## ***On the Meaning of the Philosophy of Liberation: Reply to My Critics***

**Mario Sáenz**  
*LeMoyne College*

I am grateful to the commentators in this panel, Manuel Vargas, Elizabeth Millan, and Patricia Huntington. Their comments are very helpful and give me an opportunity to clarify some of the book's central issues.

Manuel Vargas speaks of the necessity to make the language of philosophies for liberation accessible to others by eliminating or clarifying some of the technical jargon. It seems to me that philosophical jargon often depends on the social conditions in which philosophers develop a type of philosophical thinking. Those social conditions must be understood to better comprehend a certain way of thinking. Just as philosophical thinking must try to reveal the conditions of its birth as it explores the reality of its subject matter, so must the understanding of that thinking "from the outside" seek to penetrate the thicket of foreign concepts as it looks for its essential features. There are, additionally, the technical demands of the discipline to consider; these transcend

particular social conditions to the extent that they bind themselves to a tradition, whether this be a disciplinary tradition or one more broadly connected to the humanities or a liberal education. It is true that a jargon may exclude others, and it is often used precisely with that intention. We must be careful, however, in *not* doing in our relationship with the dominant analytic discourse in philosophy departments in the United States what Fourier tried to do when he scheduled an audience with the Czar of Russia to convince him of the virtues of socialism: We must not reduce discourse to a level of unthinking superficiality for the sake of a place at the table with those who have directed that philosophy be done without self-criticism. The concepts of the philosophy of liberation arise from the critique of concepts that are operational within existing social systems; when these concepts are critical, they must be tested by their capacity to reveal possibilities for social change; when they are utopian, they must be examined only as aesthetic or ethical possibilities, for, clearly, they have no real referent to which they correspond.

My text introduces concepts, such as *mestizaje from above* and *mestizaje from below*, that move beyond a mere cultural study of Latin American thought. I certainly like to think that it is outside the patriotic nationalism that does nothing more than despise the empire (although that is good in itself); finally, it offers a critique of populist dismissals of differences within the Latin American nation-states in the distribution of power, and in the production and appropriation of "cultural capital" (to use an ugly but apt term coined by Bourdieu and used by García Canclini).

*Mestizaje from above* accepts what is. It apparently affirms the diversity of our continent in the concrete; at the same time, it asserts a purely formal conception of equality. It thus ends up asserting the very differences in power, access to cultural resources, economic capital, and the like that are necessary to overcome if equality is to be realized. That is partly why, I think, Zea's thought flows so easily into an acceptance of liberalism. It exhibits, I would say, some of the characteristics that Habermas saw in postmodern thought—an inactivist conservatism, which is, in this age of neoliberal globalization, deadly. But a formal affirmation of equality—equality under the power of the market and the transnational control of the neocolonial state machine—disguises the fact that the affirmation of diversity without a class-based critique of ideology is in effect, to quote Nietzsche, the assertion that "we are all unequal." For, whether intentionally or not, it accepts the political differences between various cultural groups.

*Mestizaje from below* rejects what is. It points beyond itself. Its meaning rests, precisely, on an affirmation of diversity that asserts the inequality to be overcome. Exclusion, oppression, and exploitation are the marks of that inequality:

Exploitation in the sense of the use of labor power to satisfy the demands of variable capital for the sake of the profits of the bourgeoisie.

Oppression in the sense of, to use bell hooks's terms, an "absence of choices."

Exclusion in the sense of a marginalization from resources and decision-making for the good life.

Today, according to Ruben Zardoya, Chamizo Gil, and others, with the transformation of state-power mechanisms

into instruments for transnational finance capital, exploitation, oppression, and exclusion are intensified and, some would say, radically altered. The transformation of labor-processes into, often, sweatshop operations, the loss of state-power in dependent nation-states by even the traditional bourgeoisie for the benefit of the transnational bourgeoisie and their representatives, the imperialist states, whether through the use of direct military force or international mechanisms of transnational legitimacy—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the UN Security Council to name a few—and, finally an exclusion predicated on the colossal oversupply of labor-power relative to the demands of transnational capital, all conspire to make a mere cultural analysis of difference into a tool of the empires in the interests of the empire and for the ideological stability of class relations within the empires. But that is easier said than done.

Global neoliberalism has reached an ideological dead-end. The instability that the global world-system has created is the only constant left in the new world order. Hence, we stand in need of a theory and a set of practices to undermine the world-system in a determinate direction towards radical political and economic democracy, towards, that is, the elimination of that difference asserted by Aristotle and authenticated as the ideal of the bourgeois intellectual by Nietzsche.

Is there a universal subject therefore reasserted by a resurrection of class analysis. Is this a recall to the grand narratives of which, as Fukuyama said, only one is left? If we examine the state of political life in the contemporary state, we see, however, a weakening of those institutions of civic life that are necessary for effective republican or parliamentary democracy. In the United States, for instance, the big bourgeoisie rules with little semblance of democratic participation by the population. In the third world, state mechanisms that are necessary for the transnational bourgeoisie—from the military to financial institutions—have been strengthened, while those that legitimated the rise of the bourgeois nation-state in the West in the late eighteenth-century and in the colonial world afterwards, have been weakened. Santiago Castro-Gómez thus refers to the loss of the central role of the nation-state, which defined its character in the modern age. An increasingly large number of the population is left to find its identity in its repressed culture and in the exploited workplace. Not to call for unity and for the formation of a grand identity to fight transnational capitalism is to assume Fukuyama was right.

Now, have communism and its cultural representation, namely, *mestizaje from below*, exhausted all historicity so that novelty, including the novelty of a not completely totalized or conquered past is not allowed unless it can be categorized according to the preconceived schemata of imperial power and control? Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that a new political subject is arising from the ashes of the old modern nation-state: Empire. They attempt to think the new political formation in terms of the Foucauldian transition from a society in which disciplinary practices are limited to certain total institutions to the “society of control,” in which those practices overflow their boundaries and become foundational for the whole machine. This is an intriguing position that, like Fukuyama’s, sees an end to history in the Empire’s affirmation of its eternity—a secularized Augustinian *nunc stans*, I would add, as the Empire affirms the immanent validity of its

transcendentality. But at the same time, Hardt and Negri are neither sanguine about the system nor pessimistic about radical transformative possibilities which they find in local anti-globalization subjectivities.

We are always open to novelty within history, and it seems to me that the spirituality of the Mayan or any other subaltern culture is through and through historical as we reflect on it or communicate it. There is that remainder, a surd of alterity, that may be incommunicable, except in the language of the heart, as Professor Huntington argues.

One could be tempted to use other Latin American philosophers of the past, for instance, José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) or Antonio Caso (1883-1946), to give a place or a role to each of those dimensions or elements in the totality of the human. Thus, if we were to extrapolate from Caso’s conception of life as economy, art as disinterest, and existence as charity, we would then have a hierarchy from ego-centered effort (in which life is defined as maximum gain with minimum effort) through a disinterested intuition of the object to existence as charity.

Existence as charity is disinterested. It is the space within which we may understand how “the good man sacrifices egoism to help his neighbor, although such sacrifice is free” (Caso, *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad* (first pub. In 1916) in *Obras Completas* (UNAM, 1972), 3:70, cited in *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Prometheus, 1986, p. 50). While sacrifice is from the point of view of interested economic existence a wasted effort, from within itself it is “maximum effort with minimum gain” for the sake of the other and out of love.

Prof. Huntington’s reference to a thinking from the heart resonates also in Caso 85 year-old text, although Caso receives conscious inspiration from his Christianity.

Reader: What is said here is only philosophy, and philosophy is an interest of knowledge. Love is action. Go and act in love. Then, in addition to being wise, you will be holy. Philosophy is impossible without love, but love is perfectly possible without philosophy because the first is an idea, a thought, but the second is an experience, an act. Your century is egoistic and perverse. Nevertheless, love the men of your century that appear not to know how to love, who act only out of hunger and covetousness. He who does not love in this way will never know love. All of the philosophies of the men of science are worth nothing in the face of the disinterested action of one good man (ibid., 3:106, in 52).

It should be mentioned that this text, written in 1916, was influenced by Bergsonian vitalism and it was quiet bourgeois expression, in the midst of revolution, of the early twentieth-century middle-class Mexican intellectual’s refutation of positivism and Porfirism.

In José Vasconcelos we find a similar expression. But I will cite not from *La raza cósmica* (1925), which really represents the triumph of a national bourgeoisie over zapatismo while simultaneously asking, “how do we assimilate the Indian?,” but a much older text: *Todología* (written in 1952):

Each of the ways of our psyche or personality is a system of order that gives rise to a method of investigation and action. And corresponding to each

of these systems is a partial vision of the nature of the psyche. If we give preference to intelligence, we will have rationalism; if we make feeling predominate, we are converted into materialists; if we balance our vital functions, our systems of investigation, we will attain a harmony that is more than the reason of the idealists and more than sensualism. We will achieve an awareness of totality in which each of the particles of the Cosmos will find its place according to the proportions and hierarchies of the Universe [*Filosofía estética. Metodología* In *Obras Completas* (Mexico: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), 4:900 in *Latin Am. Phil in...*, 58).

This type of equilibrium seeks to respond philosophically to the crisis of modernity regarding the reduction of reason to rationalism and the rational life to the operationalizable life. Vasconcelos, of course, was not alone in this kind of thinking. He had the good company, to mention only two philosophers, of Ortega y Gasset in Spain and Karl Jaspers in Germany.

Ortega had sought to rethink human life in terms of the radical reality as it relates to a transcendent otherness (including absolute otherness, if we take seriously, allusions to Kant and Heine in Ortega's *Man and People*): The continued presence of latency in my world, in terms of the this-sidedness of my horizon always pointing to the beyond—what is on the other side of the this-sidedness's presence acts "habitually in our world, without our being aware of it" (MP, 67); others may point to an absolute latency

We understand what Heine is suggesting when he says that the stars are golden thoughts in the mind of the night. Their winking too, minute in each separate star and immense in the entire vault, is a permanent stimulus for us to transcend the world that is our environment and find the radical universe (MP, 71).

Incidentally, it is this dialectic of presence and latency in which there is a non-rational remainder that maintains itself always beyond presence that leads Ortega to develop in his *The Origin of Philosophy* a dialectic of sublation quite unlike Hegel's. There can never be a complete sublation of the other, even in the smallest, quotidian acts of sensing an object: the orange's other side will be present only as a future act or as an act of remembrance, but never as presence; it will always keep its latency *for us* and in itself, to the extent that it is structured in a perspectival act. Because of this, Ortega's definition of the "I," as the "I" and its "circumstance," includes, as we read *History as a System*, the accumulation of being the spatio-temporal circumstance implies, the latency of the accumulated, the other side of the ancestor's shadow.

In Jaspers we see a similar effort in his autobiographical reflections on the reformulation of Kant's fundamental questions for the last century's crisis, and his conception of the Encompassing in the dialectic of Reason and *Existenz*:

"What I am myself is based on my original relations to Transcendence: in defiance and in surrender, in falling away and in soaring up, in obedience to the law of the day and in the passion of the night. When I philosophize I clarify and remember and prepare

how, through these relations, I can experience Eternity in Time. The experience itself cannot be forced and cannot be proved: it is the fulfilled historicity of my Existenz" (Jaspers, "On My Philosophy," in Kaufmann, ed., 181).

These reflections of alterity, whether by Latin Americans or Europeans, cannot be simply dismissed as ideological aberrations, mere expressions of alienation, or simply idealism. They are reflections on the crisis of modernity, as well as ways of becoming aware of, to use Professor Huntington's language, the spiritual dimension of human life.

Professor Huntington speaks of a Mayan spirituality that serves, not only as an alternative to modern rationalism, but also as a source of meaning.

I will use also a language of dialectical interpenetration and juxtaposition. Thus, to mention one example that should complement rather than replace Professor Huntington's description of the Mayans of Chiapas, the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú's construction of a liberation theory has three components, political, economic, and cultural, which are irreducible to each other, and yet mutually conditioning.

In her Nobel speech, Menchú had said:

Our history is a living history, which has pulsed, resisted, and survived many centuries of sacrifices. Now it advances again forcefully. The seeds, asleep for a long time, burst open with some uncertainty, but they germinate in a world characterized today by confusion and vagueness.

There is no doubt that this process will be long and complex, but it is not an Utopia, and we, the Indians, are now confident that it will be carried out. The people of Guatemala will mobilize and become aware [tomará conciencia] of their own capacity to build a valuable future. They are preparing themselves for sowing the future, liberating themselves from atavisms, rediscovering themselves as a people, in order to construct a genuine national identity and begin a new life ("El discurso Nobel," Det Norske Nobelinstitutt, Drammensveien 19, N-0255, Norway, 1992).

What are the conditions for achieving this genuine collective identity? I mentioned the three dimensions of the economy, politics, and culture. Menchú proposes as the fundamental economic question (although this is not simply a matter of self-interest as it was for Caso, or work and no play as it was for Ortega in the somewhat odd "The Sportive Origin of the State"), the question of land tenure; as the fundamental question in the political field, popular democracy; and, as the fundamental question in culture, the indigenous Mayan vision of interhuman relations, and the relationship among humans, the earth, and nature. (I think one could use here the ugly term coined by Bourdieu and also developed by García Canclini, "cultural capital"—to describe accurately the processes of unequal appropriation and distribution of symbols, but also the reality of inequality within which oppressed or colonized cultures produce symbols, and it has the added virtue of suspending epistemologically any attempted formulation of an unspeakable love, a nonperspectival awareness of Totality,

an absolute latency, or a transcendent encompassing, or a living cosmos.)

