

APA Newsletters

Volume 02, Number 1

Fall 2002

NEWSLETTER ON HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

FROM THE EDITOR, EDUARDO MENDIETA

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, SUSANA NUC CETELLI

ARTICLES

JOSÉ MEDINA

“Contexts, Practices, and Identity: Comments on Susana Nuccetelli’s *Latin American Thought*”

IVÁN MÁRQUEZ

“Studying the Clash of Cultures in Latin America following 1492: A Laboratory for the Development of a Natural History of Reason: Comments on Susana Nuccetelli’s Book *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments*”

SUSANA NUC CETELLI

“Response to José Medina and Iván Márquez”

INTERVIEWS

IVÁN MÁRQUEZ

“A View from Somewhere: The Philosophical Hermeneutics of a Hispanic Philosopher: An Interview with Jorge J. E. Gracia, Samuel P. Capen, Chair and SUNY Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, SUNY-Buffalo”





APA NEWSLETTER ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

Eduardo Mendieta, Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

Eduardo Mendieta

The APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues will be celebrating its third year of existence with this issue. It also marks the expiration of Eduardo Mendieta's appointment in the committee. It is therefore time for a new member of the committee or the larger APA membership with association to the committee on Hispanics/Latinos in philosophy to volunteer and apply for the editorship of the Newsletter. This is an extremely important venue for the discussion of issues that relate to Hispanics/Latinos in philosophy. It also an important venue through which we can inform and educate other members in the APA community about Hispanic/Latinos in philosophy and what we can and should be contributing to the philosophical community in terms of scholarship, lessons and history, as well as specific ideas about the curriculum and approaches to specific philosophical issues. In other ways, the Newsletter can also operate as a laboratory in which we can experiment, try out some ideas, exchange proposals and lines of investigation. Most importantly, it is a vehicle through which Hispanic/Latino philosophers, and prospective philosophers, can get to know each other and their works. Thus, persons interested in taking over the Newsletter are encouraged to contact the acting chair Susana Nuccetelli, or any member of the committee.

In this of the Newsletter we are extremely glad to publish two wonderful papers on Susana Nuccetelli's recently published *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments* (Boulder: Westview Press. 2002), which is the first kind of book, in English, that provides a comprehensive and ecumenical overview of Latin American thought since its inauguration five hundred years ago. José Medina's raises a wonderful series of issues concerning the very possibility of seeing indigenous thought as forms of rationality, and asks whether the onus is not Western philosophers on having to prove that their own take on reason is exemplary of rationality. Medina is also concerned with balancing an externalist perspective on issues of identity with an internalist perspective that seeks to shed light on why and how subjects ascend to agency by adopting a particular attitude towards ascribed identities. Iván Márquez telescopes Nuccetelli's book and raises meta-philosophical issues about the relationship between Latin American philosophy and the very notion of mestizaje and rationality, suggesting that Latin American philosophy has been the locus par excellence for the mixing of rationality claims in such a way that the rational has to do with a certain argumentative impurity, which has been one of

the central issues for Latin American thought. Nuccetelli responds and clarifies her position. This exchange, we hope, will be of great use when thinking about how to use this book in a class on Latin American philosophy, and also on classes dealing with inter-philosophical dialogue. The Newsletter closes with a lengthy and comprehensive interview with Jorge J. E. Gracia, who has been one of the most active members in the Hispanic/Latino philosophical community. This will be our fourth interview with Latino/Hispanic philosopher. In the near future we hope to print interviews with Ofelia Schutte and Walter Mignolo. Interviews are an excellent venue for introducing and being introduced. They are informal enough that they allow the interviewer to give overviews of their works and central ideas without having to get bogged down in details. At the same time, they are personal enough that the personality of the interviews shines through, not just in the use of a particular language, but also metaphors and images. Another virtue of the interview is that it may allow the interviewee to either explore or deepen their comments on a particular issue. And in this way interviews are as singular and provocative as the interviewees themselves.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Susana Nuccetelli

As the new chair of the committee on Hispanics, I am happy to report that our committee is once again moving full-steam ahead to promote Latin American philosophy and to raise the profile of Hispanics and defend their rights in the profession. After a brief impasse due to internal reorganization, I assumed the chair in March. We offered an author-meets-critics session for the Central Division meeting in Chicago, which resulted in a stimulating discussion of some central philosophical controversies in the history of Latin American thought. Many participants stayed after the session to make inquiries about our committee and show their support for other activities we may undertake at division meetings in the future.

Needless to say, I welcome such suggestions, as I believe that our committee should continue its activities at the APA with the strength brought to it under the leadership of Linda Martín Alcoff. Linda deserves our thanks for her dedicated service as chair of the committee and for her efforts towards establishing an annual prize for scholarly work in Latin American philosophy. This prize may now soon come to life, thanks to the APA's recent decision to support it for an initial period of three years. I suspect that we shall have little difficulty in finding private funds to continue this prize, since there are

many persons and foundations in the United States who might be willing to sponsor a prize of this sort. Clearly, a case can be made that the moment is favorable for broadening cultural horizons within the arts and sciences in general, including points of view that have been overlooked, and that our prize in philosophy will do just that. Furthermore, having the prize would in itself contribute to promoting Latin American thought among philosophers in the USA, for which the moment also seems propitious. The need for multicultural emphasis is far less controversial among philosophers than in the past, and a certain dogmatic indifference to new philosophical perspectives is now in retreat.

I believe that all of these considerations point also to the need for offering the prize to an essay on the basis of its philosophical merits in broaching a topic related to Latin American thought, rather than on the basis of the author's ethnicity, though I would of course welcome discussion on this idea among all interested parties, especially my fellow Hispanic philosophers. In any case, I look forward to making a decision on this and other challenging issues facing our committee at our annual gathering at the Eastern Division meeting in Philadelphia in December. I also welcome input regarding plans for possible panel discussions, special sessions, and other events that we might sponsor at the future Division meetings in the upcoming year.

ARTICLES

Contexts, Practices, and Identity: Comments on Susana Nuccetelli's Latin American Thought. (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2002)

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Susana Nuccetelli's *Latin American Thought* is a much needed volume that successfully fills an embarrassing gap in the philosophical literature in English. The book is a valuable survey of philosophical ideas in a rich intellectual tradition that has been widely neglected for too long. It should be commended for its ambitious and provocative presentation of problems and arguments in a well-organized and accessible manner. From the Mayans to the present day, the book covers a broad range of issues and provides the requisite historical and philosophical background one needs in order to be familiar with the vast and complex tradition of Latin American thought. However, although the book's treatment of diverse views and authors is more than adequate as an introduction, Nuccetelli's critical assessments tend to be cursory and the views she defends often remain sketchy. This does not diminish the value of the book as a teaching tool, for the quality and rigor of Nuccetelli's presentation is never compromised. However, since the book has the goal of being comprehensive, depth is sometimes sacrificed for the sake of breath; and Nuccetelli's survey often invites more questions than it can answer. But this is as it should be given the pedagogical goal of the book. What the book provides is an excellent starting point for a conversation on a broad range of topics in Latin American thought. In order to participate in this conversation that the book proposes, I offer my criticisms as requests for further dialogue. I will develop my comments in two parts. In

Part I, I try to identify ways in which Nuccetelli's survey may fail to do justice to certain debates and certain views; and I criticize those arguments in her exposition that remain unconvincing. Part II goes beyond the discussion of specific problems and views. In this part I develop critical points concerning the general emerging view of ethnicity and of Hispanic or Latin American identity, trying to identify those aspects of the view that are most problematic and stand in need of further development.

I. Problems with Nuccetelli's treatment of specific issues and views.

I.a. In the first two chapters Nuccetelli addresses the issue of whether and on what grounds Latin American indians such as the Mayans could be said to have thought and rationality. She examines weaker and stronger versions of rationalist and relativistic answers; and she uncovers and criticizes ethnocentric presuppositions that underlie many of these answers. However, the reader is likely to think that too much intellectual authority has been given to ethnocentric views, allowing them to dictate the terms of the debate. Why should we think that the questions "Could the Mayans think?" and "Was their thought fully rational?" are sensible questions to ask to begin with? Today most people would regard these questions as deeply offensive, and rightly so. As recently as the 1970s, however, philosophers and social scientists uncritically accepted the validity of these questions. But a few centuries have passed since Bartolomé de las Casas had to convince Juan Ginés Sepúlveda that native Americans were intelligent thinkers.¹ And a few decades have passed since Edward Evans-Pritchard², Lucien Lévy-Bruhl³, Alasdair MacIntyre⁴, Charles Taylor⁵, and Peter Winch⁶ debated whether so-called "primitive cultures" exhibit a defective rationality or just a different form of rationality. I am not suggesting that Nuccetelli should not have addressed these issues in the first two chapters of her book, for there is indeed undisputable historical and philosophical value in examining the arguments offered in these debates. I am suggesting, rather, that we may be granting too much to ethnocentrism if we uncritically accept the burden of showing that the cultures of Latin America before 1492 contained thought and rationality. The crucial question for a contemporary examination and assessment of these debates should not be *whether* the Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas had thought and rationality, but rather, *why* some philosophers and social scientists ever doubted that they did (what prompted them to call that into question and on what grounds?). My point is not simply that this would be a more effective argumentative strategy. Rather, my claim is that this is the *only* strategy that is adequate to the current state of the question. For the burden of proof really lies on the shoulders of the skeptic who questions the presence of thought and rationality in those whose actions and utterances are radically different from the standard ways of acting and speaking available in Western cultures. The skeptic needs to say much more to motivate the issue; the identification of radical differences by itself won't do.

I.b. Another problem that I see in this part of Nuccetelli's survey is that *contextualism is not given a fair treatment*; and, therefore, her criticisms and rejection of this view remain unpersuasive. Only one version of contextualism (the one developed by Winch) is considered (see esp. pp. 33-35); and it is construed as a radical form of *relativism about truth and rational justification*. This conflation of contextualism and radical relativism is objectionable. As Michael Lynch⁷ and Hilary Putnam⁸ among others have argued, contextualism is not necessarily incompatible with a robust notion of objectivity and a nonrelativistic notion of truth. For the relativization of

truth claims to the particular contexts in which they are raised does not entail the relativization of truth itself: we can contextualize the truth conditions of a claim while maintaining that there is a fact of the matter that determines the truth value of the claim. So we can be contextualists while remaining realists. Nuccetelli's conflation of contextualism and relativism is also the product of not taking enough care in separating issues concerning *truth* and issues concerning *justification*. As many contextualists have emphasized,⁹ keeping these issues separate is crucial because we may want to tell quite different stories about truth conditions and about assertibility conditions or justification conditions. *Being true* and *holding true* are quite different things. One can argue that whether it is justified to hold something to be true is a contextual issue because it depends on situated practices of justification and it involves context-sensitive standards. But this contextualist view does not presuppose a commitment to any particular account of truth; and it can be combined with a thoroughgoing fallibilism and realism about truth. We need to distinguish between different dimensions of validity, in particular, between an epistemic dimension and a metaphysical dimension; and the point is that a contextualist account of one dimension of validity does not entail contextualist claims about others dimensions: a contextualist account of how we settle truth claims does not entail contextualist claims about truth. It is only when we blur the distinction between these dimensions of validity that contextualism appears as an unqualified claim about the relativity of all normative assessments in all their dimensions.

The problems I just mentioned weaken Nuccetelli's negative conclusions concerning contextualism. She asks: "Why should we take either the truth of a belief or its rational justification to be contextually determined when that conflicts not only with our intuitions but also with the intentions made explicit by the believers themselves?" (p. 35) It is far from obvious that contextualism is in conflict with our ordinary intuitions and with the standard intentions of believers. To begin with, I don't see how Nuccetelli can appeal to universalist or acontextual intuitions about truth and justification without begging the question, for it is clear that not everybody shares these intuitions (relativists certainly don't). But in the second place, and more importantly, there are different ways of understanding what is meant by "contextually determined," not all of which may be in conflict with the intuitions that Nuccetelli has in mind; in particular, there are nonrelativistic construals of the thesis of context dependence that are not considered. In the third place, our intuitions about truth and our intuitions about rational justification may diverge. Even if Nuccetelli is right about our intuitions and intentions concerning truth, she may not be right about our intuitions and intentions concerning rational justification. What I find particularly implausible in Nuccetelli's view is the standard epistemic intention that is ascribed to a speaker who makes a truth claim, namely, the intention to hold the claim to be justified and assertible in all contexts and at all times. Do sensible speakers typically have this acontextual intention? Is it really the reasonable intention to have when making a truth claim?

II.c. The problem of neglecting a rich spectrum of intermediate positions reappears in subsequent chapters in the discussion of cross-cultural value judgments. Here too Nuccetelli sets up a strong dichotomy between universalism and cultural relativism without exploring the wealth of philosophical positions that occupy the intellectual space between these two extremes. It becomes apparent, however, that this is a false dichotomy since Nuccetelli's own view is a *pluralism*

that rejects both any form of relativism that does away with objectivity and any form of universalism that is insensitive to conceptual differences. In chapter 4 she develops her pluralistic view through a helpful analogy between tools and theories or conceptual structures. This analogy shows how there can be objectivity in our contextual assessments of the adequacy and efficacy of cultural objects; and thus it establishes that pluralism does not entail relativism. However, Nuccetelli seems to lose sight of this reconciliation of objectivity and pluralism when she briefly discusses contemporary feminism in chapter 6. There she construes "radical feminism" as "an inconsistent form of epistemic relativism" (p. 158) that rejects objectivity and argues for different ways of acquiring knowledge for men and women. It remains unclear which feminist views Nuccetelli wants to bring under the rubric "radical feminism." But the most persuasive feminist attacks of male-dominated epistemic practices I know of do not rest on the problematic (essentialist) notion of a *distinctive* female way of acquiring knowledge. Rather, they denounce that some epistemic virtues have been privileged at the expense of others, and that those virtues that have been privileged are often found in heterosexual, middle-class white men, while those virtues that have been neglected are often found in other groups. But this view does not require that all epistemic perspectives be neatly classified along gender lines (or along racial, ethnic, economic, and sexual lines for that matter). More importantly, there is no reason why those contemporary feminists who argue that there is a plurality of irreducible epistemic perspectives need to commit themselves to the rejection of objective knowledge. Linda Alcoff¹⁰ and Helen Longino¹¹, for instance, are good examples of thoroughgoing pluralists who have developed robust accounts of objectivity. I don't understand why Nuccetelli construes the category of "radical feminism" so narrowly and leaves out the most compelling feminist views in the contemporary literature, particularly since Nuccetelli's pluralism seems quite congenial with some of these views.

I.d. Finally, another philosophical perspective that is unfairly treated is Marxism. The objections that Nuccetelli develops in her discussion of Marxist views in chapters 7 and 8 fall into two groups: those that criticize Marxist claims as fallacious normative conclusions derived from factual premises; and those that criticize Marxist analyses for being factually incorrect. Both groups of objections involve highly problematic presuppositions that derive from an outdated positivist framework. First, among other views, Nuccetelli criticizes Marxist views of the history and future of Latin America for drawing evaluative conclusions from descriptive judgments. Nuccetelli is certainly right that we should exercise caution in our normative assessments of historical and sociological accounts (and we should indeed be suspicious of those assessments that contain bold claims about the inferiority of a culture or the superiority of another). But the suggestion that it is fallacious to draw evaluative conclusions from history or sociology is simply unwarranted. Marxists would not accept that their historical and sociological accounts are purely descriptive premises that they use to derive norms from facts. Moreover, most social scientists and philosophers of science today (Marxist or not) would agree that social and historical facts are value-laden and that our scientific accounts of these facts are not purely descriptive and value-free. Nuccetelli's argument presupposes a strong fact-value distinction, a positivist distinction that has been under attack for quite some time.

Secondly, Nuccetelli also argues that Marxist views developed by Latin American thinkers have been factually

refuted. I agree with Nuccetelli that philosophical views should be answerable to the facts and that they should be assessed in the light of the evidence available in the social sciences. However, I don't think Nuccetelli has made her case; I don't think she has established that Latin American Marxist views have run into insurmountable factual problems. Take the "indigenous question" that Nuccetelli uses at the end of chapter 7 as an objection against José Carlos Mariátegui. According to Nuccetelli, it is a recalcitrant anomaly for Mariátegui's Marxist view that the wars of independence in the Americas were mainly a movement of *criollos* that received little Indian support. How is it that indigenous peoples could not be mobilized to fight their oppressor? Did they have no interest in their own liberation and the betterment of their condition?

To begin with, it seems to me that Nuccetelli makes the explanatory puzzle more mysterious than it really is by construing the apathy of indigenous peoples as a form of affirmative conformism that involves "remain[ing] loyal to social systems that are clearly unjust and unfavorable to them" (p. 212). But of course apathy can be just a sign of despair; and the lack of interest in national independence does not necessarily entail loyalty to the Spanish or the Portuguese crown. There may not be a big mystery here, for as Mariátegui pointed out "there could not be nationalism where there were not yet nationalities" (quoted by Nuccetelli in a different discussion on page 226). It is also important to note that the so-called "indigenous question" refers to quite different independence movements and wars and quite different indigenous peoples. It may be a mistake to request a single explanation for all these cases, for different local accounts may be appropriate for different social and historical contexts. At any rate, although these phenomena deserve explanation, I fail to see why they pose a special problem (let alone an insurmountable one) for Mariátegui's view. There are many different paths that remain open in the search for an explanation of the "indigenous question". We may find out all kinds of reasons why indigenous peoples did not see their participation in wars of independence as efforts towards their own liberation; in some cases, they might even have had good reasons to regard these wars as leading to the establishment of new oppressors. In fact, Nuccetelli does not rule out the possibility of finding appropriate explanations in the social sciences; and I don't see why these possible scientific explanations should not be available to the Marxist philosopher as well as to the non-Marxist philosopher. But perhaps what Nuccetelli is requesting is not just *any* explanation, but a Marxist one (though I see no reason why a Marxist philosopher has to explain everything in Marxist terms). The reasoning behind Nuccetelli's objection seems to be that the "indigenous question" constitutes a "counterexample" to Mariátegui's view because there isn't a Marxist explanation for this phenomenon (or set of phenomena), not even in principle. But in fact Marxism can offer an explanation; it is only that Nuccetelli is not willing to accept the Marxist account as a valid scientific explanation. As she puts it, Mariátegui could argue that "the oppressed had 'false consciousness' — that is, a distorted view of what is truly best according to their own interest" (p. 211). But Nuccetelli goes on to argue that this is an illegitimate way of saving the theory from negative evidence, a move that makes the theory unfalsifiable ("invulnerable to counterexamples") and, therefore, unscientific (pp. 211-212). This argument rests on the validity of the Popperian principle of falsifiability as the demarcation criterion that distinguishes genuine science from pseudoscience. However, even according to Popper's falsificationist view, it is sometimes legitimate to rescue a theory from apparently negative

evidence if the rescue operation is not done ad hoc, that is, if there are previously and independently established theoretical grounds that can explain the evidence. Nuccetelli's objection would have some plausibility if the Marxist appeal to "false consciousness" were a purely ad hoc addition to the theory introduced post facto to account for the phenomena. But this is clearly not the case here, for the concept of "false consciousness" is an integral part of Marxist theory and its application is subject to empirical constraints. In the light of sufficient evidence we should be able to determine whether or not "false consciousness" is what the theory would have predicted. Moreover, even if the Marxist appeal to "false consciousness" were necessarily post facto and ad hoc, it is not at all clear that this should automatically deprive Marxist theories of scientific status. For, as Thomas Kuhn¹² and Imre Lakatos¹³ (and a legion of philosophers following them) have argued, post facto and ad hoc moves are ubiquitous in standard scientific practices, which involve the constant reinterpretation and revision of theory and evidence in the light of each other. To use Lakatos' famous phrase, scientists have "thick skins" and don't abandon their theories so easily. So here too if we do away with the problematic presuppositions that derive from positivist strictures on scientific knowledge, Nuccetelli's argument against Marxism loses its force.

II. Problems with the emerging view of Hispanic/Latino identity and ethnicity in general.

From the various discussions of Nuccetelli's book emerges a thoroughgoing *externalist* conception of ethnicity: that is, a view according to which ethnic identity does not require epistemic mediation of any kind and is to be captured from an external standpoint rather than from the perspective of the subjects or ethnic groups themselves. This externalist view is developed in a discussion of ethnic names in the last chapter. In this discussion Nuccetelli applies the theory of direct reference defended by Saul Kripke¹⁴ and the early Hilary Putnam¹⁵ to ethnic names such as "Hispanic" or "Latino". I find this application of the theory of direct reference to ethnic names highly implausible. But its implausibility is revealing because it brings to the fore the deep problems that arise for an externalist account of ethnicity.

Note, to begin with, that the theory of direct reference was designed to explain natural-kind terms such as "water," "cat," "tiger," etc. The claim of the theory is that these terms have a direct reference: they refer to kinds of things out there in a direct way, that is, independently of the beliefs we happen to have about these things. It is argued that the reference of these terms does not require any epistemic mediation, that they successfully refer to kinds even if all our beliefs about their reference turn out to be wrong. The crucial point is that this sharp separation of the reference of natural-kind terms from our beliefs about kinds can be maintained only if we assume that reality divides itself into kinds, so that these classes remain the same even through radical shifts in our epistemic perspectives, even through radical revisions of our beliefs. Typically this is explained by appealing to a fixed *essence* that determines membership in a natural kind: the reference of a natural-kind term is stable because the essential properties shared by all the members of that kind remain the same. In the baptismal acts that institute the use of a natural-kind term we don't fix the reference of the term by means of descriptions that express our beliefs, but rather, by means of the essential properties of the samples that are baptized. As Kripke and the early Putnam repeatedly argued, even when descriptions are used to introduce a natural-kind term, their content is irrelevant and all that matters is the direct referential link

established between the term and the natural kind. As Nuccetelli puts it: “Misconceptions about the essential properties of such natural kinds [as whales and bats], though widespread among members of certain linguistic communities, surely did not undermine their success in using conventionally available terms to pick out whales, porpoises, marsupial mice, and bats” (p. 237).

The problem, of course, is that when the theory of direct reference is applied to ethnic names these are treated as natural-kind terms. Accordingly, ethnic identities are thought of as natural kinds that have fixed essences. This is the only way in which we can make sense of the idea of direct reference, of successful reference without epistemic mediation. Nuccetelli contends that the referential success of an ethnic names “does not depend on the accuracy of the descriptions conventionally associated with [the] term” (p. 237). Many of our descriptions of an ethnic identity may turn out to be wrong and we may be able to keep referring to it successfully. But does it make sense to say that all our beliefs may turn out to be wrong? Is it an intelligible possibility that we may be *all* wrong about Hispanicity, that it may turn out that *everything* that has ever been said and thought about Hispanic identity is false and that nonetheless the term “Hispanic” picks out a distinctive group of individuals with shared properties? I do not see how we can even begin to make sense of this extreme possibility. But note that this possibility is entailed by the theory of direct reference, and that if we allow for any kind of epistemic mediation in the use of ethnic names, their reference is no longer direct. It seems highly implausible that we can avoid all epistemic mediation in the use of ethnic names because ethnicity is not something that can simply happen to us without our knowing. If we remove all subjectivity from an ethnic category, I don’t see how what we are left with can be regarded as something that defines our identity. This is the reason why the strong essentialism associated with the theory of direct reference seems particularly implausible in the domain of ethnicity; that is, because we are dealing with something (an aspect of identity) that seems to have unavoidable subjective and epistemic components. The essentialist perspective invoked by Nuccetelli’s application of the theory of direct reference also brings to the fore two problems that are endemic to strong externalist views of ethnic identity: the inability to account for the crucial role that *context* and *action* play in the formation and transformation of ethnic identity. I will conclude with a cursory examination of these problems.

First, Nuccetelli’s externalist view tries to offer a metaphysical picture of ethnic identity that abstracts from particular epistemic contexts. By depicting ethnic identity as something fixed across epistemic contexts, Nuccetelli’s view neglects the situated and fluid character of ethnicity. Since ethnic names are required to refer to the same class of individuals in all contexts, the dynamic and contextual aspects of ethnic identity have to be disregarded on this view. An acontextual account of ethnic identity is the vain attempt to freeze identity in time. But even if such an account were attainable, it is unclear what it could do for us. It seems to me that all we can offer and all we need is an account of an ethnic group such as Hispanics or Latinos for our here and now, a situated account that contextualizes identity in a particular way. An account of Hispanic identity that, though still externalist, is more sensitive to the situated and fluid nature of ethnicity can be found in Jorge Gracia’s familial-historical view.¹⁶ This view depicts Hispanic identity as something dynamic that is always in the making and can never be fixed once and for all; and it underscores that the future of our Hispanic family is a task for which we have to take responsibility. As Gracia puts it: “The

future is always open and can be different. We are not trapped in our identity.”¹⁷ I’m not sure that Nuccetelli is entitled to this claim. For we need to have some sort of epistemic access to our identity in order to be able to transform it. If ethnic identity is something that happens to us without our knowing, without epistemic mediation, then we are indeed trapped in it.

Secondly, our ethnic identity is crucially dependent on our agency. However, this fact is obscured in an externalist view that examines ethnicity from the neutral and detached perspective of an external observer (i.e., from a God’s Eye point of view), instead of looking at it from the situated perspective of the engaged agents who constitute the ethnic group in question. An externalist view has to do justice to the fundamental practical dimension of our ethnic identity, which involves *our agency* and is not something that simply *happens to us* as a result of history. At the very least, an externalist view needs to be qualified and supplemented with conditions that take agency into account as a constitutive part of ethnic identity. In this vein, Gracia’s familial-historical view—despite its strong externalist elements—supplements the historical conditions for membership in an ethnic group with the agency condition of maintaining ties with this group in one’s practices.¹⁸ No such condition is specified in Nuccetelli’s view. But it is of crucial importance to acknowledge the role of agency in the formation, appropriation, and transformation of Hispanic or Latino identity. For the explicit recognition of this practical aspect of our ethnic identity is essential for the self-empowerment of our group.

Endnotes

1. See B. de las Casas and J. G. Sepúlveda, “Aquí se contiene una disputa o controversia,” in J. J. Himelblau (ed.), *The Indian in Spanish America. Vol. 1* (Lanaster, CA: Labyrinthos, 1994).
2. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).
3. L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).
4. A. MacIntyre, “Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?,” in B. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).
5. C. Taylor, “Rationality,” in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982).
6. P. Winch, “Understanding a Primitive Society,” in B. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).
7. M. Lynch, *Truth in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).
8. H. Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *Realism and Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1983); *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); *Words and Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
9. See esp. M. Williams, “Do We (Epistemologists) Need a Theory of Truth?” *Philosophical Topics* 14, 1986, pp. 223-242. See also P. Horwich, *Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
10. L. Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
11. H. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
12. T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1962).
13. I. Lakatos, *Philosophical Papers. Vol. 1* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
14. S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
15. H. Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning,’” in his *Mind, Language, and Reality. Philosophical Papers. Vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
16. J. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity. A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Studying the Clash of Cultures in Latin America following 1492: A Laboratory for the Development of a Natural History of Reason: Comments on Susana Nuccetelli's book Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments. (Boulder: Westview Press. 2002)

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Susana Nuccetelli's book *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments* explores several epistemological and metaphysical issues that emerge from an inquiry concerning the legacy of 1492 in Latin America. I will be focusing on one of them: the dispute about how to define rationality that arises when one is confronted with a radically different culture. The context of this dispute is Nuccetelli's specific investigation "of whether the Mayans... could be said to have developed intellectual skills, such as critical thinking and rational understanding of the natural world, comparable to those of Western culture." (xvi)

Nuccetelli and I agree on so many points that I cannot engage in much of a debate with her because there is little to argue about. Hence, instead, I have decided to show how her book has made me think in new ways about old epistemological and metaphysical problems. I am particularly interested in showing how I think her general line of thought can be extended and developed.

Nuccetelli distinguishes a strong notion of rationality tied to the Western scientific criteria of logical deductive validity, inductive soundness, and truth as correspondence with mind-independent reality, from a weak notion of rationality tied to notions of justificational connectedness among beliefs and consistency of truth within the belief system, based on a coherence notion of truth, broadly conceived. Susana Nuccetelli leans toward a weak characterization of Mayan rationality, but acknowledges that the Mayans did have domains of thinking where strong rationality seems to operate. For instance, according to her, the Mayans display weak rationality in domains such as astrology and prophesy and strong rationality in the field of astronomy, where they developed a very accurate almanac, predicted eclipses, and ascertained the position of some of the planets in our solar system.