The wave of wholesale violence that the bourgeoisie used in Guatemala during the eighties with its 200,000 dead and disappeared, made apparent the antidemocratic class interests of the dominant political parties and military groupings. These had their own opening towards barbarism thanks to the criminal policies of successive U.S. administrations. They were part of a broader attack against popular democracy in Latin America. The military invasion of Grenada, the mining of Nicaraguan ports, the relegitimation of the Somocista National Guard, the training in the U.S. of Salvadoran and Guatemalan officers later engaged in torture, kidnappings and killings of civilians, and in massacres of whole towns (such as el Mozote in El Salvador, and Chajul, Pichichjil, Potrero Viejo, Santa Cruz, and Chacalte in Guatemala), were themselves elements of a broader policy of global domination by transnational capital to simultaneously increase profits for the transnationals and transfer surplus value to the imperialist nation-states so that the working classes of imperialist nation-states may be kept satisfied and useful in the military adventures against the working classes or the domestic bourgeoisies of other countries when profits and surplus value transfer appear compromised. This is not only a crisis of modernity, or fundamentally a spiritual crisis; it is fundamentally a crisis of transnational capitalism, which has as a consequence, it is true, a colossal crisis of the spirit everywhere in which, according to Elsa Támez, young persons from San Francisco to San José, Costa Rica, have to have their Nikes or otherwise they will just die...

In her Nobel Prize speech, Rigoberta Menchú stresses the connection between the reorganization of land tenure and democracy:

In the new Guatemalan society there must be a fundamental reorganization pertaining to the possession of the land, to allow for the development of agricultural potential, and the return of the legitimate owners of the land that was taken away from them. And we must not forget that this process of reorganization must be carried out with the utmost respect towards nature, to protect it and give it back its strength and capacity to generate life...

It is not possible to conceive of a democratic, free, and independent Guatemala, without the indigenous identity forming its character in all aspects of its national existence (Nobel Speech, 12).

That is an important connection. It takes us to the fundamental question in the cultural field: A popular democracy that is truly heterogeneous in its cultural content.

It is that juxtaposition of elements at the political, economic, and cultural levels that I call a *mestizaje* from below. But we must be careful not to mystify the relationships in it embodied. In "The Quincentenary: A Question of Class, Not Race," Rigoberta Menchú responds:

We know that *mestizaje* did not take place because the Spanish were thinking of equality and mutual respect. Many of our grandmothers were raped, and the product of that violation cannot be equated with the harmony of the encounter of two feelings or two cultures. Today, power in our countries is in the hands

of privileged *criollos* and *mestizos*. This refers us to the imposition of one culture over another. Five hundred years later we are still living the consequences. First, it was the Spaniards. Then others came: Germans, North Americans, and so on successively [*Latin American Perspectives*, 19:73 (1992) 96-100].

However, the critique that Menchú develops through a decodification of the dominant myths of the past and the present is based upon the intersubjective ideal of cultural heterogeneity, which requires—as Prof. Huntington argues in her commentary and as I state clearly in my book—more than the formal recognition of the indigenous American. Instead of positing a purely instrumental and objectivistic relation with "the earth," ideologies of indigenous *resistance* vivify nature as one of the terms in a network of reciprocal relations. "The earth," says Menchú, "is not only a source of economic wealth, and gives us maize, which is our life; but it also provides many things that today's privileged are looking for. It is the root and source of our culture. It keeps our memories, receives our ancestors and, therefore, demands from us that we worship it and return to it with tenderness and respect what it gives us... If the world does not learn now to show respect towards nature, what kind of future will the new generations have?" (Menchú, "Nobel Speech").

From the mutuality of this cosmo vision, Menchú derives the ideal of a pluriethnic popular democracy and the cultural representation of all material resources (including the instruments of production) as collective elements of the economy.

This brings me to the two final points of this response, which I will consider as one in response to the commentaries by Professors Vargas and Millán: The meaning of the Latin American philosophy of liberation and the meaning of Latin American philosophy. I will approach them historically and "genetically." Because genesis is a poor source of actual meaning to the extent that it collapses beginning and end into one without a presentation of the process, my response should be understood solely as a metaphor.

In a sense, Stanley Diamond is right when he says that "The idea of the primitive is...as old as civilization because civilization creates it in the search for human identity." Culture, and the senses of identity and difference it provides, are this home. Culture may thus appear as an Odyssean death-to-escape through a cultural apparatus that grinds (us) on forever, as Bauman theorizes regarding modern culture (which Sartre characterized simply as bourgeois literature). But it may also appear as an "unimaginable other" (to cite again Bauman's description of death) or as Enrique Dussel's critique of (self-identical) systems of domination (what was called half tongue in cheek by one of Dussel's students "the eternal return of the new"), or yet again as a critique of the transcendentalism of the second modernity described by Hardt and Negri.

With this in mind, I would follow Zea's lead and define Latin American philosophy as characteristically a philosophy of cultural identity. However, this is not purely a metaphysical issue. From the beginning, because it is a thought about cultural and social identity (and not simply formal-logical identity), it is a thinking that breaks away with the conceptualization of identity as ahistorical self-sameness. It

introduces “difference” as integral to the project of identity. Hence, we can understand Zea’s interest in both Hegel’s and Ortega’s versions of the dialectic.

This conception of Latin American philosophy can become a critical theory as it becomes conscious of itself versus the identity that excludes it as difference. For, it is a critique of “the questioning of our humanity” (Leopoldo Zea); but our humanity is the humanity of the oppressed other, the visages the oppressed to which Dussel referred in his *El encubrimiento del Otro* and to which Fuentes attributed the source of Latin America’s history. Here we find, then, that element of commonality that Professor Millán asks for in her commentary. Our identity, what we have in common, and our self-identity, lies precisely in that which breaks with the identical and reveals the self as the marginalized other.

Latin American philosophy is, therefore, in practice a critique of those universalistic claims made by dominant interests that shows those claims to be particular and exclusionary. But the practice of critique is not possible without the spirit that moves it, namely, the points of commonality in the human condition: the ideal of equality and the universalization of freedom.

That is, I think, the meaning of the philosophy of liberation whether in its historicist version (Roig’s and Zea’s, for instance) or in its analectical version (for instance, Rodolfo Kusch’s or Dussel’s). In all of them, there is a critique of the exclusion of the other, of the structures of dependence created by dominant systems, and, certainly to various degrees, of class exploitation, the patriarchy, and homophobia.

The affirmation of the universality of an exploited, oppressed and marginalized identity has developed historically in Latin America. I will simply introduce this development by reference to a colonial text, the *Popol Vuh* we have at our disposal, in a way similar to the way Christian liberation theologians approach their Bible hermeneutically.

At first, the freedom affirmed by the intellectuals of the early post-Independence period in Latin America meant only exclusion and servitude for the majority, since it introduced conceptions of free activity used to justify the reproduction of human activity as exploited labor and of the land as the private property of those who did not labor. Enslavement was thus disguised as freedom, so that “It wasn’t apparent what language they spoke” (*Popol Vuh*, 78) in this first attempt to create a Latin American human identity. Indeed, as in the *popol Vuh*, the Hispanic ideologues of the young republics spoke with a language not their own when they asked themselves for the reasons of the political and economic crises besetting their nations. They sometimes blamed all things American, and with intellectual rigidity they maintained their consistency by excluding all difference. “They made a body,” says the *Popol Vuh*, “but it was just separating, just crumbling, just loosening, just disintegrating, and just dissolving. Its head wouldn’t turn... It couldn’t look around” (*Popol Vuh*, 79).

The end of the nineteenth century was ideologically our heyday in modernity. It was thought that science, specifically social science, and technological innovation would solve all our problems: They would show us how history *evolves*, progresses towards *the better*, how truth was transparent for the intellectual who was touched by the magic wand of

positivism. This *myth-like belief* (Miró Quesada’s *mitoide*) that science and technology could replace culture and were in a sense identifiable with it, made the eurocentric historian forget the history of the other and, therefore, the history of his own circumstance.

They came into being, they multiplied...these manikins, woodcarvings. But there was nothing in their hearts and nothing in their minds, no memory of their mason and builder. They just went and walked wherever they wanted. Now they did not remember the Heart of Sky (*Popol Vuh*, 83).

Today we are at a critical junction. We may continue being forced to move along the catastrophic path of capitalist globalization, consumerism, environmental degradation, the unequal distribution of power and resources, the instrumentalization of everything human, including cultures and struggles, the creation of vast zones in the heart of “Our America” of vast zones where the permanently unemployable would exist—a post-industrial reserve of disordered human tissue and muscle; or, we may led out of neoliberal barbarism by this rag-tag army, an “interweaving of colors ...a typical *huipil* ... a gift to humanity,” said Menchú.

Thus, “...their thoughts came out in clear light,” says the *Popol Vuh*. “They sought and discovered what was needed for human flesh” (*Popol Vuh*, 63).

*Unral zanuach xolob* (*Popol Vuh*, 298).

## ***How Latina? More Latina? In Debate with Angelo Corlett***

**J.L.A. Garcia**  
*Boston College*

Having an ethnicity or race, especially, ‘identifying with’ it, is often thought to involve knowing, appreciating, and stressing certain associated cultural features, taking pride in or striving to acquire preference for what are thought to be some of the group’s characteristic musical or literary forms, cultivating or affecting various tongues or distinctive linguistic styles or phrasings, making a point of certain styles of clothing, and so on. These are treated as marks of being ethnic, of having an ethnic identity, at least, of being authentic in it. Kwame Anthony Appiah notes that, “Distinct practices, ideas, norms go with each ethnicity in part because people want to be ethnically distinct, want the sense of solidarity that comes from being unlike others.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet immediately a problem arises. For we intuitively think that whether you are, say, a Black person or a Puerto Rican is more a matter of your ancestors’ geographic origin and culture than it is of yours. Of course, there may be something plausible in the idea that ethnicity itself admits of degrees and comparatives. There may be special contexts in which it can make sense to say some people are more Latina/o than others are, and perhaps, too, we can talk of how Latina/o someone is. This talk can arise and seem reasonable especially in cases of ethnically mixed ancestry. Nonetheless, it is problematic, however initially appealing, to claim that someone’s cultural participation and emotional commitments make her ethnicity greater or less. Examining Corlett’s discussion can help us see what motivates such a position and how it goes awry.

Corlett presents his exploration as “a philosophical analysis of the nature of a specific ethnic group”, an effort to “analyze the notion of Latino identity”, a search for “the nature of a Latino person”, an inquiry into “the necessary and sufficient conditions that define membership in a Latino group, ethnically speaking”, into “who qualifies as a Latino” and “the nature [or “properties”] of Latina/hood.”<sup>2</sup> Presumably, the author does not really mean that a Latina/o person has a different “nature” from, say, an Anglo or an Aryan one as his talk suggests. (If he did mean that, then the first thing for him to do would be to show us that we should think there exists such a nature for him or anyone to find.) The issue instead seems to be what it is for a person to be a Latina/o. Note that nothing in this description makes the project into “an analysis of Latino identity”, as Corlett also puts it. I see no good reason to speak of “identity” in this discussion at all. Here I shall treat his discussion as an inquiry into what it is to be a Latina/o, deferring the different and narrower question of someone’s having (a) Latina/o identity.<sup>3</sup> This is not so great a departure from Corlett’s own procedure, since he seems to me not to distinguish someone’s (a) being Latina/o from her having (a) Latina/o identity.

These two claims constitute the nub of Corlett’s account of what (I think, misleadingly) he calls “Latino identity”:

(C1) Someone’s ancestral connection to the peoples of Iberia after 1492 is necessary and sufficient for affirmatively answering the question *whether* she is a Latina/o.

(C2) There is a certain “cluster of attributes which, when held in some combination and to some significant degree, serve to identify [some]one as being more or less a Latino.” These attributes include mastery of the Spanish language, having a Spanish name, and familiarity with and appreciation for various Hispanic customs.<sup>4</sup> Those who, possessing the needed genealogical ties, have more of these are therein more Latina/o.

On Corlett’s account, then, *whether* a person *L* is Latina/o depends simply on her ancestry. However, “Latino identity is a matter of degree”, and *how* Latina/o she is—the extent to which she is (a) Latina/o—varies according to various cultural and linguistic factors.<sup>5</sup>

### Part Two: Initial difficulties.

What I call Corlett’s C1 resembles the approach taken by J. J. E. Gracia. Gracia first describes, without endorsing, an interesting and promising approach to ethnicity. According to it, Hispanic or Latina/o identity is what philosophers call a “cluster-concept” or “common bundle”, meaning that it applies to things when they exhibit enough features (without assuming there is a precise number), from a list, while no one or group of those features is itself necessary. So, no features are necessary or sufficient for someone *L* to be a Latina/o, but she will be a Latina/o if she has enough of such features as speaking Spanish, enjoying Latin music, having Iberian ancestors, etc. Gracia objects to such a view that there is no good way to specify the relevant set of properties, that there is no non-arbitrary way of specifying just how many a person must have to be Hispanic, and that any such list must change over time.<sup>6</sup>

Having rejected the “cluster-concept” approach to what it is to be an Hispanic, Gracia advances his own position. He maintains “there are no common characteristics to all those people whom we wish to call Hispanics.” He elaborates: “[M]y proposal is to adopt the term “Hispanic” to refer to us: the people of Iberia, Latin America, and some segments of the population in the United States, after 1492, and to the descendants of these people anywhere in the world as long as they preserve close ties to them... [T]he use of this term does not imply that there are any properties common to all of us throughout history. Its use is justified rather by a web of concrete historical relations that ties us together, and simultaneously separate us from other peoples.”<sup>7</sup>

Relevant to our C1, Gracia points out any such account ultimately must specify both: (a) what kinds of lineage relations matter, and (b) at what point they stop mattering (lest someone’s very distant kin suffice for her still being Latina/o).<sup>8</sup> The exact specification in Gracia’s (a) need not bother us here; that is a matter of detail that can wait. More important, any account such as Corlett’s must deal with the problem of whether it is meant to explicate only what is *today* to be a Latina/o, or what being Latina/o is *without regard to time*. Someone’s having ancestors who belong to a certain ethnic group can suffice for her now belonging to the group only if we allow that someone can now belong to an ethnic group that, its cultural distinctiveness and geographic and genetic separation having long passed, itself no longer exists. Even if that can be made to avoid self-contradiction, it is an unappealing implication. Similarly, someone’s having such ancestry cannot suffice for her belonging to the group without regard to (that is, in any) time, because this account could not apply to the group’s first generation.

Corlett does write as if being a Latina/o varies across classificatory schemes (and, because of that, across times and places as well), holding that being a Latina/o consists in different things in different places: “Latino identity is contextually contingent... [B]eing Latino in East L. A., for instance, is different than [in U.S. usage, I think this should read “from”] one’s being Latino in, say, Brazil or Cuba.”<sup>9</sup> However, he seems not to think that variation extends to necessary and sufficient conditions. I am not sure how that variation-claim avoids introducing inconsistencies into his account, but I mention these matters as complications involved in construing his project as specifying what it is to be a Latina/o. If what it is to be a Latina/o at place *P1* is something different from what it is to be a Latina/o at *P2*, then should not the author’s question and inquiry be into “what is it to-be-a-Latina/o-AT-(some-)place-*P*? And then, to be consistent, should not that question also be further relativized to times? Can time be irrelevant here, if place is crucial? However, this raises the problem, treated below, that it seems to imply there is no such thing as being Latina/o, only such things as being a Latina/o-in-way-*W1* and -*W2*, or -at-place-*P1* and -*P2*, or -at-time-*T1* and *T2*, or -relative-to-scheme-*S1* and -*S2*, etc.

These considerations also make it clear that even the account of whether someone *L* is Latina/o is not culture-free. For, having set aside lineage as inapplicable to the first generation, it is difficult to see how we *can* identify the first generation of Latinas/os (and explain their being Latina/o), without appealing to their culture. Maybe we could identify the group by *geography* (and their geographical isolation) but,

if the social scientists are correct here (and I see no reason to dispute them), this may not suffice to mark them off as an ethnic group, an *ethnie*.<sup>10</sup>

On Gracia's (b), Gracia needs to show *that* and *why* *L*'s distant kin connection to Latinas/os is insufficient, as he thinks, to make someone *L* (a) Latina/o today. This is not obvious, especially if being Latina/o is just having Latina/o ancestral roots. This matters for us because, though Corlett expresses greater sympathy than does Gracia for a cluster conception of ethnicity, he may not differ from Gracia here as much as he seems to think. For Gracia's position does logically allow the possibility that all the Latinas/os at a certain time may share some qualities. Thus, Gracia's general account could, like Corlett's, permit that all Latinas/os *after the first generation* share ancestral connection to the first generation of Latinas/os.<sup>11</sup> Of course, if, as I have suggested may be the case, there is no way to identify an ethnic group's first generation, then there is no hope for defining later membership by descent from prior members.

### Part Three: Critique.

Our chief concern here is not with these difficulties of detail in Corlett's C1. Rather, it is with his claim in C2 that Latina/o ethnicity—and ethnicity more generally—admits of comparatives and intensities. There is a conceptual difficulty built into any such view. For it is hard to see how someone's (or something's) having some property *P* could consist in her (its) having some feature *F1*, while her (its) being *more P* than another is (or than she/it used to or might otherwise be) consists in comparative possession of some entirely different feature *F2*. What applies here to the comparative question also applies to the scalar. How could a subject's being *P* consist in its having feature *F1*, when *how P* it is—the extent to which it is *P*—consists in the amount it has of some different feature *F2*? If something's being *P* is identical with its being *F1*, then its being *more P* (than some *X*) can only be identical with its being *more F1*.<sup>12</sup> Corlett's claims, then, appear to violate the logic of comparative and scalar terms. Yet that is the form of the claims that constitute Corlett's account, if we replace "*P*" with "Latina/o", "*F1*" with the relevant features of Iberian lineage in C1, and "*F2*" with some requisite cultural feature(s) from C2.<sup>13</sup>

Any such account as Corlett's also faces what we can call a problem from the lower limit. As the level of her Latina/o cultural involvement shrinks, a subject, *L*, approaches not being Latina/o at all, until there is no cultural involvement at all and *L* is not Latina/o. When the answer to the question of the degree to which something is *P* is "None at all", then the answer to that of whether it is *P* is *eo ipso* answered. There is no need to look to some other features, such as the ancestral ones on which Corlett's C1 relies. In this way, the 'whether'- and 'how'-questions are logically linked, whereas any two-tiered account such as Corlett's treats them as independent. Of course, defenders of such approaches can try to block the problem by insisting that the question of how Latina/o someone is—and thus recourse to cultural involvement—does not arise unless and until the question of whether the subject is Latina/o—the matter of her genealogy—is first answered affirmatively. However, any such stipulation is *ad hoc*; it needs both its propriety and intelligibility to be shown.

Corlett acknowledges that, on his account, we would need to know not just *which* factors count toward someone's being Latina/o—better phrased, toward how Latina/o she is or "the *degree* to which one is a Latino"—but also *how* and *how much* each factor counts.<sup>14</sup> The problem is deeper than this, however, and Corlett's theory can be shown to have counter-intuitive implications. On it, as a Latina/o, *L*, Anglicizes first her Christian name, then similarly changes her middle name from Spanish, and finally her surname, her "Latina/ohood" fades; she becomes less (a) Latina/o. *Unless*, that is, over the same period, she does some things Corlett's account treats as more "Latina/o-making" (as we might say), such as gaining greater mastery of Spanish, or coming to know more Latin music or literature. This picture of waxing and waning ethnicity—waxing and waning across persons and times—complicated now by trade-offs he cannot consistently deny, strikes me as unrealistic, far-fetched. (Waxing and waning "identity" is even odder, at the margins of coherence.)

Corlett also needs to provide us some account of the commensurability of these very different matters. The difficulty is not merely the one Corlett concedes, that we do not yet know *how much* Spanish she would have to learn in order to offset what he takes to be the de-Latinizing effects of her name's Anglicization. How *can L*'s learning *any* amount of Spanish add some of what she lost in changing her name? What is the metric in which this sort of commensuration could take place? What could be the relevant unit of measure?<sup>15</sup>

Finally, we should note that Corlett's account is rather unclear about whether our person *L* also has to *like* the music for it to tend to make her more (of a) Latina/o. Corlett talks here of "respecting... elements of Latino culture." Suppose, however, that someone *L* comes to know more Latin(o/a) music, but like it less. Maybe the novelty wears off, or it comes to seem shallow in *L*'s mind compared with Ravel, or Run-DMC, or "Riverdance," or whatever it is that now captivates her. What if she gradually gains respect for, say, Spanish drama but increasingly despises Cuban poetry? How does that affect her standing as a Latina/o? My questions are rhetorical, but they point to what is unanswerable. What I am suggesting is that the problem goes beyond that of assigning specific weights to the various factors. There is something highly counter-intuitive in the very suggestion at the heart of Corlett's account that these cultural matters can weigh at all in the required way, tending to make someone more or less (a) Latina/o as they grow or shrink, indeed, making her Latina/o identity track this ebb and flow.

There is also a political/moral difficulty we should acknowledge. These matters are not without possible psychological consequences, after all, and normative implications lurk. There is, recall, an ancient tradition in the West (and East, for that matter) according to which the fundamental ethical project is that of being fully what one is.<sup>16</sup> Where *X* is supposed to be some deep feature of the self, as any matter of identity ought to be, to say that someone is a *X*, but not much (of one), is already a normative judgment and a negative one at that.<sup>17</sup> Corlett denies that his comparative talk is inherently normative. This response is admirable but unpersuasive.<sup>18</sup> His account explicitly holds that someone may be "more or less a Latino", and implicitly allows that some are more Latina/o than others. It puts some "at the core of Latina/ohood" (sic) and others at "its periphery," holds that some Latinas/os are "Latinos in a strong

sense,” others “Latinos in a weaker sense.”<sup>19</sup> All this has strong normative import, including ethical, as is made clear by Corlett’s insistence that “we should wear our ethnic label with pride”, and his criticism of what he calls “the unfortunate disposition” and “self-deception” in someone who “seeks to completely opt out of what is clearly her genealogically based ethnicity.”<sup>20</sup> It is a familiar fact that, even today, the creativity, originality, intellectual boldness, and logical rigor of too many African-Americans, perhaps including some Latina/os, is constrained by their anxiety over being ‘Black enough’ or desire to become ‘Blacker’ in their tastes, projects, beliefs, and even modes of thought. Worse still, some are hobbled by fear lest others, especially some other Black people, judge them insufficiently Black or less Black than, it is supposed, they should be.<sup>21</sup> At a time when, to the group’s detriment, some still have not learned that there is no such thing as ‘thinking or feeling Black’ (or ‘Blacker’), it is difficult to see much wisdom, prudence, or fairness, in Latinas/os flirting with ideas that, despite some advocates’ protestations, can only serve to ground the presuppositions of corresponding ethnic trepidation and to legitimize them. With such stakes in the background, I think Corlett needs some stronger defense of so controversial a model, some more explicit defense against the concern that his metaphysical account is politically loaded and the worry that it is politically motivated.<sup>22</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. Appiah, p. 89.
2. Corlett, pp. 274 f., 278, 294, passim.

3. For more on this, see Garcia, J. L. A. “Is Being Hispanic an Identity?” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. v. 2 (2001), 29-43.
4. Corlett consistently talks of “willful and voluntary” participation in Latina culture. This suggests too narrow, too active, and too voluntaristic a conception of culture and cultural involvement. Many of the habits and patterns of response that are thought to constitute someone’s culture are matters of a person’s beliefs, desires, likes and dislikes, preferences, etc. It is mistaken to think that, when she spontaneously possesses these responsive states as a result of her cultural environment, she is “willfully and voluntarily” participating in her culture. Nevertheless, they may be an important part of her ethnocultural life.
5. Corlett, p. 285.
6. Gracia, pp. 58-60.
7. Gracia, p. 52; see also p. 48.
8. Gracia, chaps. 1-3. For a fuller critique of this book’s central argument, see Garcia, 2001.
9. Corlett, p. 35, in note #19.
10. Hutchinson and Smith define an *ethnie* or “ethnic community” as “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members.” They explain that “without the shared myths and memories, including myths of origin and election, and the sense of solidarity they engender, we would be speaking of the [“looser level of incorporation” known as] an ethnic category rather than a[n ethnic] community.” (Hutchinson and Smith, Introduction, pp. 6-7) Fredrik Barth similarly defines an ethnic group as “a population which: (1) is biologically self-perpetuating (2) shares fundamental cultural values . . . (3) makes up a field of communication and interaction [and] (4) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.” (See his essay in Hutchinson and Smith, p. 75) Since both accounts make ethnicity depend upon the thought and attitudes of the group itself, both go beyond defining an ethnic group simply by geographic or demographic separation, and appear to share commitment to what is called “the socially constructed nature of ethnicity.” (See Hutchinson and Smith, Introduction, p. 9.)
11. Gracia seems to think this false, and may mean other parts of his account to rule out this sort of suggestion.
12. One might object: can it not be true that being a Red Sox fan, for example, is being devoted to the Sox, but *how much* of a fan some one is remains a matter of her having more or fewer insignia merchandise, banners, bumper stickers, etc.? That is mistaken, I think. Being more of a Sox fan is *indicated* by these things, but only insofar as they are signs of greater devotion, and being more of a Sox fan consists in being more devoted, because being their fan consists in being devoted to them.
13. When I presented some of this material at Notre Dame, Kenneth Sayre suggested to me that, even if we take ethnicity to be biologically fixed, still, what I call “self-image” might usefully be employed to determine how Latina/o (etc.) someone is. For the general reason just offered against Corlett’s account, and puzzles in the very idea of degrees of culturally-defined ethnicity, I find problematic Sayre’s rather different suggestion about how Latina/o *L* is might have a different basis from whether *L* is Latina/o.
14. Corlett, pp. 287, emphasis retained.
15. Note this problem of identifying and explaining the needed units of measure (of Latina/ohood?) is a different and deeper one from the difficulty that Corlett acknowledges, which is, in effect, that of specifying *how many* of such units *L* gains in learning Spanish and how many she loses in changing her name.
16. On modern variants of this, see Taylor.
17. A putative counter-example to this claim of mine: maybe it is not an insult to say you’re not much of a liar or a thief. Still, insofar as you are a liar or a thief, there is some negative imputation in saying you are a poor one. In any case, being a Latina/o is not something presumptively bad, as being a liar or thief is, and being a liar or thief

is not something deep in the responsible agent. The purported counter-example is thus not relevantly similar.

18. Corlett also insists that someone's politics and religion are no part of her being or not being Latino/a. (Corlett, pp. 280, 283) This is right-headed and commendable in contrast to the lamentable tendency of some to people to read others out of a race, ethnic group, or gender because of the latter's (usually, insufficiently 'radical') political views. Nevertheless, the exclusion of religion introduces a problem and a puzzle for Corlett's culture-focused account of intensive ethnicity. The problem is that culture is closely linked to the cognate 'cult' (and its origin in *cultus*), and religious practices and their motivating beliefs are among the most salient differentiating features of cultures. We are understandably reluctant to exclude from her ethnic group someone acculturated to Western modernist intellectual fashions, including its secularism. Yet, the reluctance threatens to distort our view of culture, inclining us outsiders to treat as adventitious what those within a group may see as its sustaining source.

19. Corlett, pp. 285, 288.

20. Corlett, pp. 275, 290.

21. Gates revisits this mentality with the bemused, semi-nostalgic tone of someone who sees himself as having achieved some liberation from its strictures. Particularly interesting is his metaphor of the medical phenomenon of 'hyper-pigmentation' (dark skin reacting to injury by becoming still darker) to describe this frame of mind. (See Gates, esp. the final sections.)

22. I do not presuppose—or even believe—that the latter charge is, in the end, correct, only that the worry it expresses is justified.