Nuccetelli's account adequately shows the shortcomings of strict, strong notions of rationality, and the simplification that entails to simply ascribe weak rationality to the Mayans *tout court*. These are good points to make and Nuccetelli makes them well. However, as long as we continue to conduct our epistemological discussions about ethnocentrism in epistemology within the strong versus weak rationality discourse, we will continue to be ethnocentric in epistemology.

Nuccetelli's analysis suggests a more decisive departure from the traditional Western instrumental-scientific way to conceive of rationality. This can be best appreciated in her fourth chapter, devoted to the issues of pluralism and relativism as they relate to the clash of cultures that defines the legacy of 1492 in Latin America. In this chapter, Nuccetelli tries to move beyond the strong versus weak rationality debate as an either/or issue, in part, by showing how one can be a pluralist without being a relativist. The way to do this, according to Nuccetelli, is by showing, first of all, that there are at least two kinds of understanding: attitudinal understanding and rational

understanding. Attitudinal understanding of events is "[t]ypically, the outcome of practices leading to the acceptance of some fundamental phenomena of the natural world, such as its origins and human birth, death, and marriage" (73). Rational understanding of events is "[t]he outcome of practices typically conducive to explaining and predicting some phenomena of the natural world, where these need not be events that directly affect the lives of people engaged in those practices." (Ibid.) Once this is acknowledged, one can begin to see beliefs systems, like philosophy and science, as intellectual tools that can vary, but also as having a function that they perform. Identifying the function of these intellectual tools allows for a comparative evaluation of the different tools created and used for the same intellectual function. Two different tools might be made for the same function or two different tools might be made for different functions, showing the reality of pluralism. However, one tool might be better than the other at performing the function for which they were both made, thus, refuting the validity of the relativist conclusion drawn by some people from the reality of pluralism.

But then, Nuccetelli makes the following remark, "philosophical and scientific theories are, like tools, also defined in terms of their functions, but here the sort of usefulness in which their role is defined is less practical than cognitive...what makes a body of beliefs a philosophical theory rather than a myth is the role it would play in ideal conditions with regards to certain cognitive goals of human beings." (81)

Nuccetelli's remark prompts the following set of queries. If the cognitive function is one of many functions that beliefs systems can perform, why not simply stick to talk about the varied functions of diverse beliefs and avoid what almost seems like a fetishization of the cognitive function as privileged and radically separate from other practical functions? Also, why take what appears to be an exclusivist approach to the function of a set of beliefs? If different sets of beliefs might perform different functions, why not accept the very real possibility that a set of beliefs might perform several functions, perhaps more or less adequately? For instance, using Nuccetelli's terminology, a set of beliefs might lead me, both, to a rational understanding of events and to an attitudinal understanding of events. Imagine that an oncologist has diagnosed me as having advanced pancreatic cancer. My medical understanding of pancreatic cancer might very well help me to see that little can be done to cure me, and this realization can help me to accept the prospects of an early death in the very near future. In this case, knowing that there are hardly any effective treatment options saves me much of the mental suffering associated with having ongoing doubts about having made the right treatment choices, and with the hopes and disappointments connected to my ongoing wish to be lucky and be cured. But, furthermore, to even label these two kinds of understanding as rational and attitudinal respectively already seems to identify one as somewhat more rational than the other and, thus, missing the point of a truly pluralistic functional understanding of beliefs. This suggests to me the lingering presence of remnants of the traditional essentialist mentality behind what appears to be an otherwise sound functional analysis of reason.

I think that Nuccetelli's approach points in the right direction without taking all of the necessary steps to take us there. Her approach is still held hostage by the same paradigm that she seems to want to overcome. Therefore, I will try to show how, I think, her internal critique of the Western philosophical tradition of Reason can be supplemented with a comprehensive external construction of a novel approach to reason, one that will move us from analytic philosophy to

cultural anthropology, from the Early Rudolph Carnap to the Late Ludwig Wittgenstein, from the essence of rationality and belief to the functions of reasons and belief systems, and, finally, from an enlightened ethnocentric epistemology to a post-ethnocentric one.

To take a cultural anthropological turn in philosophy means to look at how ideas “work” in the world. How ideas construct a take on life, come out of life, and make a living. This kind of turn in philosophy would compel us to de-emphasize the study of how ideas connect with the world and to emphasize instead how ideas enable or disable the subjectivity and agency of human beings. A turning of this sort would challenge the old hegemony of modern philosophy, changing the subject from ontology as a study of what things *are*, to ontology as what things *do*—a move from essences to functions, from “what?” to “how?”, and from “know that” to “know how.” Taking this route would put us in the company of the likes of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, William James, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty. In the remainder of the paper, I will try to show how things might look like if we embraced this approach.

The defenders of the notion of strong rationality focus on the “truth of a belief.” The defenders of the notion of weak rationality focus on the “reasons to entertain a belief.” I suggest that we speak instead of the “functions performed by a belief.” I suggest that we come up with a natural history of beliefs, like we do with organisms in the case of biology. All beliefs are not created equal. Ideas and beliefs are things that do things. Sometimes beliefs try to “represent” “reality” *a la* Western science or they have a predictive function, but oftentimes the do *many other* different things. So, from the point of view of a natural history of beliefs, the relevant questions to ask are: (1) What is it that a set of beliefs does? (2) Does it do it well or not? (3) What are the consequences of these beliefs within the whole dynamis of the life-world? (4) Beliefs are good or bad in what respects and for what purposes?

Nuccetelli points out that many weak rationality theorists sustain that Westerners are capable of critical thinking whereas primitive people are not—being either minimally critical or even noncritical in their reasoning. (28) To this I would add that weak rationality theorists do not understand that people, primitive or otherwise, might not be critical in the Western strong rationality sense of the term, without this necessarily entailing that they do not self-regulate their belief-systems. Pushing the analysis further, I would argue that people like these might value *stability* of belief-system much more than *reactivity* of belief-system to the environment, and, more importantly, that their comfort at being-in-the-world is sought out more in the mind than through a mastery of the world by means of an instrumental-scientific reasoning that allows them for a Heideggerian-like *Gestell* of the world. If this much is granted, it would appear that, in some cases, the difference between strong and weak rationality can be alternatively explained as the difference between scientific-technological approaches to the world versus other practices of coping with existence, e.g., spiritual/somatic, psychological, subjective, or ritualistic practices.

Even if we decided to stay within a realist framework and to give epistemological primacy to the strong rationality displayed by Western instrumental-scientific rationality, the Subject/World interphase is highly complex and loose, thus, often leading to the under-determination of any interpretation by all available evidence. The world is firm on occasions, but it also cuts us a lot slack. In those cases where that under-

determinacy is a fact of life, speaking as a realist, we could “fill the gap” with hermeneutical devices that bring accommodation, peace, and a feeling of security, rather than live out an agnostic existence. This epistemological move is legitimate, I think, as long as we do not impose those devices of accommodation on others. For example, religious faith is acceptable as long as it does not become a fundamentalist creed forced upon everyone or used arrogantly as an instrument of structural social, political, economic, and cultural exclusion of non-users of that hermeneutical device.

Is Western society more or less adaptive than other societies? Does instrumental-scientific rationality lead to greater adaptive potential? These are two very difficult and complex questions. The notion of adaptation needs to be unpacked and a long-term outlook toward adaptation, however conceived, is necessary. Also, unfortunately, the answer to this issue, I think, will turn out to be empirical and *post factum*, not philosophical. Besides, the Western versus non-Western rationalities—strong versus weak—issue does not have to be one between mutually exclusive choices. In fact, now I will try to show that our epistemological goal should be precisely to avoid the imposition of such an epistemological either/or.

Nuccetelli discusses the case of Asian students who come from traditional societies that allegedly employ weak rationality to study at universities in the Western world, allegedly governed by strong notions of rationality, and who do very well in their studies, as proof of the inadequacy of regarding people coming from these other cultures as being, by and large, only weakly rational. (29) Within my framework, the Asian student is not merely capable of “more developed” reasoning processes than some weak rationality theorists are willing to grant him or her. He or she is actually a “more developed” human being than the typical Western student—period. These cross-cultural students, overall, are much more developed human beings because they can use their human potentiality in more ways than the average monocultural student to cope with the human condition. With cross-culturality often comes added complexity and richness, both of which can be good, endowing their possessor with high levels of resourcefulness. However, great personal complexity and richness can also lead to problems of self-integration and social integration. These individuals can, thus, be leading highly resourceful lives while in some respects having a low quality of life.

This phenomenon seems highly paradoxical, but it is not. The more internal richness and complexity one possesses, the more effort one needs to put to integrate all that richness and complexity into a coherent whole, or at least into a highly functionally differentiated composite. Furthermore, given that humans are social animals and social integration depends to a great extent on group acceptance and recognition, the more divergent the human subject is, the harder it will be for him or her to gain that acceptance and recognition so much needed to live a good quality life.

What I am suggesting is that an individual who has high levels of internal richness and complexity will probably be highly socially divergent, within the context of a social world consisting of individuals who generally have less richness and complexity than the one possessed by this particular individual. So, for someone living in our contemporary world, a gain in resourcefulness, richness, and complexity might be counterbalanced, to a greater or lesser extent, by an increased difficulty in personal and social integration. The results of this tradeoff, I think, vary greatly from person to person and from time to time based on that ever-changing dynamic

accommodation that takes place between the personal and the social in the life of every individual human being.

The way to ideally optimize the outcome of the interaction of these forces in tension is to keep pushing for a human society of further syncretism, while simultaneously seeking ever increasing comfort levels regarding the compartmentalization of our own different “moments” of human existence—a compartmentalization of each individual’s different dimensions of selfhood. This syncretism allows us to fully develop the internal potential of people, by making use of the practices developed by human beings in different cultural contexts. Compartmentalization helps increase the functionality of a human subject/agent without the need to apply draconian measures aimed at self-integration to our own self.

Given that different cultural practices develop different human potentialities to different levels, we should make use of all of our world’s endowment of actualized human potentiality and maintain it—for it represents a library of possible human variety comprising a vast taxonomy of human potentiality. As long as humans continue being genetically what we are now, there is no danger that humans will completely lose that potentiality. However, it usually takes the existence of concrete social and cultural practices to actualize much of the human potentiality of individuals, and it takes a very long time to reinvent many of these modalities of existence once they go out of existence and back into the sea of Being. Thus, to use Clifford Geertz’s cultural anthropological parlance, why throw away all that “local knowledge” if it takes so much time and effort to develop it?

Let us follow Rorty in debunking the notion of a Master-Language of Reason and in a pragmatist embrace of a plurality of linguistic practices. Let us follow the Late Foucault in connecting this diversity of discourses to technologies of the self and to aesthetics of existence. Let us follow the Late Wittgenstein in his very anthropological move to study language, belief, knowledge, and rationality through a piecemeal study of the workings of language games within forms of life.

Doing all of this allows us to take an inventory of human potentiality in the form of a natural history of humanity, and to develop an always-tentative general economy of human existence. To the extent that we succeed doing this and putting this knowledge to good use, we will be able to live the richest possible form of life, both individually and collectively. Ironically perhaps, this syncretic outlook turns out to be a very Latin American solution to (or dissolution of) this epistemological conundrum—the final victory of pistemological *mestizaje* over epistemological Puritanism. Perhaps, after all, in Latin America lies the future of the history of Reason.

Response to José Medina And Iván Márquez¹

Susana Nuccetelli

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José Medina and Iván Márquez have raised important questions concerning my recent book, *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments* (hereafter, “LATPRA”). Before discussing some of their comments, I would like to start by outlining the general task I undertook in writing that book. Roughly, my chief goal was to refute skeptical views about the existence of a characteristically Latin American philosophy by showing that there is in fact a philosophy of that sort. Latin Americans themselves have often agreed with such skeptics, for example arguing that

All the thinkers of our America have been educated in European schools. The spirit of the race is not felt in their work. The continent’s intellectual production lacks its own characteristics. It does not have an original profile. Hispanic-American thought is generally only a rhapsody composed from the motifs and elements of European thought. To prove this, one can merely review the work of the highest representatives of the Indo-Iberian intellect. (Mariátegui, 1925, p. 118)

Consistent with this view, Augusto Salazar Bondy (1969, p. 241) famously held that in Latin America there are neither major philosophical figures nor significant “isms.” To Salazar Bondy, Latin American philosophers are imitative, lack a definitive profile, and have contributed nothing interesting to either philosophy in general or their own communities. But skeptics of this persuasion cannot succeed, since they construe the history of philosophical thought in Latin America in a way that is clearly uncharitable. LATPRA shows that not *all* Latin American thinkers accepted Western paradigms uncritically—as illustrated by the cases of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and José de Acosta. Furthermore, not all “motifs” are European, as can be seen for instance in the work of Bartolomé de las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria, and Domingo F. Sarmiento. And Latin American indigenism, autochthonous positivism, Bolívarism, and Arielism can be invoked to prove that there are original “isms” in the subcontinent after all. In addition, having a colonial mentality has not always been an obstacle to creative thinking, as exemplified in the writings of many Latin American positivists, and their opponents.

But in LATPRA, I also argue that although culturalists such as Leopoldo Zea (1948, 1989) have attempted to support the compatibility of universalism about philosophy and the possibility of a characteristically Latin American thought, they have failed to do so. For even if we accept the culturalists’ view that it is only from within a certain culture that a philosophical theory can be developed at all, the culturalist claim that the cultural perspective of the theorist always “permeates” her work does not follow. After all, I ask, what is *characteristically Greek* in Aristotle’s theory of the syllogism, or French in Descartes solution to the mind-body problem? So far, culturalists have at most shown that there is philosophy *in* Latin America, which clearly misses the point of the debate with the skeptic about whether there is a characteristically Latin American philosophy—compare ‘Thomism *in* Latin America’ and ‘Latin American Thomism.’

On my view, to be *characteristically* Latin American a philosophical theory must (1) offer new philosophical arguments, and (2) broach topics that are in part determined

by relations its proponents bear to the Latin American environment. That is, these criteria require, respectively, (1) originality, and (2) sensitivity to the environment. In *LATPRA*, I argue that if there is a role for philosophy in thinking about problems of applied philosophy, then why not also in thinking about the issues that arise in the experiences of Latin Americans? If Latin American philosophy is considered a branch of applied philosophy, universalism is compatible with the existence of a characteristically Latin American philosophy.