## Latino/a Identity

### J. Angelo Corlett

San Diego State University

It is with great privilege and humility that I accept the Editor's kind invitation to provide replies to Professor Jorge L. A. García's incisive queries concerning my initial work on Latino/a identity. It is crucial that we philosophers devote more analytical attention to concepts of ethnicity as they constitute important standing in our folk conceptions of reality. For some of us Latinos/as, the question of what makes us who and what we are *qua* Latinos/as has concerned us since childhood as we struggle to understand ourselves and each other (as *mestizae*) in a society which neither respects us nor understands the importance of our struggle to understand our identity as a people. My replies to García's comments are based both on the work of mine to which he refers as well as the other articles I have authored on race and ethnicity prior to and subsequent to that one. Before I answer García's concerns, I extend my analysis to cover such important matters as *Latina* identity. Moreover, I shall explain how my analysis evades many of the concerns raised by some other philosophers about attempts to define the boundaries of Latino/a-hood.

The problem of ethnic identity pervades a growing cluster of ethical issues not the least of which include color-conscious versus color-blind policies underlying public policies such as affirmative action programs. But the problem of ethnic identity is also important for both accuracy in interpreting medical research data that investigate certain health issues within ethnic groups, and for self- and group-respect and esteem (assumed here is the plausibility of the claim that one's self-understanding contributes significantly to one's self-respect). For these and no doubt other reasons, it is vital to attempt to come to reasonably accurate terms with ethnic categories,

one way or another. Assumed herein is the highly problematic nature of the traditional notions of races, or "primitive race theories." In their place, categories of ethnicity are used, ones which admit not only of degree of ethnic group membership, but of a greater number of categories of persons (and ethnic groups) than do primitive race theories. Moreover, whereas primitive race theories support a view of human groups as being natural kinds, ethnic categories are not natural kinds, but are to some extent, if not wholly, social constructs. Finally, unlike primitive race theories which tend to place a higher regard on a certain group (In the United States, typically "Caucasian" over others "mongoloid" or "Negroid"), the categories of ethnicity assume no such qualitative hierarchy among human groups. Furthermore, the strategy of employing ethnic rather than traditional racial categories is hoped to have the effect of reducing racist categorizations in that ethnic terms, unlike racial ones, confer agency on members of ethnic groups because it is in-group members who decide for themselves what makes them who and what they are.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to define precisely the conditions of ethnic group membership, and hence a Herculean task to identify ourselves as being members of this or that ethnic group. This is essentially the primary problem of ethnic identity: the difficulty in defining in a plausible manner what it means to be properly classified as a member of an ethnic group. Construed thusly, ethnic identity (or Latino/a identity more specifically) is a matter of ethnic or Latino/a identification or classification. Although many social scientists use categories of ethnic identity in other ways, I shall use categories of ethnic identity to refer to ethnic classifications/identifications. After all, it does little if any good to discuss terms until we at least attempt to define them so they have suitable sense and use value in ordinary discourse. As we shall see, the manner in which this problem is approached reveals various sorts of motives or purposes. In fact, philosophical analyses ought to be aimed at or driven by a particular purpose. Moreover, it should not surprise us if a construal of ethnicity turns out to be plausible given certain purposes, but problematic given others. From the outset of my own writings on ethnicity, I have been conspicuous concerning the primary purposes which underlie my analysis of Latino/a identity.

The primary purpose of my analysis is to provide substance to the accurate classification of folk into categories of ethnicity for purposes of justice under the law. Should it turn out that ethnic classifications make no sense at all, then it would seem to follow that programs of affirmative action or policies of reparations would be unjustified due to their arbitrariness in classifying folk under this or that ethnic label. It would also imply that medical research statistics regarding ethnic groups is quite confused, being based on empty concepts. But if this conclusion is inferred, it ought to be the end result of a protracted philosophical investigation which is not motivated by partisan politics. Thus it is clear that my analysis of Latino/a identity is intricately tied to public policy considerations, rather than being a purely metaphysical dogma divorced from the very considerations which would (and should) inspire the discussion in the first place: a search for our Latino/a selves in a society which exudes injustice against us.

In proffering my analysis of Latino/a identity, I make at least the following assumptions. First, I assume that the

problems of Latino/a identity (and of ethnic identity more generally) fall under the more general problems of personal and/or group identity. That is, whatever turns out to make me a Latino, for instance, is part of what turns out to make me who and what I am more generally, e.g., as a person. And this is true whether or not I recognize this (ethnic) fact about me. Indeed, this holds true whether or not others recognize me as a Latino. Just as there are perhaps other aspects of my being of which for whatever reason I am (or others are) unaware, I (or others) might be unaware that I am a Latino, yet I might be one nonetheless. This implies, of course, that ethnic self-identification (or even out-group ethnic identification) is not necessary for ethnicity, points to which I shall return below. This in turn implies that ethnicity is not totally a matter of social construction, something which I have taken great pains to argue elsewhere. Secondly, I assume that matters of public policy are important. By “public policy,” I mean, for example, affirmative action programs of various sorts. Because this is such a controversial and complicated matter, I shall not undertake a discussion of such policies here. Elsewhere I have argued that such programs might be justified, but only if based on what groups deserve in light of their relative harms experienced, wrongly, at the hands of the United States Government. In any case, such programs are only justified, if they are justified at all, according to backward-looking arguments and are never to be confused as replacements for reparations. Herein I assume the justifications of such policies and programs. Thirdly, I shall assume, proudly and optimistically, though not naively, that philosophical analysis can make productive conceptual progress regarding the matter of ethnicity. However, I assume neither a skeptical, a nominalist, nor a realist position on the nature of ethnic groups, though I do take a position regarding the nature of ethnic groups. My view is the result, I hope, of a fundamentally coherentist moral epistemology wherein my analysis of Latino/a identity makes best sense of some rather important moral considerations, mentioned above. Fourthly, I do not rule out the fact that race is related to the notion of class, nor that ethnicity and class are related in important ways. However, given the aim of my analysis, it is quite possible to discuss ethnicity without referring to class, though a full-blown account of the former would no doubt include a discussion of the latter. In admitting this, however, it does not follow that ethnicity is somehow dependent on the notion of class. Fifthly, I assume that so long as we Latinos/as are the ones who are classifying ourselves, it is inconsequential whether we adopt the label “Latino/a” or “Hispanic” [or some other label(s)]. After all, Jorge J. E. Gracia has pointed out the problematic natures of “Latino” and “Hispanic” such that neither label enjoys a substantial amount of favor over the other, historically and etymologically speaking. Whichever category we adopt, should we adopt one or the other of these two, it is important that *we* adopt it as a people with a sense of pride and dignity.

It is helpful to note some of the desiderata of a theory of Latino/a identity. First, it is desirable that a theory of Latino/a identity recognize differences between aims of variant conceptions of Latino/a identity. Otherwise, confusion may result from the lack of this recognition. Most accounts of Latino/a identity end up being metaphysical ones, but ones which hardly end up providing useful guidelines for public policy. In fact, most philosophers writing on the topics of race

and racism seem to be rather skeptical about the idea of classifying folk into different ethnic groups. Yet such views imply that the employment of ethnic classification even for affirmative action aims is unjustified because it is arbitrary or capricious. I draw a distinction between positive and negative, metaphysical and ethical views of ethnicity. Positive analyses of ethnic group identity are those which hold that ethnic groups do exist while negative (say, skeptical or nominalist) accounts of ethnicity deny this. There are metaphysical positions which tend to focus on the issue of whether or not there are racial or ethnic “essences,” as well as ethical views about ethnicity which tend to place value judgments on the employment of ethnic (or “color”) categories for whatever reasons. I am an anti-realist concerning the metaphysics of race and ethnicity, though I am a realist concerning the ethics of ethnicity. I have argued against primitive race theories taken as metaphysical dogmas, though I believe certain moral and legal considerations behoove us to attempt to develop plausible conceptions of ethnicity. For racist harms of great magnitude ought not to preclude justice to groups against whom such racism is perpetrated. And if justice to members of certain ethnic groups is to be minimally arbitrary, it must be grounded in plausible conceptions of ethnicity.

Secondly, it is desirable that an analysis of Latino/a identity be able to distinguish Latino/a groups from other ethnic groups with as little ambiguity as possible. Whether or not this is desirable of a metaphysical account is unclear, but it is essential for an ethical one which attempts to provide a means of governments to enact public policy which targets ethnic groups. Thirdly, even though a theory of Latino/a identity ought to distinguish members of the Latino/a group from other ethnic groups, it is desirable that it do so while using the same basic conditions for Latino/a identity as obtain for other ethnic groups. In other words, the basic conditions of ethnic group membership ought to remain the same for all such groups, unless, of course, there is good reason to think otherwise. Fourthly, it is desirable that a theory of Latino/a identity distinguish between the question of the nature of Latinos/as and the moral evaluation of us. When this distinction is made, then there can be ethnic classification without racist classification and stereotyping. Fifthly, it is desirable that a theory of Latino/a identity not be politicized. For what makes me a Latino/a is not a matter of the political ideology to which I subscribe, whatever else it is or is not. Sixthly, it is desirable that a theory of Latino/a identity reflect an in-group perspective of the conditions which need to be satisfied for one to be a Latino/a. This desideratum guards against a government’s or an out-group member determining or controlling how a government wants to define us Latinos/as. If these six desiderata are satisfied in a theory of Latino/a identity, it will be unlikely that serious problems will accrue as a result of classifying us into ethnic groups for purposes of public policy administration.

In my previous writings on the problems of Latino/a and ethnic identity, I neglected to mention the possibility that Latino/a identity might entail some difference along gender lines. I simply assumed that what fundamentally makes someone a Latino/a was the same for both Latinos and Latinas. I maintain this position. However, I do want to recognize (in general terms) variant experiences between Latinos and Latinas, and along at least the following lines. One difference between Latinos and Latinas, on balance, is

that although we Latinos are more often than not disrespected intellectually (and in various other ways) in U.S. society by out-group members, Latinas not only face this problem, but confront in-group traditions which typically discourage in significant ways their intellectual growth and independence. This vitiates against Latinas' self-respect in ways that are deeper than what the typical Latino faces. It is one thing to face out-group disrespect; it is quite another to experience not only out-group disrespect, but discouragement from within one's own group and family. Moreover, instead of being born with privileges as Latinos carrying the family name, Latinas always bear the burden of parental fears of how they will turn out differently than the tradition, always having to prove themselves more than Latinos do. Whereas, then, Latinos are disrespected by out-group members, we enjoy a general in-group respect. But Latinas, on the other hand, experience disrespect by both out-group and in-group members. If it is true that we Latinos are disrespected in U.S. society, then it seems that Latinas are doubly so. For even in the Anglo world of feminism, Latinas are invisible or disrespected. This is not a novel point, as many writers have articulated Latina experiences along these and related lines in rather moving and impressive ways. As Ofelia Schutte argues, "As Latina women, we have to negotiate our identity constantly in the midst of a complex of stereotypes that include masculine-dominant expectations (both Hispanic and non-Hispanic) as to what woman should do with her body, in addition to undertaking another whole set of negotiations with respect to what a woman will do with her mind and how she will apply her intelligence." This underscores my point that whereas Latinos are disrespected by Anglo society, Latinas are disrespected also by Latinos, and perhaps for a complex array of socio-psychological reasons due to traditional Latino/a culture, *even by themselves*. For certain aspects of some Latino/a cultures discourage Latinas from even considering the sorts of leadership roles in society that are "reserved" for Latinos.

Having noted one important difference between Latinos and Latinas, it bears noting that this difference in experience between us seems not to amount to one which would justify our needing to provide distinct analyses for the natures of Latinos and Latinas, respectively. For to distinguish us in this fine-grained manner would seem to be as absurd as thinking that because there are differences between genders in each ethnic category (epistemically speaking), that for purposes of public policy such distinctions are helpful when it comes to various *ethnic* groups. It is not that public policy ought to be unconcerned with gender, but rather that the concern of this project is to analyze Latino/a identity. And in so doing, recognizing existential differences between Latinos and Latinas does not seem to suffice for distinct analyses of each category insofar as the analysis of Latino/a identity is concerned.

However, if the point of discussion concerns public policies such as affirmative action programs, it might well be important, even necessary, to make gender distinctions within ethnic groups such as Latinos/as. I have recently argued that based on a general notion of proportional compensation underlying affirmative action programs which are distinctly backward-looking in their primary justifications, it is important to award benefits of such programs differentially based on the amount of harm experienced by group members (say, in

U.S. society), past and present. On this construal, Native and African Americans would receive not only adequate reparations from the U.S. Government because of the evils experienced at its hands, but would also receive affirmative action differentially greater than any other groups in the U.S. Using this model of compensatory justice to ethnic groups, it would seem to follow that since Latinas on average experience significantly more obstacles to equal opportunity than do us Latinos, that Latinas ought to receive greater affirmative action benefits than us Latinos. If this is plausible, then it is rather important to note and respect the existential differences between Latinos and Latinas, for public policy purposes.

Thus while Latinas deserve greater compensatory benefits via backward-looking affirmative action benefits due to their experiencing greater racist harms at the hands of the U.S. Government and its citizenry, it does not seem to follow that this difference in experience amounts to a difference in what makes one a Latino/a, even for purposes of public policy administration. This assumes, of course, the existence of groups, group harms, group desert, and group compensation.

As I have argued consistently over the past few years in a number of articles, genealogy is the necessary and sufficient condition of public policy-oriented ethnic identity in general, and of Latino/a identity in particular. Although there are other qualities which individually or collectively might well count toward the enhancement of Latino/a identity, it is genealogy which makes one a member of this or that Latino group. That Latino/a identity ought to be indexed to or grounded in a particular aim or purpose is consistent with the claim that ethnic categories are socially constructed. And as Linda Alcoff points out, "To say that an identity is socially constructed is to say not that it does not refer to anything in reality, but that what it refers to is a contingent product of social negotiations rather than a natural kind." But one question here is whether or not, for purposes of public policy administration, such identities are total social constructions.