But my argument, if sound, would show only that such a philosophy is possible. What about the further question of whether there actually is a philosophy of that sort? An influential Argentinean philosopher, Risieri Frondizi, illustrates skepticism about the latter. He writes,

It is undeniable that the works of Sarmiento, Bello, or Martí ...contain philosophical ideas. But such ideas appear as a result of literary or political concerns to which they remain subordinated. *In none of them does philosophy have an independent status; none of them set forth philosophical problems motivated by philosophical interests.* In their work... *philosophy has been subordinated to non-philosophical interests* (Frondizi 1949, 346. Emphasis mine).

Here Frondizi holds that to be philosophical, a theory must set forth philosophical problems motivated (mainly?) by philosophical interests. Given that conditions, the existence of a characteristically Latin American thought is compatible with the absence of a philosophy of that kind. But *LATPRA* shows that in Latin America scoring high in Frondizi's condition comes with a poor performance in conditions (1) and (2) above—which I consider essential for a theory to be characteristically Latin American. This is clear not only in the work of the 'founders' (Alejandro Korn, Carlos Vaz Ferreira, Antonio Caso, José Vasconcelos, Francisco Romero, and Samuel Ramos), but also that of Latin American analytic philosophers, and Marxists. Furthermore, given Frondizi's condition, Hobbes, Saint-Simon, Bentham, Mill, Marx, Sartre, and Rawls would be ruled out of strict philosophy—which suggests that Frondizi's condition is too demanding. In addition, that condition seems grounded on nothing more than an old prejudice which takes "first philosophy" to have a higher status than the rest. Thus *LATPRA* rejects that condition, concluding (pp. 252-253) that "there is philosophy in Latin American thought—even though it is not always philosophers have produced it. Progress in encouraging fruitful work in the philosophy of the subcontinent can be made only if... we ourselves engage in reflecting upon issues specific to the diverse experience of Hispanic America."

II

Let me now consider some of José's and Iván's criticisms to *LATPRA*. In the first two chapters, the book raises the problem of Mayan rationality. There is evidence that these indigenous peoples of Meso-America went about rational prediction in ways that differ radically from those of contemporary Western culture. To José, any attempt to ask about Mayan rationality is ethnocentric, since on his view, a less morally objectionable debate must instead ask *why* Westerners ever doubted that those peoples were rational. I believe that there are two different questions here that must not be conflated. The one preferred by José concerns the history of knowledge, falling in the domains of social epistemology. The other question, which I discuss in *LATPRA*, concerns rational prediction in the West and in Maya society, falling in the domains of metaphysics and comparative epistemology. Given both the centrality of prediction among the indigenous peoples of Latin America,

and available evidence about their epistemic practices grounded on prediction, it is difficult to find any support for the view that *LATPRA*'s question ought not to be asked by those who interested in metaphysical issues involving rationality.

Iván also contends that my treatment of Mayan rationality is ethnocentric, as it is conducted within "the strong *vs.* weak rationality discourse." *LATPRA*, however, rejects that distinction, clearly arguing that it would be uncharitable to ascribe to the Mayans only 'weak rationality.' I offer two reasons against such an ascription: (a) 'weak rationality' amounts to 'having a rationale,' which lacks the evaluative force often associated with 'strong rationality;' and (b) it is ethnocentric to ascribe only weak rationality to the Mayans, since that notion can also truly apply to some non-human animals and infants.

Yet I agree with Iván in many of his insights on pluralism, relativism, and contextualism, and believe that some of his examples in fact show that the same set of beliefs may perform more than one function. But such a view is consistent with that defended in *LATPRA* (see chapter 4). José, on the other hand, needs to find some other examples to support his contention that both a robust notion of objectivity and a nonrelativistic notion of truth are compatible with contextualism. His appeal to Hilary Putnam cannot be of help here, since given Putnam's conceptual relativism (e.g., 1987), there is no "neutral" construal of objectivity, and truth must be cashed out as warranted assertability, which boils down to a relativistic notion of truth.

Another point of disagreement I would like to discuss concerns Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: was she a radical feminist? To answer this questions we need of course to look closely at her writings. Consider, for example, the following passage in a letter to her confessor, My studies have not been to the harm or detriment of any person, having been so extremely private that I have not even enjoyed the direction of a teacher, but have learned only from myself and my work, for I am not unaware that to study publicly in schools is not seemly for a woman's honor...[B]ut private and individual study, who has forbidden that to women? Like men, do they not have a rational soul? Why then shall they not enjoy the privilege of the enlightenment of letters?" (Paz, "The letter," in *Sor Juana*, p. 498)

Although here Sor Juana clearly shows her commitment to women rights to education and knowledge, an adequate answer to the above question would ultimately depend on how we construe the *radical* position in feminist epistemology. From a view proposed by Lorraine Code (1988), we can extract these two theses:

- RP* (i) There is *no* objective truth to be known by anyone, and
(ii) Women and men might acquire knowledge in ways that are relevantly different.

If the radical position is construed in this way, it would indeed amount to an inconsistent form of relativism. As argued in *LATPRA*, we could raise the usual objection against such a relativist position: if (i), then *knowledge cannot be objective*. But then, how are *we* supposed to know that *RP* is true? Yet by sincerely asserting theses (i) and (ii), aren't we claiming that they *are* true?

At this point, however, some may point out that radical feminism need not be construed as *RP*. Such a reply would, if sound, have the consequence that my argument here would be a strawman. Yet that reply cannot be supported, since the

standard radical feminist critique of traditional epistemology (as directed, for example, against Descartes' argument for external-world skepticism and the Gettier problem) makes little sense without theses such as (i) and (ii).

Sor Juana's views were, however, quite radical in her day, and certainly perceived as a menace in colonial Mexico. Like other subversive Hispanic intellectuals of the time, she was persecuted and ultimately crushed so that the Scholastic order in Latin America would remain undisturbed. In any case, our debate here shows that the lives and writings of intellectuals such as Sor Juana are worth discussing, for they raise interesting philosophical issues for us today and help us to make sense of the diverse experience of Hispanic Americans. In discussions like this, we ourselves prove that there is a characteristically Latin American philosophy.

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Endnotes

1. This paper summarizes my remarks at an author-meets-critics session of the APA Central Divisional Meeting held in Chicago, April 2002. I am grateful for the critical comments of the participants José Medina, and Iván Márquez, and of the chair, Bernard Baumrin.

INTERVIEWS

A View From Somewhere: The Philosophical Hermeneutics of a Hispanic Philosopher: An Interview with Jorge J. E. Gracia, Samuel P. Capen Chair and SUNY Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, SUNY-Buffalo

Interviewer: Iván Márquez, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Bentley College, Waltham, MA



Jorge J. E. Gracia, the Samuel P. Capen Chair and SUNY Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at SUNY-Buffalo, is one of the preeminent Hispanic philosophers working in the United States. His research spans the areas of metaphysics/ontology, philosophical historiography, philosophy of language/hermeneutics, medieval/Scholastic philosophy, and Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy. His work can be characterized as a sustained effort to

bring Iberian and Latin American philosophy into the Anglo-American philosophical dialogue. Furthermore, and more importantly, Gracia is one of the first philosophers to have delved into the metaphysics of ethnicity and the contextualized epistemology of the situatedness of any act of philosophizing. One of the strengths of Gracia's research is his showing that philosophy is universal, but also how it necessarily comes out of somewhere in particular. Gracia's whole *oeuvre* explores the metaphysics and epistemology of this view from somewhere—of the conditions of immanence involved in any act of transcendence, but always with the ultimate interest to transcend this very immanence to discover the universal fact, value, or category that transcends any immanent view.

At the professional level, Gracia is one of the first Hispanic philosophers working in the United States who views himself as such. This self-perception has strongly influenced his philosophical career, putting him at the forefront in his role as scholar and promoter of Hispanic philosophy and Hispanic philosophers within American academia and the APA.

Professor Gracia has a BA from Wheaton College (1965), MA from the University of Chicago (1966), MSL from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (1970), and a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Toronto (1971). He has been a visiting professor at several universities in Europe and Latin America. He was awarded the John N. Findlay Prize in Metaphysics by the Metaphysical Society of America (1992) and has received numerous grants, including an NEH Research Grant (1981-82) and Goethe Institute Grant (1983).

Professor Gracia has served as APA member of the Eastern Division Executive Committee (1996-99). He has also been president of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy (1991-93), Society for Iberian and Latin American Thought (1986-88), Federación Internacional de Estudios sobre América Latina y el Caribe (1987-89), American Catholic Philosophical Association (1997-98), and the Metaphysical Society of America (2000-01). In addition, Professor Gracia is

an active member of the editorial boards of *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofía*, *Cuadernos de Ética*, *Analogía*, *Medievalia*, *Philosophia Scientifica*, *Tópicos*, *Essays in Philosophy*, *Devenires*, *The New Centennial Review*, *Quaestio*, and Editor of the SUNY Series in Latin American and Iberian Thought and Culture.

His publications include close to 200 articles, 45 reviews, and almost 30 books, editions, and translations. Some of his books are *Individuality: An Essay on the Foundations of Metaphysics* (1988), *Philosophy and its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* (1992), *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (1995), *Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience* (1996), *Metaphysics and its Task: The Search for the Categorical Foundation of Knowledge* (1999), *Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (2000). His latest book is *How Can We Know What God Means? The Interpretation of Revelation*, St. Martin's Press, 2001. The book presents a philosophical understanding of the conditions that must be satisfied by the interpretation of texts that are regarded as revealed by religious communities. In this book, Professor Gracia argues for the centrality of theological interpretations, for the logical possibility but the factual difficulty of definitive interpretations of revelation, and for the relativity of, but not relativism in, these interpretations.

In this interview, Professor Gracia talks about the connection between metaphysics, hermeneutics, and ethnicity, the role of philosophy in contemporary American society, the nature of Latin-American philosophy and its institutional possibility within American academia, and the character of a philosophical life—in this case, his life.

A. Metaphysics, Hermeneutics, and Ethnicity

MARQUEZ: What have been your main research interests during the past few years?

GRACIA: Metaphysics and hermeneutics. The interest in metaphysics, though, has been present throughout my entire career. As you know, my training in graduate school was geared toward medieval philosophy. But already in this historical period I concentrated on metaphysics. My Licentiate thesis from Toronto had to do with universals in an obscure 14th century author, and shortly after I received the PhD, I began to work on the metaphysical issues related to individuality and individuation, first in Francisco Suárez, and then in the early Middle Ages. The work on individuality culminated in a systematic treatment of the subject published in 1988. So metaphysics has always been at the center of my philosophical concerns.

Up to the second half of the 1980s, I had not taken any interest in hermeneutics. And by the way, by 'hermeneutics' I mean the theory of interpretation—the term is used in so many different senses today that it is difficult to know what is meant when anyone uses it. When I use it, I have something rather traditional in mind that goes back to Schleiermacher and beyond.

At any rate, in the late eighties, a colleague of mine (Peter Hare) organized a conference in Buffalo on issues related to philosophical historiography. I had been doing history of philosophy for a great part of my career until then, but I had not really explicitly confronted historiographical issues. Obviously, the only thing we have from the philosophical past is texts. So a number of questions arise concerning these: What is a text? How is a text related to the author? Can we figure out what an author thought from the study of a text? Is authorial

interpretation the right kind of interpretation? What are the identity conditions of a text? And so on. This got me started

The questions on which I focused first had to do with philosophical historiography in particular. So I came out with a fat book on the subject. But I had hardly finished writing it when I realized how dissatisfied I was with what I had done. I had included in it a chapter on the nature of texts and their interpretation, but this did not do justice to the logical, metaphysical, and epistemological issues that can be raised about this topic. Besides, I had been dealing only with philosophical texts. But what is one to do about other texts? This led me to write three other books. The first two are concerned with generic issues of textuality and interpretation, and the last one, which appeared just recently, raises the question of the interpretation of texts that are regarded as divinely revealed by communities of religious believers. My interest in this last topic goes back to the fact that hermeneutics began in the West in the context of the interpretation of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The names of authors like Origen and Augustine loom large in this context, for they set the parameters for the discussion of the issues for centuries, and in many ways they framed the pertinent questions that we are still trying to answer today. As you know, once certain questions are asked in certain ways, it is difficult to rephrase them; we are all very sheepish about these matters, we tend to follow someone's else lead. Only a few thinker in each generation are able to break out of the conceptual cages in which the past has imprisoned them, and often there is a heavy price to be paid for this "uncollegial" attitude.

Now, where do I go from here insofar as hermeneutics is concerned? Currently I am working on tradition. This is a much maligned topic. You might ask: Tradition in the twenty-first century? Doesn't this smack of conservatism, incense, and repression? Isn't tradition a way of maintaining the status quo and thus preserve privilege on one side and disadvantage on the other? These are good and pertinent questions that need answers. But my interest is more basic. Indeed, upon reflection, it turns out that tradition is a key concept that not only underlies much of what we think about but can be used and has been used to account for communication, the preservation and transference of knowledge and memories, and group identity. (Alasdair MacIntyre used it in an ethical context, even.) Consider three key questions: How do I know what you mean? How can we preserve and pass on past discoveries? And, what is the glue that keeps ethnic and national groups together? Part of the answer lies in tradition, and so I am addressing these questions in a short book that will come out in the Marquette Aquinas Lecture series. I am due to deliver the lecture in 2003.

Beyond this, and in the area of hermeneutics, I think my last gasp will be a book on the interpretation of literary texts. As you know, this is a topic that has been at the center of hermeneutics in recent years and I need to address it in particular because I have proposed a theory of literature than goes contrary to most mainline thinking. Indeed, mainline thinking is that it is impossible to formulate a cogent theory of the literary, and therefore that one should not try. But I have tried and now I need to take it into account for a proper theory of literary interpretation. The central claim of the theory is that literature falls into the category of art, but that its matter is words.

But, what about metaphysics? In fact, much of what I have done in the books on hermeneutics is actually metaphysics, for I asked questions about what texts are, and the same goes for interpretation, and so on. In doing this, I have been trying to develop categorizations which I regard as metaphysical. You

need to keep in mind that I have proposed a view of metaphysics as the study of most general categories and of how less general ones are related to these. This proposal came out in 1999 in a book, but it has actually informed most of what I have done before and after then. So my metaphysical project and interest continue.

The next step I expect will be a book on categories. This is a much neglected topic. Indeed, with the Foucaultian view that categories are mere inventions has also come a rather disparagement of them and any studies geared toward their understanding. But of course, whether categories are inventions or not, they still inform all our thought and therefore need to be taken seriously. It is therefore surprising that so little has been done to explore the nature of categories, and that what has been done is almost exclusively directed toward the establishment of the list of most general categories rather than trying to understand what categories are. This is, for example, what Roderick Chisholm and Reinhardt Grossmann have done.

I have already proposed a *prima facie* understanding of categories in the book on metaphysics I mentioned, and elsewhere I have written about the issue of invention, construction, and discovery, but much more needs to be done. Eventually, I will give it a try. So far, I have come up with the view of a category as what is expressed by a predicable term, which in turn implies that a category, qua category, is whatever it is as determined by its proper definition, and nothing more, for that is what the predicable term that names the category expresses. This avoids the exclusive identification of categories with realities, concepts, words, predicates, properties, universals, meanings, conditions, and so on. Moreover, it sidesteps the vexing issue of whether categories are real, conceptual or linguistic, for there are certainly some categories that are real, some that are conceptual, and some that are linguistic. But this is a long story that I have told only in part.

MARQUEZ: Can you explain in a nutshell, the general outlines of your theories of textuality and interpretation?

GRACIA: I have written four books dealing with issues related to textuality and interpretation, and they are big books. So it is not easy to summarize them and do justice to the complexity of the issues and the overall theory they present. Perhaps the best way to answer your question is to take each book separately and say something about it.

The first book I wrote on this topic was *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* (1992). This presents a systematic and comprehensive treatment of issues involved in philosophical historiography in particular, and thus on the interpretation of philosophical texts. It deals with such topics as the relation of philosophy to its history, the role of value judgments in historical accounts, the value of the history of philosophy for philosophy, the nature and role of texts and their interpretation in the history of philosophy, historiographical method, and the stages of development of philosophical progress. The book defends two main theses. The first is that the history of philosophy must be done philosophically, that is, it must include philosophical judgments. The second is that one way to bring about a rapprochement between Analytic and Continental philosophy is through the study of the history of philosophy and its historiography. By the first thesis I mean that historical accounts of philosophy should include descriptive, interpretative, and evaluative judgments. The view that the history of philosophy is purely descriptive, purely interpretative, or purely evaluative is wrong.

All this is presented as a response to two concerns. The first is purely historiographical. As philosophers, we are constantly using and interpreting texts, but how can we be sure that we are doing this correctly, and what is the proper way of doing it? Central to this issue, of course, is the possibility of the recovery of past ideas and the solution to the conundrum known as the Hermeneutic Circle (i.e., that we can't transcend language). The second concern that inspired the book is the division between so-called Analytic and Continental philosophers—so I explore the origins of the division and propose the mentioned solution.

Once I finished this book, as mentioned earlier, I realized that the issues of textuality and interpretation I had raised in it needed separate attention. So I began work on a large project, which ended with the publication of two books: *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (1995) and *Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience* (1996). The first presents the first comprehensive and systematic theory of textuality ever attempted, taking into account the views of both Analytic and Continental philosophers and the pertinent positions developed in the history of philosophy by a variety of major figures. It shows that most confusions surrounding texts and textuality are the result of three factors: a too-narrow understanding of the category of texts; a lack of a proper distinction among logical, epistemological, and metaphysical issues; and a lack of a proper grounding of epistemological and metaphysical questions on logical analyses.

The book begins with an analysis of the notion of a text resulting in a definition that serves as the basis for the distinctions subsequently drawn between texts on the one hand and works, language, artifacts, and art objects on the other. A text is defined as a group of entities, used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an audience. Works are the meanings of certain texts when meaning is understood broadly. Language consists of a collection of words and the rules on how to put the words together. Artifacts are products of intentional activity and design. And art objects require being regarded as capable of producing an artistic experience, which in turn is analyzed in terms of artifactuality and a capacity to cause an aesthetic experience. All these are controversial views. After I deal with these, I offer a classification of texts based on their modality and function.

The second part of the book uses the conclusions of the first part to solve various epistemological issues which have been raised about texts and their interpretation by philosophers of language, semioticians, hermeneuticists, literary critics, semanticists, aestheticians, and historiographers. The main conclusion of this part is that textual interpretation is a matter of textual function understood in a cultural context. I also present the distinction between what I then called textual interpretations—which have historical, meaning, or implicative functions—and nontextual interpretations—which have the function of relating a text or its meaning to something else that the interpreter brings into the picture, such as a Freudian, Christian, or Feminist scheme.

The main tenets of the view presented in *Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience* are that texts are ontologically complex and constituted by entities considered to have a mental relation to meaning. The issues addressed in this book arise because, even if one settles on a definition of texts as I gave earlier, lingering questions remain about the categorization of texts in terms of most general categories. Are texts properties of objects, relations, qualities, and so on?

What are the conditions of their identity, and how are they related to authors and audiences?

Obviously, the entities that constitute texts can be individual or universal, physical or mental, and substances or features of substances. But texts can be constituted only by substances considered as characterized by features or by the features of substances. Moreover, texts are always aggregates with meanings but, like their meanings, they can be individual or universal. Individual texts have the existence and location proper to the individuals in question, whereas universal texts are neutral with respect to existence and location, and their historicity is the historicity of their instances.

The identity conditions of texts—whether we are speaking achronically, synchronically, or diachronically—include the identity conditions of the entities of which they are constituted and their meaning. Accordingly, the identification and re-identification of texts require knowledge of those conditions in most cases.

The notion of author is not univocal. One can distinguish among several authors of a text (historical, pseudo-historical, interpretive, and so on), and therefore several functions as well, although the historical author is generally regarded as paradigmatic. Historical authors are responsible for the elements of novelty in a text; they create texts and therefore are necessary to them. The often discussed “repressive character” of an author is not always so and never applies to the historical author. When repression occurs, it is exercised by the view an audience has of the historical author; that is, by what I call the pseudo-historical author.

The notion of audience also is not univocal and neither are its functions. The audience contemporaneous with the historical author is paradigmatic, and its function is to understand the text. Texts are never without audiences, for the author includes the function of audience. Audiences, like authors, can act repressively, and they can be subversive when they distort the meaning of texts. In the discussion, I try to strike a sensible middle ground between the excesses of those traditionalists who give a place of prominence to authors to the detriment of the audience, and the postmodernists who do the reverse. Extremes are frequent in philosophy and in this context they are particularly acute, even if they make little sense and would appear ridiculous to an ordinary person.

The fourth, and most recent book I have written on hermeneutics is *How Can We Know What God Means? The Interpretation of Revelation* (2001). This deals in particular with the question of how to interpret texts that are regarded as revealed by communities of religious believers.

To ask about how we can know what God means is in fact to ask about the meaning of what a community of religious believers believes is a divine text, for a divine text is what I call revelation, or revealed text. And to ask how we can know what this divine text means is to ask how we can understand it. What are, then, the conditions under which this understanding is possible? This is the question the book asks and attempts to answer from a strictly philosophical standpoint.

The answer it gives is that these kinds of texts require a theological interpretation, that is, an interpretation from the articulated point of view of the religious beliefs of the community that holds them to have a divine origin. The importance of other interpretations depends on the theological parameters held by the community. This means that we can only legitimately judge the legitimacy of the interpretation of these texts from within a theological tradition, and not from outside it. However, this does not entail that the theological tradition cannot itself be judged, although the judgment about

it has to be made based on the most general epistemic principles of understanding, therefore falling outside hermeneutics and being part of the province of epistemology. I also discuss the issues of definitive interpretations and relativism.

MARQUEZ: Can you sketch a conceptual bridge between your interest in metaphysics and ontology and your interest in ethnicity issues?

GRACIA: Of course. Unfortunately, most of what has been done with respect to ethnicity, and also race and nationality—which are closely related topics—has completely ignored metaphysics. Now, if you keep in mind that for me metaphysics consists in part in the attempt to relate less general categories to the most general ones, you can see how important a metaphysics of ethnicity, race, and nationality is. For, how can we really make any progress in the understanding of these categories if we do not really know where they fit in an overall conceptual scheme?

Most discussions of these categories simply assume certain metaphysical views about them. These unstated assumptions, then, vitiate the parameters of the discussions and often force conclusions that seem absurd or contradictory. To present these, the discussion of the political and social issues surrounding ethnicity, race, and nationality needs to be grounded on adequate metaphysical categorizations. Yet, if you take race, for example, there is only one article on its metaphysics in an enormous literature, and this is J. S. Mill’s excellent piece. About ethnicity, the only thing available is what I say about it in my book on Hispanic/Latino identity. Of course, there are many people who make comments that certainly imply a metaphysics or are in fact metaphysical claims, but there is no attempt at critically examining such claims and developing an adequate view. Indeed, not just metaphysicians, but philosophers in general have stayed at the margins of the discussion of ethnicity and race in particular. Consider that only two of the thirty-eight authors who contributed to Blackwell’s massive *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies* (2002) are connected to philosophy departments, and only one of them has philosophy as his main base. This is nothing short of a scandal.

In part the reason for this neglect is that there is considerable ideology that infests the discussions of these topics. Many people have already made up their minds, and many are out to push certain ideological programs to which they are committed. And I mean people from the left and the right. And there are also the self-serving types. There are many people who are making a good living, and becoming famous (or notorious—in contemporary America this distinction has ceased to exist) simply by saying outrageous things, or by appealing to the feelings of audiences. Race, ethnicity, and nationality are explosive topics because they affect the well-being of many people, and many persons have suffered as a consequence of political and other kinds of decisions related to them. So it is easy to play on their emotions.

Another factor at play in this neglect is the division between so-called Analytic and Continental philosophers. The former avoid these topics because they consider them “soft” and permeated by confusions and ideology. The second ignore them because they philosophize by commenting on the work of certain past philosophers and these either ignore these topics or say things about them that are absurd and even occasionally malicious, so they cannot serve as a foundation for serious reflection.

Finally, there are disciplinary people who look at these phenomena only through narrow disciplinary parameters. In many ways they cannot be blamed for their shortsightedness, but we need to expand their horizons. Ethnicity, race, and nationality have many dimensions in contemporary society and for this reason their study cannot be limited to a single discipline, not even to a few. But even if we have many disciplines looking at them, how are we to put all this information together? Only philosophy can do it, for only philosophy can mediate among different disciplines, and only philosophy can function as a critic of all knowledge. But the basic stuff out of which philosophy is made is metaphysics. So we are back to the connection between metaphysics and ethnicity, race, and nationality. And this is why I am writing a book on this subject, which I hope will break new ground.

MARQUEZ: Does your research in hermeneutics illuminate/influence in any way your take on Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy?

GRACIA: Yes, indeed, for my main claim about the study of the history of philosophy is that it needs to be done philosophically. By this I mean that the views of philosophers from the past or the present need to be looked at as claims that want to be understood as philosophical claims. And if they are philosophical, they need to have philosophical criteria applied to them. We must be prepared, then, not only to describe and interpret, but also to evaluate. It is commonplace to believe that historians of philosophy should keep themselves at a distance from their subjects. They can tell us what someone said or thought, but they should never tell us what is wrong with it.

This is a mistake, because the very process of interpretation requires selection and this involves evaluation. And the very process of understanding requires the kind of connections that require evaluation. Of course, the case of Latin-American philosophy is not different. What Latin-American philosophers have said needs to be taken as philosophical claims and thus treated philosophically.

Unfortunately, one of the great problems of Latin-American philosophy is that Latin-American philosophers themselves do not treat each other as philosophers and do not think of their history philosophically. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is that they are taught in school that what one does when one studies philosophy is merely to learn what others have said or claimed. The other reason is that, in Latin America, philosophy is often taken as an expression of one's personality. So to attack the ideas of a philosopher turns out to be an attack on his or her person. Why is this the case? Many reasons, but one of these is the pervasive influence of José Ortega y Gasset in Latin America. Ortega y Gasset was a megalomaniac and accepted the view of philosophy as a personal thing. Miguel de Unamuno also had something to do with this. The result is that meetings of Latin-American philosophers are filled with boring platitudes, and little is done to really interact with the ideas put forth and judge them. It is very sad and I do not know that anything can be, or will be, done about it. But if the situation continues, Latin-American philosophy is doomed.

But let me also say something about the terms you used in your question: 'Hispanic philosophy,' 'Latino philosophy,' and 'Latin-American philosophy.' All these terms are in use, but they do not have the same meaning. The first term is the most encompassing, for it refers to the philosophy produced by all Hispanics-Latin Americans, Iberians, and Hispanics in the US and elsewhere. The second term is the narrowest, for it refers only to Hispanics of Latin-American origin residing in

the US. Latin-American philosophy is somewhere in between, including the philosophy of all countries of Latin America, but excluding those from the Iberian peninsula. In principle this should include not just Spanish and Portuguese America but also French America. In practice, however, it refers only to the first two. Although I have argued, on historical grounds, for the use of the term 'Hispanic philosophy' to include all the philosophy of the Iberian peninsula and Iberian America, I have no objection to the use of the other terms, as long as they are understood with some precision.

MARQUEZ: How did you get interested/Why did you undertake a philosophical inquiry into issues of ethnicity?

GRACIA: Do you want a personal answer or a non-personal one? Both apply, I imagine, so I will give you both. On the personal level, which is less philosophically interesting, the fact that I belong to an ethnic group had much to do with it. I should make clear that I have never experienced blatant discrimination, for example. And in fact many people would think that I have been treated very well and professionally have gotten more than I deserve. And they may be right. But I should also say that I have encountered situations in which being Hispanic has in fact affected how I am treated in subtle ways, and certainly the ways in which people talk about, and to, me. I have mentioned some of these in my book on Hispanic/Latino identity, so I will not repeat them here. Indeed, others—who are not members of my ethnic group—have remarked on it. For example, a few years back, the Canadian Society for Hermeneutics scheduled a session on the two books on hermeneutics I had published then. The attendance was not bad, but one of the organizers said to me afterwards: "If instead of a Spanish name you had a French one, the room would have been filled to capacity." Not long after that, another Anglo philosopher said to me that the major obstacle to Anglo philosophers taking my views seriously was that I had a Spanish surname.