My genealogically-based, public policy-oriented analysis of the nature of ethnic and Latino/a identity attempts to answer the charge that "There is no internally consistent or coherent theory of ethnic or racial identity underlying the diversity of categorizations." One challenge to analytic philosophy is that it attempt to provide precisely such an analysis. And it would seem premature to rule out our being capable of meeting the analytic challenge until and unless we have devoted sufficient time and effort in developing such analyses, and criticizing them. For as with other areas of philosophy, the opportunities for conceptual progress are sufficiently probable to justify a cynical skepticism along these lines. In other words, the rewards of attempting philosophical analysis here are too great for us to rule out *a priori* the possibility of conceptual progress. Given the importance of ethnic categories in our daily lives, the stakes are simply too high for intellectual cynicism to reign. This is precisely why I adopt, not uncritically, an optimistic stance regarding the use of analytical philosophy in our attempt to wrestle with the problems of ethnic and Latino/a identities.

What, then, is my analysis of the nature of Latino/a identity? Again, the analysis concerns fundamentally public policy classification of us into the cluster of ethnic groups comprising "Latino." As with the Diné (otherwise known as the Navajo) of Window Rock, Arizona, the Maori of New

Zealand, and various other indigenous peoples dealing with their respective colonial governments, genealogy is the basis of consideration. I argue that for public policy administration considerations, genealogy ought to be construed as both a necessary and sufficient condition of award or benefit. Aside from public policy considerations, however, factors which would go toward making one more or less a Latino/a may include, for instance, the degree to which one: knows and respects a Latino/a language or dialect thereof; possesses and respects a traditional Latino/a name; engages in and respects Latino/a culture or parts thereof; accepts and respects himself or herself as a Latino/a; is accepted and respected as a Latino/a by other Latinos/as; and is construed as a Latino/a by out-group members. Like the genealogical condition, each of these conditions admits of degree. Yet while the genealogical condition is both necessary and sufficient for Latino/ahood, neither of the other conditions is either necessary or sufficient to make one a Latino/a, i.e., for one to be properly classified as a Latino/a.

Given the fact that there are several paradigmatic cases of Latinos/as who know no Spanish or Spanish-related language or dialect, such as the rock and roll legend Richie Valens, knowledge of a traditional Latino/a language or dialect is not a necessary condition of Latino/a identity. But even if it were thought that such a statement betrays a kind of question-begging on my part, the following example is enough to defeat any claim of the kind that would suggest the necessity of a command of a Latino/a language or dialect thereof. Consider the case of Cuban President Fidel Castro, who stands for millions as a paradigmatic instance of Latinohood. Suppose that Castro suffers an unfortunate accident leaving him unable to speak or even understand Spanish. Would he then no longer be the Latino he most assuredly is at present? To suggest an affirmative reply to this query runs counter to our intuitions about what makes one a member of a Latino/a group. It would also imply that a Latino/a who by way of old age becomes less able to speak or understand a Latino language or dialect thereof becomes less and less a Latino/a, which is strikingly absurd.

But neither is command of a Latino/a language or dialect thereof a sufficient condition of Latino/ahood. For as we all know, various and sundry Anglos/as have learned, mastered, respect and even teach Latino/a languages—even to many of us Latinos/as! Yet this hardly makes those Anglos/as Latinos/as, ethnically speaking.

Just as knowledge and respect of a Latino/a language or dialect thereof is neither necessary nor sufficient for Latino/a identity, neither is the possession and respect of one's traditional Latino/a name. For the cases of Latinas in traditional marital contexts assuming the names of their husbands hardly makes them no longer Latinas, just as an Angla's marrying a Latino and taking on his surname hardly makes her a Latina.

What about participation in and respect for Latino/a culture? Does a degree of this condition being satisfied count as being necessary or sufficient for Latino/a identity? The answer here is similar to the answers provided concerning traditional Latino/a names. Just as there are instances of paradigmatic Latinos/as who have been acculturated into U.S. (*mestizae* are examples), there are cases of Anglos/as who participate in and respect various elements of Latino/a culture, yet are hardly Latinos/as. Thus participation in and

respect for Latino/a culture or some elements thereof is neither necessary nor sufficient for Latino/a identity.

Is self-identification as a Latino/a either a necessary or sufficient condition of Latino/a identity? The fact that there is, sadly enough, ethnic self-hatred and denial of the sort wherein folk often simply either do not realize that they are a member of a Latino group or simply deny that such is the case shows that we are not necessary indicators of our own ethnicities. Since one can be a Latino/a without knowing or admitting it, self-identification as a Latino/a cannot be a necessary condition of Latino/ahood. But neither is it sufficient. For if it were, then I could simply affirm that I am, say, an African American and this would make me one. This is, by the way, one of the challenges facing theories of race and ethnicity which hold that they are total social constructions. At least for purposes of public policy administration, this cannot be the case, as it would be impossible to verify ethnicity. This is precisely one reason why I anchor ethnicity in genealogical considerations. As problematic as self-reporting of genealogical data is, it is better than having no working categories of ethnicity for such purposes.

Is Latino in-group acceptance of and respect for a person either necessary or sufficient for Latino/a identity? Of course, there are politically-motivated Chicanos many of whom believe that unless one is similarly situated, then they are simply not Latinos. A similar view is held by some African Americans who for political reasons deny the African American status of U. S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Not only is this position morally odious as it is obnoxiously arrogant, but it assumes without argument that certain folk with political agendas are the gatekeepers of ethnicity! Surely this view is a *non-sequitur* when it comes to public policy administration, as it would mean that those millions of folk who are “unenlightened” and do not accept the politicized views of the gatekeepers of ethnicity would not be categorized as, say, Latinos/as and would then not qualify for certain benefits. Furthermore, the fact that Latinos/as might be incorrect or deceived about the status of a person's Latino/ahood implies that in-group identification of and respect for one as a Latino is not enough to make one a Latino/a.

The fact that out-group members can and often do misidentify (often in racist ways) members of others groups means that out-group identification of one as a Latino is not necessary for Latino/a identity. But the fact that the U.S. Government decided to disrespect us Latinos/as by naming us “Hispanics” without even asking us, thereby in a sense categorizing (or *miscategorizing*) us suggests that out-group identification of folk as members of this or that ethnic group is not enough for ethnic identity, in particular, of Latino/a identity.

Thus we can see that only genealogical considerations count as being necessary and sufficient for Latino identity when it comes to public policy matters. Otherwise, it would simply become far too difficult for governments, even well-intentioned ones, to administer public policy to us Latinos/as and other more or less deserving ethnic groups. And we need to understand that each of the conditions discussed admits of degrees, and the degree to which one is a member of a Latino/a group is the extent to which one deserves a benefit. This point is based on a simple matter of proportional

compensation for harms experienced (or harms experienced by one's forebears, etc.). This assumes the plausibility of the notion of group-based harm, which would serve as at least part of the justification for ethnicity-oriented public policies.

Now that my analysis of the nature of Latino/a identity is sketched, I can begin to consider and reply to various concerns faced by it prior to answering García's concerns. Although Schutte argues that "...it is in the best interest of Hispanics to retain our ethnic/cultural identifications and insist on some form of political representation based on group classifications," she cautions that

The classification of individuals into groups for purposes of social policy control is subject to a number of significant objections, including the fact that group identifications are vulnerable to manipulation, are subject to easy stereotyping, and in fact can do violence to individuals who differ substantially from the mainstream members of their groups. A different kind of objection with which I sympathize is that if one classifies people according to their membership in groups, in a racist society this will result in dividing people racially.

As insightful as her cautions are, I believe that there are plausible replies to Schutte's points. Although it is unclear as to exactly what sorts of manipulation, according to Schutte, to which we might be vulnerable in public policy contexts, it is possible that political powers might well use ethnic crime statistics, for instance, in rather selective ways to support or enact legislation which might not be in the interests of all citizens equally. Such selectivity might well lead to the passage of laws which would eventuate in the persecution of certain ethnic groups, thereby creating an unfair advantage for others. Nonetheless, this is not the fault of ethnic classification *per se*, but of certain of those in power who misuse the classifications. To blame ethnic classification itself for its misuse is akin to blaming gender classification for the wrongful treatment of women. Such classifications exist, plain and simple. That they exist is a value neutral fact about our cognitive selves. It is what is done with such classifications that is either good or bad, just or unjust. So that ethnic classification might well lead some to manipulate ethnic statistics is an insufficient reason to not classify ourselves according to ethnicity.

What might be said concerning the problem of stereotyping due to ethnic classification? This difficulty is not faced by my analysis of Latino/a identity, as my analysis insists that it is a matter of genealogy, not skin color, or other morphological features, that makes one a member of ethnic group/s. If my analysis were used in public policy administration, as it is in some contexts concerning indigenous peoples, then the diversity within each ethnic group would tend to vitiate against stereotyping. Either one is a member of this/that ethnic group/s or one is not, genealogically speaking. Once this is understood in public policy contexts, then the diversity within most ethnic groups will eventually minimize stereotyping of the type that concerns Schutte (and the rest of us).

But violence might be done to those who, being recognized as members of ethnic group/s, do not fit the mainstream image of what members of the group/s ought to look like, or how they ought to behave, etc. This is certainly a

legitimate concern, like the others. However, my analysis of Latino/a identity is motivated in part by a deploring of the sort of politicization or otherwise ostracizing of in-group members. For what makes one a member of ethnic group/s has nothing whatsoever to do with class, politics, religion or other such ideologically-based factors, thereby minimizing the extent to which ethnic stereotyping might obtain in public policy administration.

In short, the fact that ethnic classification might be used by many for injustice is not a good enough reason to prevent genealogy from forming the foundation of ethnic classification. For it is precisely such classification which can and should enable a society to use genealogy to award justice to deserving groups. Even if it were true that such concerns will indeed occur because of ethnic classification, I argue that these are risks that are worth taking. After all, we have experienced just these kinds of problems, yet without sufficient justice based on adequate models of ethnic classification.

This leads to Schutte's own concern with ethnic classification, namely, that in racist societies (I take it that this includes all societies, more or less), folk will be divided along ethnic or racial lines. In response to this concern, it might be argued that "divided" is ambiguous. If it means that folk will simply be classified into different groups (a kind of division), then such division seems innocuous. But Schutte would appear to have something else in mind here. Perhaps she has in mind ethnic groups being divided for adverse purposes, such as discriminatory racism. And such racism might lead some societies to a kind of apartheid or segregationist system. While such systems are typically unjust against the more powerless in society, segregation is not necessarily a bad thing. In many instances, ethnic groups which are oppressed (or have been oppressed) have no desire to integrate with the powers that oppressed them. Nor should they. Thus ethnic classification which leads to racial divisions is not necessarily a bad thing, though it might be in some cases.

Turning, alas, to García's probing discussion of my early work on Latino/a identity, it is essential that there be some clarification concerning my use of the term "identity" in this discussion. The reasoning behind my use of the phrase, "Latino/a identity" when referring to the problem of how to classify us Latinos/as is as follows. I take it that questions of identity are those which concern who or what makes me who I am as a person. Since ethnicity is part of what it means to be a person, then my ethnicity is part of what it means for me to be who I am. My ethnic identity is part of my overall identity. Thus my identity as a Latino/a is part of my overall identity since it is part of my ethnic identity. "Latino/a identity" refers to that cluster of questions concerning who I am *as a Latino/a*: What does it mean to say that I am a Latino/a? What makes me a Latino/a? What are the conditions of Latino/a-hood? and other related questions. I have focused my attention primarily on the conditions of the nature of Latino/a-hood. For it is this set of conditions which, hopefully, provides policy-makers a means by which to adequately classify us as Latinos/as.

García raises some rather important concerns with my analysis, some of which cause me to clarify it in the following manner. I am a Latino/a to the extent that I am genealogically tied to a Latino/a group, ethnically speaking. But my genealogical tie to a Latino/a group is a matter of degree. For

given my family tree, I might be one percentage or another Latino/a. As I argued previously and repeatedly, my genealogical tie to a Latino/a group is both necessary and sufficient for my Latino/a identity. The point at which I am not a Latino/a for purposes of public policy administration is an open question, and I see no unproblematic or non-arbitrary way by which to decide this matter. Nonetheless, a percentage can and should be adopted for reasons of justice. That the decision as to how much of a genealogical tie to a Latino/a group one must have in order to be a Latino/a fraught with problems of arbitrariness is not sufficient reason to refuse to decide whatever minimal percentage of Latino/ness I need to qualify for affirmative action programs. Thus far my analysis remains unchanged from the way I have stated it previously.

But whereas previously I stated that the degree to which one is a Latino/a is the degree to which the other six conditions are satisfied in his or her case, I would now clarify that these secondary conditions are not applicable in public policy contexts, as they lend themselves to the same kinds of problems I noted which make them neither necessary nor sufficient conditions of Latino/hood. Indeed, they would tend to fall prey to manipulation, stereotyping, and such, the very concerns Schutte has when ethnic classifications are used in public policy contexts.

However, the six conditions other than genealogy may be construed as conditions of Latino/hood apart from public policy administration. Each may serve as an “enhancing condition” of Latino/a identity, one which is neither necessary nor sufficient for Latino/a identity, but one which, to the extent that it obtains in a given case, serves as a secondary indicator of ones being a Latino/a. Although these enhancing conditions ought not to be used to define Latino/a identity in public policy contexts, they may in some significant measure signify ones devotion (or lack thereof) to some Latino/a cultural traditions, for instance. I *am* a Latino/a based solely on genealogical considerations, yet my respect for, enjoyment of, and identification with certain aspects of Latino/a music, art, dance, food, language, etc., further identifies me as a Latino/a, so long as I am a Latino/a in the requisite genealogical sense. Thus my identification with and participation in various aspects of Latino/a culture “testifies” to my being a Latino/a on the condition of my being a Latino in the genealogical sense. This is the sense in which I mean to use the six conditions as enhancing ones: although they do not in any way effect my being a Latino/a, they do signify the extent to which I identify as such given the fact of my Latino/a genealogy.