These experiences naturally have had the effect of making me aware of ethnicity and, as a philosopher, it is hard for me to ignore a topic that is brought up to my attention. The question of who we are is something important for all of us. I think we work on it from the moment we are born until the moment we die. So the question of the part played by ethnicity and group identity in personal identity then is inescapable. I am struggling with some of these issues in the book I am writing at the moment and to which I alluded earlier, *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality*.

Now for the non-personal question. From the early seventies, I have been reading Latin-American philosophers, and one of their main interests has been the question of identity, and in particular Latin-American, Hispanic, or national identities. The result is that I have been exposed to a large body of literature concerned with topics that are closely related to the ethnic issues that are only now being seriously raised in the US. This naturally generated an interest that otherwise I might not have developed.

B. Philosophy and Society

MARQUEZ: What roles do you see for philosophy and philosophers within contemporary American society?

GRACIA: Let's face it, philosophy is a marginal discipline if judged by the role that other disciplines play in American society. Moreover, philosophers do not generally fit the mold of what people think of as "successful" or "agreeable" persons. They do not earn large salaries; they reside in ivory towers; they are not cheerleaders for the latest fad; they are cynical about "progress"; they distrust politicians and sales people;

they tend to be abrasive and blunt; they have strong opinions and they express them without qualms; they often stand on what they consider to be matters of principle; they are seldom glib or poised; and so on. In short, they are a pain in that part of the body that is often referred to with a three-letter word. So how can we be surprised that they do not play large roles in the country? Who would want them around? Besides, they have a serious handicap and that is that they seldom, if ever, agree with each other. So those interested in moving forward and accomplishing something naturally want to get as far away from philosophers as possible. And they cannot be blamed. Besides, philosophy is a field in which everyone thinks himself or herself an expert. (None of this is new, of course. Just read what Plato tells us Socrates had to say about philosophers.)

Under these conditions, it is unrealistic to expect that philosophers will play any kind of major direct role in American society in the sense of being part of the government or being conspicuous in the media. And this, as I have argued elsewhere, might be just right. I think that our role is primarily a different one. Our influence is precisely in what we do best, in educating and criticizing, even if this is not all we do. Our quarrelsome nature is part of our virtue. Our intransigence, when it comes to principle, is a blessing. And our surliness is a wake-up call in a society that prefers sleep to being confronted with stark and painful realities. We are the gadflies. And we are the people who first alert the young. Only open societies can tolerate us, and only those societies that tolerate us can really move forward, for we provide a needed balance to all the nonsense that goes unquestioned, and the religious fanaticism and unreflective nationalism that permeates most of the world. Someone has to tell the emperor that he wears no clothes, and it is our job to do it, and also to tell the young men and women of this country, and elsewhere, how to do it. But certainly we cannot expect to be loved for it.

MARQUEZ: What about the role of the intellectual in Europe though? Don't you think that the situation in the US is more directly related to American anti-intellectualism, which in turn is connected to its anti-elitist, populist self-image and its allegedly anti-ideological, no-nonsense pragmatism? Also, what about philosophers like Richard Rorty, Cornel West, Martha Nussbaum, and Noam Chomsky? Are they exceptions to the rule or are they in some way actually betraying the true philosophical vocation of being a noncommittal detached gadfly? Shouldn't a philosophical education instill a commitment to a critical engagement with the world rather than simply to a detached critical understanding of it?

GRACIA: Well, I see that you have taken out the heavy artillery. Obviously, El Morro at San Juan is well prepared for battle! So, let me see what I can do.

First of all, I have not argued that being a gadfly is our only goal and function. Surely philosophers do all sorts of other things. After all, the primary job of the philosopher is to develop conceptual schemes that serve to understand ourselves and the world. And these also have a function in society, although most of these schemes are couched in terminology that is inaccessible to the general public and only filters to them through the work of others, of intermediaries. But in the social context being a gadfly seems to be, indeed, the primary goal we serve. And I do not think this is a result of American anti-intellectualism, for Socrates was the quintessential gadfly and he had nothing to do with this.

And by the way, I have not said anything about a "detached critical understanding." Indeed, criticism is seldom detached. We criticize because there is something that irks us, something with which we do not agree, something that we feel needs to

be corrected. There is nothing wrong with this. As human beings, we are not logical machines. Our feelings are part of our make up. Now, keep in mind that criticism goes hand in hand with clarification and understanding. And also that behind every criticism there is a standpoint, a conceptual framework that is being used.

As for European intellectuals and such public intellectuals in this country as you named, are they betraying philosophy by engaging in public discussion and dialogue? Of course not. But if you take a careful look at what these intellectuals do, you will notice that much of it is precisely to criticize. How else are we going to understand West's challenges to the dichotomy conservative/liberal, Chomsky's tirades against the Establishment, and Russell's pacifism? It seems to me that what you just said in fact confirms, rather than undermines, what I have been claiming. At the same time, these authors have also work which is constructive, and which supports their critical interaction with society, but this work is often technical and accessible primarily to other philosophers.

MARQUEZ: What do you make of the notion of a philosophical dialogue, in light of your interests in hermeneutics?

GRACIA: Dialogue among philosophers is extremely important, although strictly speaking it is not necessary. If dialogue were necessary, it would be contradictory to have a first philosopher who had no other philosopher to dialogue with. Of course, philosophers can always dialogue with non-philosophers, and the case for this is more compelling. But even here, I do not see that this is logically necessary in that I can think of a philosopher who philosophizes by himself or herself, without talking about this activity with anyone else. Indeed, this probably goes on all the time in areas of the world where philosophy is regarded as suspect, either because totalitarian regimes (of the left or the right) are in power who fear the exchange of ideas, or because there are religious and social taboos (sometimes dominating the government as well) that prevent people from expressing their thoughts freely without incurring nefarious consequences. I do not think examples are difficult to come by. Indeed, I would say that in most places philosophy is discouraged, and the freedom to philosophize that we enjoy in the US and other parts of the Western world is rather the exception than the rule.

Of course, true dialogue, I have argued elsewhere, requires the possibility that those engaged in the dialogue can change their minds. If the views of interlocutors are such that this is impossible, then we do not have a dialogue but soliloquies. But, be that as it may, it is clear that the pursuit of philosophy benefits from dialogue for two reasons. One is that philosophy has a fundamentally critical component. I would not go so far as to say, as some philosophers would want to say, that philosophy is nothing more than criticism. Philosophy has also a constructive role. The aim is to try to put all our knowledge together in a consistent and adequate framework that helps us to act appropriately and effectively. But this kind of enterprise has two sides to it: the constructive and the critical. Consistency and adequacy cannot survive without a strong element of criticism. This is one reason why the practice of philosophy needs dialogue, for dialogue facilitates criticism. Chances are that philosophers who avoid dialogue will not subject their views to the kind of criticism that is essential.

The second reason is that philosophy always arises within a culture. The idea that we begin to philosophize from scratch, as Descartes thought, from a kind of *tabula rasa*, is completely wrong headed. Aristotle was right on this. We begin where we are—with a language and a culture, or as Ortega y Gasset would put it, from our circumstance. Then, when we try to

make sense of the different pieces of information and claims that bombard us, we introduce an element of criticism. And, of course, this is much easier if we engage in dialogue with others, particularly those who disagree with us. And since it is more likely that we find disagreement in those who do not belong to our own culture and who speak a different language, dialogue with them becomes very important. J. S. Mill believed that we profit most not by considering the views of those who agree with us, but rather of those who disagree most strongly with us. This applies also in the cultural realm: Foreign cultures are a challenge to our own and that is why we need to consider them.

Mind you, I am not saying that every culture is as good as any other; that there are no general standards of justice (for example, that it is just to prevent women from getting an education in certain places because that is what a particular culture mandates, or that it is just to circumcise them in other places for the same reason). I am not a cultural relativist in philosophy. I do not believe that the principle of non-contradiction or the principle of identity are culturally relative. And I do not believe that justice is a matter of culture. Socrates made that clear many years ago. Those who hold a contrary view must accept two rather unpalatable consequences: (1) might is right, and (2) the disadvantaged will continue to be so to the extent they have no power and there is no advantage in giving it to them on the part of those who have power.

But I do not think any particular culture, including Western culture, has a lock on what is true, best, or right, as some conservatives seem to think. This is why I believe that intercultural dialogue is essential. If this is what is meant by “intercultural philosophy,” I am all for it. But if those who adhere to this view have in mind a wishy-washy cultural relativism in order to make us feel good, then I must part company with them. My point is that it might turn out that Hindu culture is right about something or other about which our Western culture is wrong, and therefore it is likely that a Hindu philosopher from India will get a point that we miss, or vice versa. But I am not willing to accept the view that transcultural criticism is impossible and that it is the job of philosophy to accommodate all views. If that is what G. W. F. Hegel meant, by the way, he was wrong, but I do not think he did. It is only those who think he did who are wrong.

MARQUEZ: And what about the notion of interdisciplinary dialogue and philosophy’s possible role in it?

GRACIA: This is very important. As I said earlier, philosophy has a unique position among human disciplines of learning. Philosophy is the only discipline that tries to put all our learning together. It is also the only discipline that includes metaphysics, logic, epistemology, and ethics—to mention just four important subdisciplines of it. This means that the general framework that philosophy tries to develop is unique and goes beyond what particular disciplines can provide, and even beyond what all the disciplines outside philosophy taken together can provide. There is no other discipline that studies the most general categories, for example, not even physics. This should be clear.

However, philosophers need to pay attention to the conclusions of other disciplines of learning both because they supply information that philosophy cannot get by itself and also because philosophy needs their conclusions to integrate them into the general framework that philosophy aims to develop. We need to take into account the conclusions of physics, sociology, political science and so on; we need to investigate what they tell us and why. This is the starting point

of our task as philosophers, and a requirement of its accomplishment.

Unfortunately, most philosophers pay no attention to the results of other disciplinary studies. We get wrapped up in irrelevant conundrums of our own making, useless linguistic games, and petty fights for turf, and we forget the world out there. This world is composed of what science tells us, in addition to what we get from religion, culture, and so on. If philosophy is going to go anywhere, it needs to become aware of what goes on outside philosophy. But again I must qualify. This does not mean that philosophy has to become interdisciplinary. Indeed, I do not quite know what ‘interdisciplinary’ means—the word is used in so many different ways! What I mean is that philosophy has to take into account what non-philosophers have to say. Indeed, I would suggest that it would be a good idea that every graduate program in philosophy does what Texas A & M has done with its doctoral program, namely, to require an MA in some other discipline of all PhD students before they graduate. Even this may not be enough, but at least it forces philosophers to begin their careers by being exposed to some discipline other than philosophy.

C. Latin-American Philosophy and American Academia

MARQUEZ: What do you mean when you talk about a Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosopher or a Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy?

GRACIA: By the first, namely a Hispanic/Latino philosopher, I mean simply a philosopher who is ethnically Hispanic or Latino, and I put Latin Americans within this category with the qualifications introduced earlier. This is an ethnic description. Now, because ethnicity is a historical phenomenon and is closely related to culture and language, it is obvious that this has implications. Recall that I said earlier that philosophy begins in the place where the philosopher begins to philosophize and from that perspective. I cannot begin to philosophize from the perspective of a Chinese person who has never left China. I begin where I am, and this involves my ethnicity and all that comes with it, which are in turn products of a history.

By the second, namely a Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy, I do not mean anything more than the philosophical views of philosophers who are ethnically Hispanic or Latino. The controversy about the possibility and identity of Latin-American philosophy so far has centered on the idea that one must find something unique to it in order to justify the label. But I do not think anyone had been able to do this. Many of us have tried very hard. Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere that if anything is to be found it has to do with a search for liberation. But even this cannot be taken to inform all Latin-American philosophy, although one can find it in various forms in all periods of philosophical development in Latin America. So what is it that gives unity to this philosophy and separates it from, say, American philosophy? The history.

But history differs from time to time and place to place, because it is always individual and unique in spatio-temporal location. So, to say history is not to say properties or commonalities as we often think. Still, precisely because a history is always individual and unique, in the case of Latin-American philosophy it has produced concerns and characteristics in certain places and times that can function as differences between it and the philosophy from other places. There is certainly something different between the Latin-American philosophy of the nineteenth century and the

European philosophy of the times. Indeed, positivism, common to both, displays very different faces in the two continents. But one would be hard pressed to find something that is distinctive of Latin-American philosophy as such. All those big words that are branded about—coloniality, dependence, marginalization, and so on—they all can apply to other philosophies in other parts of the world, and they do not apply to all philosophy in Latin America. So they cannot help us, strictly speaking. But they sound good, and so I suspect they will continue to be used, and indeed they will become popular in certain circles and contribute to the fame (or notoriety) of those who use them. Meaningless rhetoric is always effective with those who are not used to thinking for themselves.

MARQUEZ: Do you think that there is a possibility for something like a Latino/Hispanic philosophy to emerge, and most importantly, whether there is a need? And if there is a need and a possibility, what form should it take and what should be its sources?

GRACIA: Not only is there a possibility of a Latino/Hispanic philosophy, there is already a reality. Remember that my view of Hispanic/Latino philosophy is that it is to be understood in familial historical terms. And there is certainly a body of texts historically related which are distinguishable through those relations, and the features that those relations generate in context, from other philosophical families of texts. This is probably the idea Leopoldo Zea has been trying to formulate for the past fifty years, but has never been able to get right. Indeed, it is surprising that with all the ink that has been spilled on this matter, it had to wait until now to be stated with some degree of clarity, for it seems rather obvious.

The issue, then, is not whether there is such a thing as a Hispanic/Latino philosophy, but rather the form that it has had in the past, has in the present, and should have in the future. For us here, the last is the one that counts. What should Hispanic/Latino philosophers be doing when they do philosophy, then? The answer is that they should begin doing philosophy from the context in which they find themselves. They should look at their surroundings and ask themselves questions about it, and move on from there. Plato was concerned with justice because of the lack of it in Athenian society. Is justice an issue of concern for Hispanics/Latinos? And if so, justice in what sense, and in relation to what?