Even with this clarification of my position, García is unlikely to be convinced that these six conditions enhance my being a Latino/a in the genealogical sense. But perhaps an analogy is helpful here, however imperfect analogical arguments are. What is needed here is a reasonably good analogy which would support my distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions of Latino/a identity, on the one hand, and “enhancing conditions,” on the other. Consider the institution of marriage. In many U.S. jurisdictions, what makes a couple married is precisely that a certain legal authority (justice of the peace, a licensed cleric, etc.), along with the couple to be married and some witnesses, sign the marriage certificate. Of course, this legality does nothing whatsoever to demonstrate the extent to which a couple is devoted to one another and to the marriage. For legal

purposes, however, it is the signing of the marriage certificate by the appropriate parties which makes them married, though it is the way each spouse treats the other, their participation in their culture of marriage (typically, including monogamy), etc. which demonstrates how devoted each of them is to the other in marriage. Similarly, what makes me a Latino/a for legal or public policy purposes is genealogical, though what *shows* how much of a Latino/a I am (aside from public policy) will be my degree of dedication to at least some aspects of Latino/a culture, relevant languages or dialects thereof, etc.

Furthermore, as I have stated previously, ethnicity is a matter of complexity and degree. It is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that there is “purity” of ethnicity just as there is no such thing as a “pure race.” If this is true, then various possibilities emerge. One is that I might well be a member of more than one Latino/a group, ethnically speaking. Another is that I might be a member of more than one ethnic group (Latino/a and, say, African American). Yet another possibility is that I might be a member of more than one Latino/a group and, say, an Anglo of some sort, etc. With this sort of ethnic complexity, it is important that minimal genealogical qualifications be drawn (admittedly, somewhat arbitrarily) in order to enact and implement public policy targeting certain ethnic groups. I see no way to escape some degree of arbitrariness here, though percentages of 1/8 and 1/4 have been used by some governments in dealing with justice toward ethnic groups harmed by them. Perhaps these figures might prove useful for affirmative action purposes, so long as it is understood that the blood quantum is determined solely by genealogical considerations.

Given this degree of complexity concerning ethnic identity in general and Latino/a identity in particular, it makes good sense to think, though my being a Latino/a is a matter of degree only in the sense that I am this or that much Latino, genealogically speaking and in regard to public policy matters, my Latino/ness might well wax and wane beyond public policy matters given how much I participate in, respect and identify with, say, Latino/a culture. I see no problem with this concept of waxing and waning ethnicity so long as what it mean is that it is ones’ identification with Latino/a culture, for instance, that waxes and wanes, just as in a marriage it is not the fact of the marriage that waxes and wanes (until the point of divorce, of course), but the devotion each partner has for the other that sometimes waxes and wanes.

These answers are meant to address García’s concerns about what he terms the “commensurability problem” with my analysis of Latino/a identity. My clarifications seem to evade the difficulties he notes, though I should point out that the problems he notes seem to face any positive account of ethnic identity. Nonetheless, I believe that it is important for me to defend my analysis against important concerns.

It is not, then, that my analysis of Latino/a identity is one which seeks to define Latinos/as across cultures and times. It is that, however we Latinos/as define ourselves, public policy must base its understanding of what makes us who we are on genealogical considerations. Beyond that, enhancing conditions, when they obtain, may tell us the extent to which one is a Latino/a in some traditional or mainstream sense. But we need to be ever mindful of the fact that this schema for identifying Latinos/as is neither intended to be nor is unproblematic in that it can be used to ostracize those who do not fit the mainstream of what is

Latino/a. Being mindful of this important fact, however, is a step in the right direction in ethnic relations.

Yet another concern with my analysis as it was initially articulated is that it indexed the genealogical condition to geography as it defined “Latino/a” as one whose genealogy connected to the Iberian Peninsula. I believe that this is a mistake, whether or not the question is one of what makes one a Latino/a for purposes of public policy. For ethnic groups have mingled throughout the world in such complicated ways that it is overly simplistic to hold that any such group includes only those whose genealogical ties trace to a particular region. That would be as problematic to assume with regard to Latinos/as as it would to most, if not all, other ethnic groups. Thus I no longer link the genealogical condition to some geographical one.

Nonetheless, it might be objected that for all I write about Latino/a identity, I never provide a definition of “Latino/a.” Hence my use of such terms as “Latino/a identity,” “Latino/a culture,” “Latino/a names,” etc. are problematic as they are undefined. This circularity objection has been raised previously, aimed at analyses that purport to provide a realist conception of Latino/a identity. Of course, the circularity problem faces every positive analysis of Latino/a identity, and so it is not a unique problem for my analysis. Still, it is important to address this conceptual difficulty.

In reply to the circularity objection, it should be noted that, if William P. Alston is correct, circularity *per se* is not so much the problem, as there are, he argues, virtuous circles in philosophical analysis and argumentation. Moreover, some contradictions are such that it is even rational to believe them. And if it is true that at some point and in some way each analysis of Latino/a identity falls prey to the circularity objection, then it would seem that the more virtuously circular ones would be those which provide the best account of what common sense would tell us about Latino/a identity. Epistemologically speaking, this might well entail a coherentist/reliabilist account wherein the most explanatorily powerful account wins out over others, all things considered. I submit that my analysis of Latino/a identity is superior to competitors because it not only recognizes the fact that ethnic identities are products of social construction, metaphysically speaking, but it provides better than any competing analysis or theory an account of Latino/a identity which is useful for positive purposes by governments. Moreover, there is empirical evidence over generations that genealogically-based accounts such as mine are indeed successful in providing government benefits to certain ethnic groups. So whether the issue is public policy in the form of affirmative action or reparations, or public policy regarding the rights of ethnic groups, my analysis goes a long way toward providing a philosophical account of who and what we are for the purpose of improving the lots of increasing numbers of Latinos/as in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world.

For those who would still raise the circularity problem for my analysis, I would remind them that one of the desiderata of a theory of ethnic or Latino/a identity is that it recognize the distinction between metaphysical and ethical accounts of Latino/a identity. So whereas I acknowledge the problematic nature of metaphysical views to define adequately “Latino/a,” orienting my analysis to public policy considerations just means that I have delimited the range of definitions of “Latino/a” to genealogical matters. This is hardly

question-begging. Rather, it simply recognizes that given a certain purpose for the analysis, it makes best sense to ground the analysis in genealogical considerations.

In sum, my analysis of Latino/a identity (or classification) is multi-tiered, respecting the distinction between metaphysical and ethical issues pertaining to the nature of us Latinos/as. The conditions defining the nature of Latinos/as for public policy or ethical concerns are not the same as those which might define us metaphysically. Indeed, there is good reason to be metaphysical skeptics about Latino/a identity, especially because of the regress problem of the origins of us Latinos/as (also known as the circularity objection), a difficulty facing the classification of every ethnic group, as well as other previously-noted difficulties. However, leftists who favor affirmative action programs, for instance, face the problem of how to classify non-arbitrarily us Latinos/as (as well as other targeted ethnic groups) in order to fairly distribute affirmative action benefits. For this purpose, I proffer and defend a genealogical analysis of Latino/a (and ethnic) identity:

*For purposes of public policy, one is a Latino/a to the extent that s/he has a Latino genealogical tie, and to the extent that her/his genealogical tie is equal to or dominant over her/his genealogical ties to other ethnic groups.*

This analysis has the benefit of prohibiting non-Latinos/as from qualifying for policies aimed at us Latinos/as unless they are predominantly Latinos/as, genealogically speaking, relative to the other ethnic groups to which one belongs. For it is genealogy which, however hard to ascertain in many cases, stands as the most objective means of classifying persons ethnically. In order for this analysis to be utilized positively by governments, governments must begin to keep good genealogical records of ethnicity, perhaps working with duly elected and well-respected representatives of each ethnic group. This assumes, of course, a government that supports a society not unlike John Rawls’ pluralistic society (which includes ethnic pluralism represented in its democratic structure). For this would better ensure that records of ethnicity would not be misused.

My conception of Latino/a identity serves more than any other philosophical conception of who and what we are as Latinos/as to assist governments in enacting and administering public policies aimed at Latinos/as, without leading us to the despairing rubble of metaphysically-based skeptical views which fail to see the implications of their views for public policy. That ethnic categorization has in the past and continues to be morally problematic is not a good enough reason for us to define who and what we are so that the government can use our classification of us for public policy administration. Perhaps metaphysics leads to a justifiably skeptical or nominalistic view of the nature of ethnic identity. However, if affirmative action policies are in some measure morally justified, then it behooves us to develop an analysis of Latino/a identity which is useful in legal contexts, and for positive (not negative) aims. I sincerely and respectfully hope that my analysis achieves this goal in some meaningful way. And I am grateful to Professor García for asking a series of probing queries that have begun to test what appears to be the most plausible public policy-oriented analysis of who and what we are. I suspect that the discussion will continue, and that it should until even greater clarity and plausibility is

attained. In the end, should this discussion continue its course, it will be we Latinos/as who define ourselves. And if that alone is achieved and we end up in a quandary of skepticism or even nominalism with regard to Latino/a identity and public policy, that would be an improvement over the current situation wherein we are defined by others (and the U.S. Government) and for not altogether positive purposes.

## ***Caliban as Philosopher: An Interview with Paget Henry***

**Linda Martín Alcoff**  
*Syracuse University*

### **Editor's Introduction:**

The following is the first installment of a series of interviews this newsletter will be publishing with innovative theorists working in areas related to Latino/Latin American philosophy and Latino studies. Martín Alcoff has done three interviews, the first with Professor Paget Henry, which appears here, and also with Professor Juan Flores from CUNY and Professor Lewis Gordon from Brown which will appear in future issues. We hope these interviews will help those interested in the development of Latino philosophy to learn from social theorists who have been grappling with the relationship of philosophy to cultural location for some time. We also want to make connections between Latino thought, Caribbean thought, and Africana thought, to explore the connections that already exist as well as to bring them into more explicit dialogue.



We welcome feedback on these interviews as well as suggestions and proposals.

### **Introduction:**

Professor of Sociology at Brown University, and author of the recent book, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (Routledge 2000), Paget Henry is one of our most innovative and interesting social theorists writing today. His work over the last twenty-five years has focused principally on the interpretive studies of C.L.R. James and other major Caribbean thinkers, along with development theory from the perspective of the Caribbean, covering such topics as structural adjustment and NAFTA.

In recent years, Henry has dedicated himself to a new project, to bring forth and develop critical reconstructions of the original philosophies of the Caribbean, to show their important relationship to African thought as well as to European thought, and to explore their contributions to a liberatory philosophy that speaks to today's complex world. Thus he titles his book *Caliban's Reason*, invoking the idea of the slave who talks back, and who has his, or her, own ideas, concepts, and philosophical problematics.

*Caliban's Reason* offers a new conceptualization of the rich traditions of thought in the English speaking Caribbean, bringing forth philosophical ideas from poets, writers, and literary critics as well as social theorists, and categorizing them

into two broad camps—the historicist and the poetist—which he defines in the interview below. The book offers excellent overviews as well as insightful critiques of the work of C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, Wilson Harris, Sylvia Wynter, and others, and brings them into dialogue with the critical theory tradition of Habermas and the burgeoning Afro-American philosophy being written in the United States. In future work, Henry plans to explore the Asian Indian thought which is such a major part of the West Indies today, the intellectual work of Caribbean women to a greater extent than he was able to do in *Caliban's Reason*, and the relationship between the liberatory philosophies of the English Caribbean and the Spanish Caribbean as well as Latin America.

In the following interview Henry talks about, among other things, how he understands the relationship between philosophy and culture as well as between sociological, historical, and philosophical approaches to ideas, about coming to New York from Antigua to go to college, about taking courses from Hannah Arendt, about postmodernism's relationship to anti-colonial philosophy, and about the need to have more south-south conversations in the development of new philosophical work.

### **Interview with Paget Henry, May 2001**

**LMA:** Latino readers will have an interest in your book, *Caliban's Reason*, first and foremost because of the overlap between Latin American and Caribbean societies, but also because of your subtitle, *Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, which identifies a philosophy by its cultural location. This is an issue for us as well, because, in thinking about how to have a foothold in north American philosophy, this is not the usual way Anglo Americans think about philosophy. So I want to begin by asking how you understand the relationship between philosophy and culture? Can philosophies transcend the cultures which gave them birth?

**PH:** Well, two things. I think that philosophy has two capabilities that make possible the transcending of its cultural context, neither one of which is perfect. These two possibilities rest with the logical and the phenomenological capabilities of philosophical discourses.

To me, the logical gives philosophy a deductive/inductive mode of conceptually abstracting from specific cultural contexts. In contrast, the phenomenological gives it a self-reflexive capability in the negating and transcending of specific cultural contexts; just think of Hegel's definition of the "I" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that capacity to negate one's surroundings and to define oneself in terms of that capacity to negate, right? That's the phenomenological moment that gives philosophy this ability to rise above specific cultural contexts.

So we have a logical and a self-reflexive capacity, but the philosopher, before he or she comes to maturity, is formed in a specific culture. He or she has to learn a specific language and is shaped by that language, you see, so that the capacity to be formed culturally and the capacity to transcend go together. Neither one is an absolute in my view. I see them as parts of a dialectic that go together. If we absolutize either one of these capabilities it leads to trouble. In the case of the logical, it leads to a form of logicism that is formalistic and ultimately quite shallow. In the case of the phenomenological capability, as we can see so well in the case of Husserl, it can lead to a form of a priorism that can also become quite

formalistic. So while it's possible to transcend cultural contexts through these two registers, I think we have to recognize at the same time that they are finite, limited, and that they are part of a dialectic in which cultural specificity is very much a player. These can never really give philosophy the ability to completely cut its ties with the culturally specific.