The key to good philosophy is to ask the right questions, and the right questions are the ones that are closely related to the reality we live. This means that we need, as Hispanics/Latinos, to begin with the sources that record the experiences of those who have lived in our context. We need to engage the problems and issues that surface when one looks at the world in our social context and from our perspective, just as Plato did in ancient Greece, Aquinas did in the thirteenth century, and Descartes did in the seventeenth. And notice that this reality is not just social and political; it includes science, religion, and so on.

MARQUEZ: Do you see any use for the “philosophy/thought” and “philosophers/thinkers” categorial distinctions? For example, were Jonathan Swift, Leo Tolstoy, Tristan Tzara, André Breton, José Enrique Rodó, or Jorge Luis Borges philosophers or thinkers? I consider this to be a relevant question regarding Latin-American history of ideas because it appears to me that much of the truly original (non-derivative) thinking done by Latin Americans comes from non-academic non-philosophers.

GRACIA: And you are entirely right. Who could say that Borges does not raise profound philosophical questions? Could anyone argue that Swift’s satires do not contain philosophical truths, or that Tolstoy’s novels and essays do not prompt philosophical reflection of the highest sort? And can we say that the ideas of these authors should be excluded from the history of ideas in their respective areas of the world? Still, histories of English philosophy do not include a chapter on Swift, and histories of Russian philosophy do not cite *War and Peace*. So should histories of Latin-American philosophy contain discussions of Borges?

The issue is rather important because some recent authors have proposed the obliteration of the distinction between literature and philosophy as a way of finding a place for Latin-American thought in philosophy. The argument is that outstanding Latin-American philosophy is carried out by authors like Borges rather than authors like Francisco Romero.

My answer to this is that, indeed, the distinction between thought/philosophy and thinker/philosopher is useful. The reason is that within “thought” one can, without difficulty or embarrassment, include certain works of literature for example, but this is not so if we are speaking of just philosophy.

I take philosophy to be a view of the world or any of its parts which seeks to be accurate, consistent, comprehensive, and supported by sound evidence independently of religious belief. This separates philosophy from religion, from non-religious disciplines of learning, and from a *Weltanschauung*. From the first because philosophy does not rely on religious belief; from the second because philosophy aims to be comprehensive, whereas other disciplines are concerned only with some particular aspects of the world; and from the third because philosophy is critical, systematic, and argumentative.

Now, if one adopts this view of philosophy, then it is clear that, although literary works may have many “philosophical thoughts” in them, they do not qualify as philosophical works insofar as they are not structured in a way to achieve the result indicated. But this does not mean that we must ignore what they say; it means only that they use a different approach and have different goals than those pursued by philosophers in philosophical works.

This is an oversimplification, of course, but it is as much as I can say here. Incidentally, I have argued elsewhere that the distinction between a literary and philosophical work is that the conditions of identity of the first include the text of the work, whereas this is not so in philosophical works.

MARQUEZ: Why is it important to study Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy and to listen to Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophers?

GRACIA: Because it has a different history and trajectory than American philosophy or British philosophy, say. The reasons are the same I mentioned earlier when I talked about culture and the starting place of philosophy. We, as Hispanics/Latinos, have something to contribute to the point of view of non-Hispanics/Latinos because we come from a different world. Our mere existence is a challenge to others. Our views are a challenge to other views. But the reverse is also true. Hispanic/Latino philosophers can gain much by looking outside. Of course, some might respond that we have been doing too much of that, and in the process have become intellectual slaves of others. And this is true to some extent. Even the work of those Latin-American philosophers who constantly harp about an authentic Latin-American philosophy are filled with views borrowed from Karl Marx, Levinas, Martin Heidegger, and other European philosophers. So the right attitude has to

be developed: A critical attitude toward ourselves and others. We certainly do not want to become, or continue to be, if that is actually what we have been and are, philosophical colonies of Europe, the United States, or any other place.

But perhaps the best way to answer your question is to divide it in terms of the importance that the study of Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy has for Latin Americans and for Americans. For Latin Americans the importance is that, if it is true, as I have argued, that philosophy should begin with the particular circumstances, tradition, and situation of the philosopher, it is essential for Latin-American philosophers to know what other Latin-American philosophers have thought and said.

For Americans the importance is that Latin-American philosophy constitutes a challenge to the mantras and dogmas of American philosophy. Latin-American philosophy is a good point of contrast, a radically different point of view, that can be used to examine critically American philosophy.

MARQUEZ: Are you pleased with the levels at which these two things are presently done within contemporary American academia?

GRACIA: Of course not. I am on record as expressing my displeasure. Anglo-American philosophy is arrogant and self-assured—possibly because, like German philosophy, it has an inferiority complex. Another alternative explanation is that, if you are at the center of the world, why bother with the margins? This attitude is perhaps appropriate for a political and economic power that has nothing to fear from others and whose only aim is to preserve that power, but philosophers are after the truth, presumably, rather than power. Of course, the reality is quite different, as I have pointed out elsewhere. This is a point in which I think Michel Foucault was quite right. And if this is so, philosophers should be on the look out for it, regardless of where it surfaces. As I said, it is from the diametrically different from us that we stand to learn the most.

But there is also another reason to encourage the study of Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy in this country, and that is the composition of the population. With so many Hispanics/Latinos/Latin Americans here, we need to make room for Hispanic/Latino philosophers who can act as role models for younger people belonging to this ethnic group, and who can help them develop the kind of philosophical conceptual framework that makes sense to them.

MARQUEZ: Can you be specific about the curricular changes that need to take place in order to reflect your dissatisfaction with what students are presently taught, and can you also address more specifically the role of Latin-American philosophy within the philosophical canon and curriculum in the US?

GRACIA: Oh, dear, these are big questions. I have addressed some of them elsewhere, but here is a very brief summary of what I think is most important. And let me say that I want to propose changes in curriculum or approach both in the US and Latin America.

In the US, I think the most important need is to establish Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy as a standard course for philosophy majors. Black/African philosophy is already established, and so are the philosophies of China, the East, Islam, and India. The canon has to be opened in this way. But there is also something more subtle. We need to integrate the thought of our philosophers into regular courses in philosophy. Naturally, this requires that there be texts available. And this is a major stumbling block. So we need to

move in this direction. There are many other things that need to be done, but these two are critical.

In Latin America we need to do these two things also, because paradoxically, courses on Latin-American thought are frequently offered outside philosophy departments, such as in departments of Latin-American Studies, for example. Moreover, Latin Americans tend to ignore the philosophical work of other Latin Americans. So we need also to try to get this work into standard philosophy courses. But there is also another need in Latin America. We need to change the mind set with respect to how these and other philosophical texts are read. We need to develop a problems approach to the teaching of philosophy, rather than the descriptive style that is current in most places. There is a collection of essays on the use of the history of Latin-American philosophy in Latin America that is coming out through SUNY Press, edited by Arleen Salles and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, which deals with this issue. I recommend that you look at it. Finally, it is important that Latin-American philosophy stop being used as a tool of certain ideological positions. We have a long tradition of doing this—the cases of scholasticism and positivism are well known. But we should not ignore the political left and right.

MARQUEZ: Do you see important connections between the social, political, economic, and cultural struggles of poor Latino immigrants in the US and the philosophical endeavors of philosophers of Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American descent within academia?

GRACIA: Most academic disciplines tend to be elitist and conservative, and philosophy is probably worse than most in these respects. Just look at a list of courses in philosophy in any college in the United States—let alone Europe or Latin America! What do you see? The same old thing that has been taught forever. Well-established Hispanic philosophers are not on the radar screen, let alone poor Latino immigrants. These people do not exist, as yet, in the academic world of philosophy. And if they do not exist, their concerns do not exist either. A few voices are beginning to be heard, but these voices have not yet been translated into curricular changes. It is going to take time for the stuffy world of philosophy to notice these people and their problems. After all, how long did it take to notice Blacks? And in fact Blacks are still very much part of the fringes of philosophy. I do not expect to see any major change in my lifetime.

But there is another problem which is perhaps more serious precisely because it is seldom acknowledged. This is that most Hispanic philosophers belong to the upper (or at least middle) classes and have never experienced the poverty and marginalization of the lower classes. Moreover, even in cases in which they do not, they often forget their origins and adopt the philosophical agenda of the Establishment. Of course, one can hardly blame them, for the way to get ahead in the profession is precisely to adopt that agenda. But this is not the point. The point is that the poor, the economically dispossessed, the marginalized, and the forgotten in society have no effective representation in philosophy.

Is there anything that can be done about this? It is clear that something should be done, but it is not clear what.

MARQUEZ: Speaking of categories, do you consider the use of the category of ethnicity as fruitful as the use of the categories of class, gender, or, even age, to address cultural, social, and economic issues in the US? By spending so much time on an inquiry concerning the metaphysical category of “ethnicity,” aren’t you endorsing more of the kind of cultural politics of academic correctness that it appears to me you don’t

quite value? Also, don't you think that the US cultural mantra of "freedom, equality, and democracy" leads to a generalized categorical blindness among US citizenry? Do you see your work in this field in any way as one that tries to restore clear categorical vision? And finally, do you think that it is better to spread categorical vision or categorical blindness in the US, especially when it comes to the categories of ethnicity and gender?

GRACIA: All five of these are key questions. You have put your finger on a very important set of issues, so let me see if I can give a response that makes sense, and I shall try to be brief.

With respect to the first, I see the category of ethnicity as more important than any of the others you mention. The reason is that the world has changed and is still changing drastically. It is more and more evident that national, gender, economic, class, age, and cultural divisions are giving way to, and becoming secondary to ethnic divisions. Even nationality, understood in political terms, is becoming secondary. Ethnic associations of peoples that transcend national boundaries are guiding not only decisions within nations but also decisions at the international level. The dynamic between ethnic groups is becoming key to world organization and action. This does not mean that the other divisions you mentioned are to be forgotten. They are still important in many ways and in some contexts they are more important than ethnic ones. But ethnicity is reaching a level in the world that I do not think had been reached before. This means that the use of the category of ethnicity to understand our current situation is essential. Without it, most of the conflicts we have seen in the Middle East, the near East, Europe, Africa, and elsewhere become meaningless.

But you are right, I do not favor what you call "the cultural politics of academic correctness." But trying to understand ethnicity and using this category does not imply that one must adopt any kind of political stance. One's aim can be to understand what is going on, and this is an investigative task. Political correctness is a result of a certain ethical and political position one takes; it has to do with prescription, rather than description.

In this context, as your third question suggests, the US mantra of "freedom, equality, and democracy" plays an important role, and is often used to obscure differences among US citizens. But it is not the contexts of freedom, equality, and democracy that cause this, but the misunderstanding of these concepts. One thing is to believe in equality, and another is to believe that this entails the obliteration of all differences and the homogenization of the citizenry. The latter is a serious misunderstanding. I am a firm believer in the usefulness of these notions, but only when they are correctly understood, and it is our job as philosophers to help in that understanding, particularly by exposing their misunderstandings.

Here we can also find the answer to your fourth question: Indeed, I see my task as a philosopher precisely as that of restoring clarity in the understanding of these and other categories. Without this clarity we cannot hope to get anywhere. We will remain trashing around, pursuing obscure goals or misplaced aims. Action arising from confused understanding can be very dangerous.

This is why I believe, in answer to your last question, that it is always "better to spread categorical vision than categorical blindness." Indeed, I believe categorical vision is a requirement. Not that we can always achieve it. But we must try, otherwise we are doomed. Knowledge and understanding are always to be preferred to ignorance and misunderstanding. To choose

blindness for the sake of some practical goal is nothing other than dogmatism and obscurantism. We have had enough of these in the world in the name of religion and nation, and it will not do to bring them back in the name of some other goal, regardless of how lofty it is perceived to be.

D. Living Philosophy

MARQUEZ: Do you consider yourself a Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosopher, or a philosopher who happens to be Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American, or simply a philosopher?

GRACIA: Are these exclusive of one another? Let me take a Hegelian approach. There is some truth in all of them. But let me rephrase and divide the question as follows: Do I begin to reflect philosophically from my ethnic situation? Do I consider problems and issues in philosophy that uniquely arise from my particular ethnicity? Do I consider philosophical problems that arise from my ethnic situation and problems that do not? And do I offer solutions to the philosophical problems I consider, whether arising from my ethnicity or not, that take into account my ethnicity?

I think the answers to all these questions are affirmative. I begin to reflect philosophically from my particular ethnic situation, as a Hispanic and a Latino and as a result, some of the problems I consider are uniquely connected to that ethnic situation. But I also consider other problems that have been raised by other philosophers and that do not have an ethnic connection. Finally, the solutions I give to the problems I consider, whether ethnically motivated or not, some times take into account my ethnic experience.

And how does this help answer your own question? Because it is clear that I am a philosopher, and as such concerned with philosophical problems of every kind; a philosopher who happens to be Hispanic, and as such must begin to philosophize from the place in which I find myself; and a Hispanic philosopher in that part of my philosophizing—both in the questions and the answers to them—is rooted in my experience as a Hispanic.

MARQUEZ: What do you wish to accomplish as an academic philosopher?

GRACIA: First let me raise a quibble. I do not like the terms in which you have cast the question: "what I would like to accomplish as an academic philosopher." I do not consider myself an "academic philosopher" but rather a philosopher who happens to be an academic. The academy is the place where I earn a living and where I get the opportunity to practice my craft. The academy is therefore incidental and accidental, even if closely related to what I do as a philosopher. Naturally, the academy imposes on me many duties and tasks which have nothing to do with philosophy, and some that affect the way I philosophize, but it is philosophy that I do, not "academic" philosophy.

Now, what do I wish to accomplish as a philosopher? Understanding. Everything else is secondary. What moves me as a philosopher is simply the desire to understand. My work begins always with some kind of puzzle, as Socrates did. Almost everything I have written has been written because I have been puzzled by some problem or issue. Other things are tempting, no doubt. Fame has an appeal for philosophers and certainly it has tempted me, but it is a terrible trap, for it leads to a search for what will attract attention rather than what is true. It is therefore a very good thing that I have not achieved it, because it has allowed me to remain focused in what from the beginning attracted me to philosophy, namely philosophy itself. Money has never been a serious consideration for me—one can do better selling hotdogs in a

street corner in New York City than with an academic salary in a philosophy department.

What I enjoy the most is taking up an issue, reading what others have said about it, and trying to figure out the right answer. And I take the right answer to be one that fits within as comprehensive a view as possible, and one that makes sense in terms of my experience and that of others as far as I know it. I conceive understanding, then, broadly.