**LMA:** Why did you write *Caliban's Reason*?

**PH:** Well, two things. As I pointed out in the dedication, we have had this very outstanding journalist and activist, Tim Hector, in Antigua, a very eloquent writer, and one of his most piercing questions would always be, where is our philosophy? And he would ask it in a way that you got a feeling that he knew it was there, somewhere, but he couldn't find it, you know; he never made the argument that we didn't have one, but at the same time he couldn't quite put his finger on it. I always had the feeling that he was right, and I always had the feeling that I knew where it was! Then, when I found myself in a position where I wasn't able to be involved in on-the-ground developmental work as a sociologist after the rise of neo-liberalism as the dominant ideology in the Caribbean, and so I found myself out of the loop in terms of advising governments and that sort of stuff—I was a sociologist of development without a praxis. But for me this was the perfect opportunity to reflect on what I had been doing and why my praxis was all of a sudden non-viable, suspended. So this just became the opportunity to explore these philosophical questions. I usually spend my summers in Antigua, so there I was talking to Tim and there he was asking these questions, so all of that came together.

**LMA:** But you've had an interest in philosophy for a long time. You're a sociologist by discipline but your work belongs in the broad category of social theory. Could you talk a little about your educational background and different things that led you to study philosophy and social theory? And I also want to ask you about the distinction between philosophy and the sociology of knowledge, as well as the distinction between the history of ideas and philosophy. Those are two very sharp distinctions that philosophers like to make, but in your book you're crossing those boundaries all the time because you are providing so many insights about sociology of knowledge, but also giving history of ideas, and you're also giving critical evaluation of those ideas all along the way.

**PH:** I've always taken quite seriously that statement by Merleau-Ponty, that the sociologist philosophizes every time he's required not only to record facts but to comprehend them. And I've always added to that that the philosopher sociologizes whenever he or she is required not only to deduce conclusions but to comprehend that act of discursive production.

That reciprocity between doing philosophy and doing sociology has always been visible to me from day one. I was always conscious of the philosophical element in my sociological work. There are always difficult methodological choices to be made as a sociologist and there's no way that you are going to make these choices without the aid of philosophy. There are different conceptions of social science practices: what is the nature of the social sciences is a longstanding debate, and in this philosophers have had a lot to say. And this takes you right into epistemology and the nature of social science knowledge. I always enjoyed these discussions, and I really turned to philosophers to help me in making some of my crucial sociological choices. So, the

intertextual conception of philosophy that I develop in the book arose directly out of my sociological practice. I've never seen sociology as a separate autonomous discipline. Sociology is not; it depends on statistics, it depends on philosophy, it depends on psychology. You cannot separate sociology from its neighboring disciplines, right? And I could flip over this intertextual conception of sociology and look at the way in which philosophy draws on and can be supplemented by sociological work. And to me Marx really exemplifies this—how he brings the two together in a very, very powerful way, supplementing one another. So that's the way I've always seen the relationship between sociology and philosophy. And so it was very easy for me to link the two as I was writing the book.

**LMA:** But sociology has changed a lot as a discipline from the 60's when you were a student, hasn't it? At that time the link was more explicit and accepted and now sociology has become much more quantitative and empirical.

**PH:** No, there have always been three distinct approaches to sociology: quantitative, historical, and interpretative or hermeneutic. These three have always been there and they compete for dominance; depending upon who the leading scholars are at the moment and which schools they fall into determines how visible these three different approaches are. So if we are in a period where we have an Alfred Schutz, or somebody like that, then the hermeneutic side of the discipline is very visible, and lots of graduate students get trained in it and so forth. But if you don't have a figure of that stature then it tends to become invisible. However, you are right in the sense that institutional and financial support is greatest for the quantitative aspect. There's this feeling that sociology should be scientific, that it should look like a science, like the natural sciences, but this has never been the whole story in sociology. I've always been in the historical school, always considered myself a historical sociologist.

**LMA:** Let me get in a biographical question here: could you tell us about how you came from Antigua to Professor of Sociology at Brown?

**PH:** Basically I graduated from high school in Antigua. I was age 14 and my parents didn't know what to do with me; I was too young to go to the University of the West Indies, and of course nobody wanted to send me off to the wilds of America at the age of 14. So actually I stayed in school another year, did courses in physics and chemistry, all on my own, because we did not have science teachers. The situation with teachers was very bad, and I wanted to do natural sciences but couldn't. I had this extra year, so I studied on my own.

Now the school system in Antigua is modeled on the British system so in high school you do two sets of exams: the O levels, which is the equivalent of high school in the U.S., and then you stay on for an additional two years and you do what's called the A levels. So at age 15, I did additional O levels and later my A levels in the natural sciences, physics, chemistry, and mathematics. I became really enthused with the natural sciences, but when I applied to the University of the West Indies, which at that time was very small, I got put on the waiting list. I was very frustrated, I wanted to get on with my studies so I applied to universities in the U.S. City College in New York was the first to accept me. From there I went to Cornell for graduate work and got my first job at SUNY, Stony Brook. I taught at the University of Virginia for two years, and now I am here at Brown.

**LMA:** And City College was a good place for you?

**PH:** Oh sure, I loved New York. As a matter of fact I only applied to universities in New York because as far as I was concerned the U.S. was New York at that time. A little kid in Antigua, what did I know about Iowa and California, I knew nothing about them. All I knew was New York so I applied to NYU, Columbia, City, that was it.

**LMA:** And you moved to Harlem?

**PH:** Yes, I moved to Harlem and actually moving to the U. S. is what got me out of the natural sciences, you know. For me, the natural sciences, physics in particular, was a dialogue with nature. When I came to the U.S., that changed dramatically. I developed this interest in sociology, and several things were responsible for that. First, the shock of living in a large industrial society. I had to find out what that was all about because it was so different from Antigua. And then the shock of living in a racist society. I thought Antigua was bad but America was a shock, a real shock. You really felt the racism much sharper. The degradation of blackness, of black identity, of what it meant to be black was much greater here. I felt it to the point where I had to do something. I never felt the corresponding need to deal with racism in Caribbean society the way it became a pressing issue, a moral issue, a political issue, here in the States. So much so that doing physics and carrying on this conversation with nature seemed like a luxury I couldn't afford. That was the second big factor in explaining why I gave up physics and turned to sociology.

The third factor was, at least at City College—I don't know about other places—the technologization and commodification of physics which was awful. I felt as though I was being prepared for a job at GM in so many of the physics classes. Professors would be explaining a principle, and there was always a reference to something that Ford or GM was doing. I was not at all excited about doing all this technological stuff for corporations and began to lose interest in physics because of its industrial orientation. It was physics being converted into technology and that for me was not a particularly exciting intellectual challenge. And finally meeting Erich Fromm and reading his book *The Sane Society* also was very instrumental in my shift from physics to sociology.

**LMA:** Tell us about that meeting with Erich Fromm.

**PH:** Well it was during the 60's. It was right at the peak of the student takeover at Columbia in 1968, at the height of the student movement, the height of the civil rights movement. American society was wonderfully politicized, with all these political mobilizations taking place. There was just so much to be involved in. And so there was the takeover of Columbia University in 1968 by Students for a Democratic Society. Mark Rudd was the head of Columbia SDS and they wanted solidarity and support from other students at other universities and so we organized a massive contingent of students at City College, and we marched from 137th and Broadway, right down to 116th and Broadway. And of course we had lots and lots of speakers, and the chief speaker at the rally was Erich Fromm.

**LMA:** I can't imagine him as a rally speaker.

**PH:** No! But he certainly rose to the occasion and many of us knew that he would because he had done this little thing called the *Socialist Manifesto*. And I read it, picked it up quite by accident. So he gave a great talk at the rally and later on we brought him to City College to speak at the City College

Forum. And I had the pleasure of picking him up at the airport and driving him in and so I had this chance to really talk to him. He began telling me all about the Frankfurt School, and all the players in it and some of his exchanges with Marcuse and some of the differences between them and so forth. He also spoke of what sociology meant to him, and of course what he thought were the problems of modern industrial society. So it was really around this question about the nature of modern industrial society that our conversation was most engaging for me, and that really helped to push me in the direction of sociology. And yes, I was quite impressed.

**LMA:** I know that you had many incredible experiences in those years: tell us the Hannah Arendt story.

**PH:** One of the great things about going to school in New York is that you have all of these great universities not far from one another, and in those days classes were open and lots of us students in sociology used to go down to Columbia and sit in on Robert Merton's lectures. I mean that was just the thing to do, so even though we were not students at Columbia, we'd go down and listen to Robert Merton lecture. For me, the other person's classes that I always looked forward to sitting in on were Hannah Arendt's. She was just such an amazing lecturer, and so I would always go whenever I could. So one day she was talking about her book *On Revolution*. Actually it had been assigned and I had read it in preparation for the class. I was just very engaged by her reading of Melville in that book because, being a student of C.L.R. James and having read *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, which was James' study of Melville, it was striking to me that hers was sort of an exact opposite reading. James reads Melville and he looks at the Pequod, the ship in *Moby Dick*, and he sees the microcosm of American society, the fact that you have all of these racial types on board the boat, various classes, and everything. He sees all of the contradictions of the modern individual who is obsessed with power, control, and domination, and who has to know how to manage bureaucratic structures and bureaucratic organization. So for him all of the major themes of modern life are there on the Pequod.

And what strikes James more than anything else is the tragic figure of Ahab in contrast to the humanity and the spontaneous creativity of the workers. Even though they don't rise up and take control, as he thinks they will do one day, still, we don't see in them the human destruction or the depths of neurosis and decay that we see in Ahab. So for James this is why the future belongs to the crew on the Pequod, the workers—it's a very Marxist, radical reading of Melville, sensing very clearly the rise of a new class in America, the class of capitalists. In a way James reads Melville in relation to Prospero, as opposed to Faust, because in the case of Ahab, as a capitalist, he's dealing with racial capitalism in a way in which Faust is not. And so he becomes a classic Prospero figure and the workers become these Caliban type figures. You have a classic conflict between Prospero and Caliban being played out on the Pequod. And the way he sees the other texts of Melville is that if this problem is not resolved then American civilization will certainly go deeper into crisis. That's how James reads a novel like *Pierre*, as an example of what happens when this crisis is not resolved. It's the failure to resolve social crises that breeds and produces the neuroses of Ahab and Pierre.

Hannah Arendt, on the other hand, sort of sidelined *Moby Dick* and focused mainly on *Billy Budd*. She focuses on, the failures, the inability to change the dominant order. And in these later works of Melville there's no question that there's greater pessimism about the possibility of change, that the individual characters who are challenging the existing order don't come out as well—they don't remain those spontaneous creative creatures they are in *Moby Dick*—and so what Arendt uses Melville to show is that there are fundamental things you can't change, which begins to echo her positions on race and gender. So she sort of instantiates the power of the dominant order.

**LMA:** So why did you like to go listen to her?

**PH:** Because she was just sheer brilliance. I disagreed with a lot that she said, but just to watch her at work and to listen to her was quite amazing. It was also a wonderful confirmation of my own philosophical understandings. Hearing her talk about Kant, I got confirmation about my own understanding of Kant; hearing her talk about Marx and Hegel confirmed my grip on these figures. She went in and out of Kant, jeez, the way I went in and out of a newspaper, and that was really powerful.

**LMA:** It was confirming not in the sense that she had the same take as you...

**PH:** Oh no no.

**LMA:** So in what sense did it confirm you to hear a different view?

**PH:** Because in her style of lecturing, she would always begin by doing this wonderful exposition, laying out the great thinker, and then she would begin to position this thinker so she could critique him. And so listening to her do the expositions was always for me the confirming experience. Then you would watch how she would do the critiques, and in the case of Melville I could see the way in which the process of selection was very different than in the case of James. So you saw her making these moves that were very specific, very particular, questionable, but at the same time, strategic for what she was doing. And so there were certain things you could disagree with but one was always impressed with her intellect and her imagination. Very insightful.

**LMA:** So you took her a copy of James' book on Melville.

**PH:** Yes, so to finish the story, after we had discussed *On Revolution* and I had heard her reading of Melville, I decided that I must expose her to a completely different view of Melville. So I took her my copy of *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* and went up to her after class. This was the first time she was finding out that I wasn't really in her class, and she said to me, "I don't remember getting an exam from you." I said "there's a very good reason why you haven't gotten an exam from me because I'm not in the class"! Then, I explained to her that I just had to be there. She was really thrilled. We had a great exchange about James. She took the book and promised to read it. Unfortunately, we never really had the chance to talk about it because, not long after that, she left for the University of Chicago and became a member of the Circle of Social Thought, and I took off for Cornell.

**LMA:** Let's go back to your book. I wanted to ask you about the categories that you develop, the poeticist and historicist categories: could you define these for us and explain how you came up with them? And do they correspond to contrasting political orientations? Clearly the historicist group

is more Marxist, but what you show in the book is that it is a mistake to see the poeticists as not thinking about political issues.

**PH:** Let's take the historicist category first. As a sociologist of development operating out of a tradition of political economy I always saw myself as being in this historicist tradition so that even before I formulated it as such I had this vague awareness that this is what we were philosophically. I knew that as a group we had a kinship with historical materialism and by that category—historicist—what we shared was an approach to a study of society and of identity that saw both as being the product of historical action, both as being the product of historical praxis. Praxis was the medium in which institutions came to be and the medium in which identities were formed, sustained, and realized, that it was historical activity—people engaging in collective action, people undertaking a social project that resulted in institutions—that resulted in changes in society. So historicism was this view that history was constitutive of self and society, that it was also the great transformer of self and society, and that to understand the transformation of colonial identities into post-colonial ones there had to be some form of praxis, some form of historical activity. That's the core of what historicists share. Now I use the term historicism as opposed to historical materialism because not all historicists are Marxists. If we look at a lot of the Pan-Africanists, they are also historicists. They too believe in historical action as the great transformer of human identities and societal institutions, but at the same time their conception of history is very different. If you look at Garvey, history for him had the structure of cycles of racial conflict, racial rise and fall, and certainly not the pattern of class conflict that you have among Marxists. So you find different conceptions of history in the historicist school. We have providential conceptions of history, where history is an arena in which God is active and to understand history, to read it, one has to attempt to read the providence of God. So the category of providence becomes central for many historicists. I find the category of providential historicism very interesting because it marks that transition out of predominantly religious philosophies and into secular ones.