This is a somewhat Narcissistic attitude, I grant you. But I do not want to suggest that there are no other considerations or other things that I do not aim to do. For example, I feel a responsibility to be an advocate for Hispanic/Latino philosophers. And I also feel a responsibility to the philosophical community in general. Teaching is also important for several reasons. One is the opportunity for dialogue it affords, although this feeds the Narcissism or egoism, if you will. Another is to serve as a conduit of past philosophical ideas to the present. And finally, there is the challenge to help others to acquire the skills and interest necessary to develop a framework of ideas that will serve them in life. All these are important, but they are fundamentally and ultimately informed by the desire to understand.

MARQUEZ: True, Socrates considered himself a gadfly, but he also considered himself an athlete of the soul. Plato's Socrates surely emphasizes the role of being gadfly and the philosophical quest to understand Being. But the Socratic schools of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Cynicism seem to be more interested in Socrates as a philosopher sage engaged in ascesis (i.e., training)—leading to self-mastery. Within this tradition, the philosophical understanding of Being is important, but always as it enables us to engage in ascetic practices of becoming. The same can be said of the Chinese traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Marxism, with its emphasis on the relationship between theory and praxis, also falls under this general category. Do you think philosophy should/could embrace this outlook and make this goal part of what it means to be a philosopher and teacher of philosophy?

GRACIA: If I understand your question correctly, what you have in mind here is the view of philosophy as a way of life, so popular among the Greeks, rather than as a search for understanding. In this interview, I have been emphasizing a conception of philosophy as a view of the world and therefore as understanding primarily, and I have neglected to say that, although I consider this the most appropriate conception of philosophy, this conception also entails other things, which are often also called philosophy or philosophical. Elsewhere I have identified these as three: a certain activity, certain rules, and a certain ability or skill. All these, I have argued, are dependent on the goal of developing the view about the world that philosophy is supposed to be. The activity in question has to do with the actions in which we must engage to develop the view; the rules are the principles of action that have to be followed in order to develop the view; and the ability or skill, whether natural or acquired, has to do with the practical know how to reach this goal. Obviously, if philosophy as a view requires us to engage in certain actions, which follow certain rules, and presupposes certain skills or abilities, it cannot be regarded as pure theory, for it involves praxis, the living of a certain life. And this makes sense, doesn't it? For in order to philosophize one must not just live a certain kind of life but even perhaps become a certain kind of person. This is, I think, what the Greeks had in mind, and I believe they were right. But, of course, this does not invalidate my view that philosophy is primarily about understanding.

MARQUEZ: Going back to my previous question, when I asked you about your goals as an "academic philosopher" I wasn't using the term mainly to denote a person who does "academic philosophy", but more that anything else as a term that denotes a person who does philosophy within an institutional framework, in this case, academia. I find it difficult to reconcile your respect and deep understanding of tradition and of our craft with your somewhat disembodied, atomistic, and narcissistic self-image as a philosopher. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues quite convincingly, I think, for the close and necessary connection between traditions, institutions, practices, and the internal goods embodied in practices. Using his framework, it appears to me that one cannot ignore the reality that in the 21st century, for better or worse, academia still constitutes the central institutional locus that provides the formal and material conditions that allow for the very existence of our craft. If this descriptive point is granted, it seems that a further point with prescriptive consequences follows: a utilitarian/mercenary approach to academia in the 21st century would be detrimental to the long-term well-being of our craft, given that no craft can exist *in vacuo* for very long and academia is the present niche of our craft.

GRACIA: First of all, let me suggest that your description of my position as "somewhat disembodied, atomistic, and Narcissistic self-image as a philosopher" is not quite accurate, if I understand what you mean. Disembodied certainly it is not. May I remind you that the philosophical point of departure for me is the individual person in context (el hombre de carne y hueso, as some say in Spanish), immersed in everything that affects us—ethnicity, race, education, religion, culture, experiences of whatever sort, etc. How can this be described as disembodied? Atomistic certainly it is not, for similar reasons. Atoms are self-contained and enclosed units, and I have presented an essentially relational view of philosophers. Indeed, I have stressed the place of dialogue and particularly the consideration of what is foreign and different from us. Moreover, my view of ethnicity is relational, familial, and historical, all of which go contrary to your description of disembodiment and atomism. But I do grant you a degree of Narcissism in the senses I make clear in this interview, for I am not taken with ideology or social causes. Of course, I am frustrated by injustice and I am sympathetic to, and support, efforts to eradicate it from the face of the Earth. But I do not see my job, qua philosopher, to do this. I do see my job as clarifying the issues and evaluating human actions taken in response to it. But I do not see that our task as philosophers is to get into the fray, as it were. Indeed, even the most practically minded philosophers—consider Marx, for example—turn out to be theoreticians rather than activists. And ultimately what is it that motivates us? Understanding, surely.

Second, with respect to whether and how the academy affects us: Of course, it does, and in many ways. Indeed, as forming part of our experience and imposing on us certain tasks, the academy does influence what we philosophize about and how we do it. After all, some philosophers would rather not publish articles and instead sit around talking philosophy a la Socrates. But the pressure of publishing or perishing forces them to publish.

And yet, the requirements of academia forced upon us are considerably less than those other professions impose. And after we receive tenure, our freedom increases considerably. Of course, the question that we need to investigate in order to settle this issue has to do with concrete examples in which our philosophy is affected by the academic environment. Can I find examples of this in my personal experience? Is there some view that I hold and would not hold

if I did not work in the academy? I think all of us should ask ourselves these questions.

MARQUEZ: Do you think the institutional spaces presently at our disposal allow for the fulfillment of your desires/goals? Can you imagine better ways to pursue those same desires/goals?

GRACIA: I have been fortunate in that my institution has allowed me to do pretty much what I have wanted to do. No one ever has imposed anything on me. And when requests have been made, they have been of the sort that have posed interesting challenges rather than obstacles in my quest for understanding. Nor have my colleagues judged me by narrow and parochial standards of what is or is not philosophy. And believe me, I know plenty of examples in which this has occurred to others. Indeed, in my own department, I understand there used to be a time in which some faculty members went around saying that what this or that other faculty member did was not philosophy.

So, although my personal testimony is very good, I know this has not been the experience of many others. Moreover, at present there is little, if any, space in the profession in the US to pursue certain areas of philosophy. For example, can someone interested primarily in issues that have to do with Hispanic/Latino/Latin-American philosophy and issues related to the condition of Hispanics/Latinos/Latin-Americans get a job to pursue these interests? I do not think so. It is possible for African Americans to do it. Indeed, there is a great demand for African Americans who are conversant with issues of race, and Africana in general. But there are no jobs in the area of ethnicity pertinent to Hispanics/Latinos/Latin Americans. I do not believe that there is a conspiracy behind this. It is just a matter of ignorance and prejudice. More than anything else, it is a case of plain blindness. Hispanics/Latinos/Latin Americans are outside the field of vision of most Anglo-American philosophers. I have dwelled at some length on this in my book on Hispanic/Latino identity, so I will not repeat myself. But there is plenty that needs to be done.

MARQUEZ: Which philosophical and institutional challenges do you foresee engaging you during the next 10 years?

GRACIA: I am turning sixty this year, and I probably will not retire until I am seventy. Some philosophers, were they in my situation, would probably look at these coming ten years as a time of rest. But frankly, I see them as a time of work. The end of my life is already in sight in that I am sure I have already lived at least two thirds of it, but there are still some things I would like to do before I go to sleep. Indeed, there are miles and miles to go in this sense, and time is short. But the number of these miles, and the direction I will take, will depend on the circumstances.

MARQUEZ: Would you care to be more specific?

GRACIA: I do not foresee any of the institutional challenges to which you allude. Throughout my career I have been actively engaged in all sorts of administrative tasks, and I have participated actively in the administration of my university, my department, and various philosophical societies. But all this is coming to an end. I have paid my dues. From now on I want to concentrate on philosophy. I want to reflect and write. The areas for this are the same I have been exploring in the past: ethnic/race/nationality, metaphysics, hermeneutics/historiography, Hispanic thought, and medieval philosophy. And primarily in that order. As I say later in this interview, I have some books I want to write in these areas, but what I do will ultimately depend on circumstantial factors, challenges that are presented at particular moments. For example, I had been thinking about tradition for a while, but it was only when

I was asked to give the Marquette Aquinas Lecture that I decided to tackle it.

MARQUEZ: Of the fifteen or so books you have written, which one is your favorite, and why?

GRACIA: My favorite book is always the one I am writing at the moment. I am always dissatisfied with a book once it is published. The reason is that I look at a book as marking a stage of my intellectual development and understanding. And since this development and understanding is in a constant process of change, what I have written at any particular time is always *passé*, superseded by developments at subsequent times.

The book on which I am working, then, is my favorite because it is under construction, unsettled, modifiable, thus reflecting better the state of my mind. A published book is done. One being written is in the making, like our grasp of the world, which is always, or perhaps should be—otherwise it is not true understanding—in process. Human experience is constantly increasing and so should our understanding based on that experience. The last book I read, the last article I come across, the last conversation I have, the last empirical experience to which I am subjected, all these affect the ways I view the world, bringing me closer to a better understanding of it.

MARQUEZ: Accomplished philosophers like you always have a book up their sleeves, the one they really want to be remembered by, what book would you like to write that you have not written yet?

GRACIA: Accomplished? I wonder what you mean by that. But never mind. To answer your specific question: Not one, but several books. First, a book on categories. I want to do with this topic what I did with individuality back in 1988. No one has done it yet, and categories is a topic of enormous importance in philosophy. Second, a book on literature and its interpretation. I already have a tentative title for it: *Art with Words: Literature and the Literary*. With all the current interest in obliterating the boundaries between literature and philosophy, it seems to me essential to understand what literature is all about. Third a book on honor. This would include a bit of history, and it is quite a departure from the kind of thing I usually do. But it seems to me that honor is a very difficult concept in the modern world, and one that has had enormous influence in human thinking, so I want to tackle it. And finally, a book on God. I have been reading what philosophers say about God for the greatest part of my life, so it is about time to come clean on this. Of course, this book will not be religious, but rather a purely philosophical analysis—belief and piety are not my strong points.

MARQUEZ: If you were not a philosopher, what would you be?

GRACIA: Ah! It is difficult to say, for I could be (meaning that I would be happy being) almost anything, even though, after knowing philosophy, I do not think I could have been anything else. But let us assume for a moment that I had never been introduced to the field and I had never become a philosopher, then what could I have been?

In fact, I had a terrible time trying to decide what to be until I found philosophy. I began thinking that I was going to be a physician because there had been physicians in my family for at least four generations prior to mine. Psychology was another field that fascinated me probably because I have always been a little crazy—some would say, I am sure, not just a little. Physics was my love in high school and I toyed

with the idea of pursuing it at the college level. I was a voracious reader of literature while still in high school and have continued to read fiction almost every day of my life, although I have hated literature courses generally. I studied architecture for a year and loved it. I took painting classes for two years and was told I had some talent. My first major in college was math, until the challenge of English—for someone who was Spanish speaking and was thrown into college with practically no knowledge of it—became too challenging to pass. But then I discovered philosophy and I was done for.

The story is more complicated than this, but it will have to be told at some other time. Suffice it to say that, except for chemistry, and such banalities as speech and physical education, I have loved every subject matter to which I have been exposed. I still look at buildings with a trace of envy, thinking about the one I have never built. Occasionally I miss the freedom of the literary writer and yearn to illustrate effectively what I only succeed in saying poorly. Medicine fascinates me and I keep bugging one of my daughters and her husband, who are physicians, with detailed questions about diseases and the workings of the human body. Psychology captures my attention occasionally, so I sit enthralled with my other daughter's explanations of human behavior. Mathematical puzzles continue to intrigue me, and physics remains an allure. My interest in ethnicity and race have brought me into contact with recent research in biology and sociology and I have found some of this material fascinating.

So what would I be? Most likely whatever it was that presented itself at the appropriate time, for in every field there is something fine, and that is the discovery of truth and the development of understanding, which is ultimately what draws me. I am not the revolutionary type. I am not consumed by a desire to change the world. Nor am I the compassionate and tireless social worker. Indeed, unlike many other philosophers, I am not even consumed by the desire to bring others to think like me. I am quite happy with variety, pluralism, and disagreement, although I hate obscurantism, dogmatism, fanaticism, ideology, and falsehood. My aim is understanding. But the life of the philosopher is privileged beyond compare. There is nothing that comes even close to it. The adventure, the thrill, the pleasure, the frustration, all in one! What a life! Who can match it? I feel sorry for all those devils who have never had a chance to experience it, and even more sad for those who, having experienced it have missed its beauty and excitement. The tragedy of a philosopher who abandons philosophy must be unbearable. It can only be compared to that of Lucifer, who after seeing God abandoned eternal beatitude for a trifle. And yet, philosophy departments are filled with such cases. How sad, that after seeing the light out of the cave, some would prefer to go back and tether themselves in the shadows.

MARQUEZ: What advice do you have for a young prospective Latino/a philosopher?

GRACIA: Like yourself? Well, Ivan, first and foremost, honor the name of the discipline: Love wisdom. Anything else is rubbish. Second, do not forget your roots. Philosophy begins where you are. So start with your experience, with what you are, with your intellectual traditions. You are a Puerto Rican, a Latino, a Hispanic, and an American. So begin there, but do not stay there. Move on in search for the understanding of yourself and the world. Third, develop a tough skin, this is essential for protection and survival. Pay attention to criticism for the benefit that you can derive from it, but do not let it discourage, and even less paralyze, you. Fourth, do not get

sidetracked by what others say. If you are honest in the pursuit of truth, then do not allow the opinions of others to dislodge you from the views at which you have arrived critically, unless their objections prove to be sound. Fifth, do not set fame as your goal. Your goal should be understanding. Fame is given by others, and therefore always conditional, but understanding is in your power. Finally, let me congratulate you, for you have chosen the best possible life. Now the most important thing for you is to maintain a steady course and not forget the excitement and curiosity that brought you to philosophy. I say this not only to you and every prospective Latino philosopher; I say it to every one who has chosen philosophy as a career and a life. Best wishes.

MARQUEZ: Thank you for your time and all the best to you.

GRACIA: My pleasure.