So that's the school of historicism, and I was located in the political economy wing of that. When I came to write this book I simply began by reflecting on what I was doing as a historicist and I began to formulate the fundamental ontology that was so central to it: history as this constituting activity. Then I went on to talk about the epistemological positions that were implicit in what we were doing, how we saw knowledge, why were we opposed to certain conceptions of knowledge production, why did we ban the category of spirit, why were we so opposed to idealism, and things like that. And then, when we came to consider issues of race, for example, I had to consider the Pan-Africanists and how they differed from my version of political economy. That's how the category historicism got worked out. The category of poeticism was a bigger challenge, because here were all these great Caribbean intellectuals, well known, and there was always a real tension between what they were doing and what we were doing. Occasionally these debates would break out in which we would just be at each other's throats. We did a major James conference at Wellesley, I can't remember the year, and we invited Derek Walcott who proceeded literally to trash the whole conception of

historicism. He made the argument that the poet is totally and completely beyond the reach of history. As a matter of fact at one point in his talk, I remember, he made this claim: “If history had never existed, poets would still be here.” I don’t have to tell you what kind of reaction he got. So there it was, a whole other school of thought, that was saying something very different from what we were saying. So I knew if I was going to write this book I had to make a phenomenological move and suspend my own ontological commitments to historicism, suspend my opposition to poeticism, or what I would later call poeticism, and begin to look philosophically at what this group was doing.

The one that I found most accessible was Wilson Harris and so I focused on him very intensely, reading his works very carefully and just looking at the philosophical assumptions he made in the course of producing novels. The interesting thing about Wilson Harris is that the philosophical elements in his art are very up front, very explicit, easy to see, especially when he uses words like “ontic closure”...

**LMA:** In a novel?

**PH:** In a novel! He makes it very easy for you. As a matter of fact, James said something about Wilson Harris that I think is so true. He said “Mr. Harris writes his philosophy and his art in the same line”, and that is so true. Wilson was the perfect candidate for me to really begin to inquire into this alternative philosophy. So as I inquired and I began to look at it as a philosophy I began to see that what they were doing was using the process of poetic creation, poetic composition, in the way in which we were using historical action, that the process of poetic composition became an ontological space and also an epistemic space. The process of poetic composition, they argued, was the site at which human self formation occurred. Also, that it was the poetic process that gave society its original naming and original meanings: that the original semanticizing of reality was a poetic process. That is why they believe poetics is fundamental, because it is constitutive and has ontological status. This is so clear in Wilson. Once I realized that, I called it poeticism.

**LMA:** So there’s a kind of parallelism between poeticism and historicism, and neither are apolitical.

**PH:** No, there’s no easy correlation between these two schools and progressive politics; it’s a much more complex relationship. We have poeticists who are very progressive and radical and we have historicists who are very apolitical and conservative. So there’s no straightforward correlation.

**LMA:** Let me turn next to some of the issues about decolonizing philosophy in the book. You argue that the African aspects of the philosophical traditions in the Caribbean have been woefully neglected, and you offer a wonderfully helpful overview of some of the main strains in African philosophical traditions that continue to be influential in Caribbean thought, especially concentrating on the ontological categories. Were you concerned with issues of interpretation here, given the enormous variety in African philosophy?

**PH:** Not really, and in some ways I surprised myself, but for me I knew when I was doing it that it was going to be a matter of striking a balance between the general and the culturally specific, which relates back to your first question. So I very consciously used both phenomenology and logic to try and articulate what were to me the most general features, or if

you like, the common features, among these different philosophies, or I should say common features among philosophies of different ethnic groups in West Africa. In other words, if you looked at them logically and phenomenologically they allowed you to see the generalities and the commonalities. At the same time I knew that there was a danger of either overgeneralizing or just not seeing specific differences. So those logical and phenomenological strategies I combined very carefully with my skills as an ethnographer.

**LMA:** So you relied both on text and on dialogues that you had with people.

**PH:** Right. Basically I just interviewed a lot of sages. I went to Ghana and I was particularly fascinated with the Tellensi, and that was the group that I studied most intensely. I spent the entire summer of 1994 among the Tellensi just talking to their barnabas, tendaanas, all of the major religious leaders of that community. Why the Tellensi? Because they have the most explicit set of predestinarian beliefs of any West African ethnic group. The explicitness of their predestinarian discourses is just amazing, striking, you can’t miss it.

**LMA:** Many people think that the project of decolonization has a natural ally in poststructuralism, that poststructuralism is the philosophy that will best be able to do postcolonial work. Though you are critical of postmodernism to some extent, you have more positive things to say about poststructuralism. In your discussion of Sylvia Wynter’s focus on epistemes, for example, and the need to critique the developmental teleology that one still finds in James, one might find a resonance with some aspects of poststructuralism. So how do you position Afro-Caribbean philosophy in relation to European poststructuralism?

**PH:** Poststructuralism has functioned in Afro-Caribbean philosophy primarily as a hermeneutic resource. Its functions have been primarily to deepen interpretive capabilities. It has allowed Afro-Caribbean thinkers and in particular Afro-Caribbean philosophers to get at deeper levels of meaning than they were able to while remaining within the historicist and poeticist traditions. So in a way I think it has enriched the hermeneutic capabilities of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. There is a real parallel between the way in which Sylvia Wynter in particular has used post-structuralism and the way in which Lewis Gordon uses phenomenology. Lewis uses phenomenology to get at the deeper constitutive processes by which groups produce and legitimate racism. Seeing racism grounded in the process of meaning construction, enabled Lewis to bring new phenomenological resources to Afro-Caribbean philosophy. And so it really gets appropriated for hermeneutic use, for use in interpreting racial meanings, gender meanings, and this is also the way in which poststructuralism has been appropriated for the most part. It has not fundamentally shaken the hegemony of historicism and poeticism, those remain very much the dominant schools, and I would argue that the work of Lewis Gordon has had a more profound impact. Lewis’s existentialism has taken people back to Fanon and has really renewed the interest in Fanon, and so we are more likely to see a strong school of Caribbean existentialism than a school of poststructuralism.

**LMA:** Because it has more resources for theorizing racism?

**PH:** Not necessarily that but because there are more existential roots already planted. Lewis is watering some roots that haven't been watered in a long time. While poststructuralism may develop such roots, at the moment they are not as obvious as the existential roots that are gaining new life. I think that it's possible to talk about an emerging school of Afro-Caribbean existentialism. I see more of an influence there.

Sylvia's work as I said continues to gain recognition, but doesn't have quite the same level of recognition as Lewis's. And if anybody could do for poststructuralism what Lewis has done for existentialism it certainly would be Sylvia. But at the moment I really don't see a Caribbean school of poststructuralism developing. It might take root in the French Caribbean which I don't know very well because I don't know French very well, but I was thinking more of the English speaking Caribbean. The other interesting development which I think has potential is the work of Charles Mills and his use of logic. While I don't think it will hold the kind of attraction that existentialism has, I think we should keep an eye out for the impact of his work. There has always been, because of the British influence, a strong analytic, empiricist tendency in Afro-Caribbean thought and Charles is likely to appeal to that tendency.

**LMA:** A lot of what you are doing is teasing out the metaphysical presuppositions and categories in the various works that you are looking at, and showing that you need to have a different set of metaphysical categories sometimes to describe adequately or take account of different phenomena. I am wondering if there's also ways in which you see an epistemological difference and I'm thinking of the chapter on Sylvia Wynter where you discuss her critique of some of the orthodox Marxist traditions that in her view neglected the sphere of knowledge production. Their neglect of and failure to critique the epistemological process is what caused some of their main problems in her view.

**PH:** Sylvia is probably exceptional in terms of the comprehensive and well thematized nature of her epistemic turn. There is a sharp epistemic turn that she makes and that's one of the reasons why she is such an innovative figure. This is a new turn for Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Sylvia's analysis of the crisis of Caribbean Marxism as well as Caribbean liberalism is that both remain epistemically colonized, that they remain trapped in a Western episteme; it's the situation of Caliban remaining trapped in the episteme of Prospero and not realizing fully the consequences of that entrapment. So in a way Sylvia has raised the question of the depths of that epistemic entrapment and what it means for fashioning new ideas about oneself, new definitions of oneself, and revolutionary social alternatives. If the episteme limits what you can think by always framing your thoughts within certain horizons, then there are going to be serious consequences if you want to get out of this colonial situation.

**LMA:** And that's why you named the book *Caliban's Reason*. This the THE trope of Latin American philosophical and cultural identity, and it has been put to various uses, from Rodo's which was arguably an internalization of colonialism, to Retamar who is using it for revolutionary purposes.

**PH:** Yes, just as in Latin America you had this tradition of appropriating the Shakespearean construction, there's also

been a long tradition of that in the Caribbean, in Cesaire, Lamming, and others. This is really where we begin to see some of the similarities between Latin American and Caribbean thought. The way I see Latin American philosophy is that its historical trajectory is very similar to the historical trajectory of Afro-Caribbean philosophy in the sense that both have this experience of coming into modernity through European imperialism. In other words, you move from a situation that is primarily mythic and religious, in which existence is the creative project of the gods. That's your premodern experience of life. And modernity is not the internal breaking down of this order of existence but a kind of crushing intrusion in which the disruption of this mythic conception of existence comes by the imposition of a conception of existence in which life is a project of European imperialism. Modernity for both Latin America and the Caribbean moves between these two poles and I think that that is why the figure of Caliban becomes central to both. Octavio Paz is very popular among Caribbean poeticists. As a matter of fact, in coming up with the term poeticism it was the way in which John Hearne, the novelist, spoke about Octavio Paz, in particular *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, that really gave me an important clue. Paz is one of these poets that I see as really similar to Wilson Harris, who himself loves Paz and you can see why. Paz writes in a way that makes the poetic process explicit, especially in some of his essays. Here's a poet who is also a thinker, and he's thinking through a poetic imagination and so here's the poetic imagination being forced to come to grips with this experience of imperialism. So you feel this similarity between Caribbean poeticism and the work of somebody like Octavio Paz.

And of course there is also a very strong school of Latin American historicism. I'm most familiar with Latin American schools of political economy, and, again, the way history functions within the work of Caribbean political economy is very similar to the way it works in Latin American political economy. The work of Fernando Enrique Cardoso has been very influential in the Caribbean, and a number of other Latin American political economists, such as Anabal Pinto. The whole school of Latin American dependency was very influential on Caribbean political economy. As a matter of fact there were several Latin American political economists who published in *Social and Economic Studies*, the premier journal in which this whole school of Caribbean dependency emerged. I don't think my political economy would have been what it was if I hadn't read Cardoso.

**LMA:** For my last question I'd like to link your project this time not with South but with North American philosophy. I wanted to ask you about the connections and tensions that you see between African American and Afro Caribbean philosophy. And this question is of course relevant not only for the development of African American philosophy but also for the development of Latino philosophy that some of us are engaged in as well as philosophies generally of people of color in the U.S. Do you see these as developing differently or as essentially one discussion?

**PH:** Clearly the primary obstacle in the conversation between these philosophies that have so much in common is the extent to which they all privilege their conversation with the philosophical tradition of the West. For both institutional and historical reasons we are so profoundly involved in the dialogue with the Western tradition—its kind of a replay of

the Prospero/Caliban thing—that we’ve had little time to converse among ourselves. And this is something that I really want to change, which is why I wrote a chapter on Afro-American philosophy. Right now I’m currently working on opening up dialogues with Indian and Indo-Caribbean philosophy in the Caribbean...

**LMA:** Meaning not the indigenous but the south Asian immigrant populations?

**PH:** Right. So I see a potential for great dialogue that could take philosophy as a discipline in completely different directions because I see philosophy as based upon concrete experiences. Once you begin to philosophize about different historical experiences, the philosophy that emerges is going to be different. In a way the West has had all of us reflecting on their problems, their experiences, and what we need to develop now is a genuinely comparative philosophy in which the experiences of different peoples, both their premodern and their modern experiences, can be looked at conversationally with the idea that each can learn from the other.

As long as the West doesn’t think it can learn anything from African philosophy we can’t have this conversation. And to the extent that that bias continues to operate among Third World philosophers, where they think that they can only learn by being in touch with the latest currents in the West, and that they must always be up on what is happening in the capitals of the West, then we have a problem.

But I think if we can really begin to see that the roots of philosophy are in people and in people’s experiences, that philosophy is a formalization of lived experiences, then we can come to appreciate that philosophy lives in people. And people’s experiences, whether in Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean, are very valuable and very significant. Now this specificity of experience, on the other hand, is where, to come back to your first question, in spite of our philosophies having a lot in common, each is culturally and historically specific. These differences must be appreciated, they must be recognized and be framed in the kind of language that will not do them violence. So in this dialogue I see the need for understanding and deploying very clearly the phenomenological and logical resources of philosophy to get at the general while at the same time linking these general features to certain styles of ethnographic research that will keep us in tune with what is culturally specific. If we learn to link the two dialectically, that is, the logical and the phenomenological on the one hand, and the ethnographic and the historical on the other and, I think we could really take philosophy in new directions.

**LMA:** That’s a great ending. This interview will surely make a contribution to the dialogue, and I hope we can do another before long.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### (1)

#### **Nuns transcribe Colonial Philosophy Works on Computer**

The Carmelite nuns of Ayacucho, Peru, have transcribed the *Metaphysics of Joséé Aguilar, S.J.* (third part of his *Cursus philosophicus dictatus Limae, 1701*). Their copy is now being placed on a CD-ROM which includes photographs of each page of the original book as well as studies (in time a Spanish translation will be provided). The ASCII Latin text will also go out on the internet. This is a pilot-project sponsored by the Catholic University of Peru, and eventually all works on philosophy and theology from the Viceroyalty, it is hoped, will be made available. A similar project has recently been initiated in Mexico. Contact: Walter Redmond ([wredmond@texas.net](mailto:wredmond@texas.net)).

### (2)

*The Journal of Ethics: An International Philosophical Review* extends a call for papers on the topic of Latino/a ethical issues and indigenous ethical issues. Please send four copies of your paper, along with a diskette version for review to:

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