

# APA Newsletters

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## NEWSLETTER ON HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

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# Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

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Arleen L. F. Salles, Editor

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## FROM THE EDITOR

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**Arleen L. F. Salles**  
*St. John's University*

This issue of the *Newsletter* presents the article winner of the 2005 APA Prize in Latin American Thought. In the article "The American Challenge: The Tension between the Values of the Anglo and the Hispanic World," Gregory Pappas raises a wonderful series of issues regarding the possibility and desirability of integrating and balancing diverse cultural values that appear to pull in different directions. Pappas takes as a starting point the widely held view that there are two cultures, one Hispanic/Latino and the other Anglo/Saxon, that each embraces specific values, and that their respective values are in tension. The question is, what follows from this? On one view, represented by Samuel Huntington, the existing tension between values is to be avoided by protecting typically Anglo/Saxon values and promoting the assimilation of Hispanics. Pappas rejects this view after careful examination of the arguments used to defend it. Instead, he draws from the work of the Cuban philosopher Jorge Mañach and the American philosopher John Dewey to show the advantages of an alternative view, according to which the existence of conflicting values plays an instrumental role in that it allows for mutual modification, transformation, and learning. In his article, Pappas identifies the philosophical issues involved and discusses how a good understanding of the notion of balance can make a difference in our analysis and approach to the issue of cultural differences.

This issue of the *Newsletter* also includes a comprehensive interview with Linda Martín Alcoff that gives an excellent glimpse of her central ideas and an overview of her work.

I would like to encourage our readers to send along papers, letters, announcements, and suggestions that might help toward creating a more diversified newsletter. We want to continue to offer issues filled with thought-provoking contributions, so please send us your work and thoughts. Articles that address recent developments in Hispanic/Latino thought and reflections on topics of interest to the philosophical community are welcome. Please submit two copies of essays. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the *Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* send us a copy of your book. Consider volunteering a book review. All items and inquiries should be sent to Arleen L. F. Salles at Division of Humanities, College of Professional Studies, St. John's University. [sallesa@stjohns.edu](mailto:sallesa@stjohns.edu)

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## REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

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**Susana Nuccetelli**  
*University of Texas–Pan American*

As the chair of the Committee on Hispanics, I am happy to report that our committee this year has aggressively pursued its goals of promoting the teaching of Latin American philosophy and raising the profile of Hispanics in the profession. For one thing, we had a central role in the successful application for an NEH Summer Institute on Latin American philosophy. In this, our aim was to make a contribution to the field so that topics from Latin American thought, broadly construed, begin to be incorporated into the curriculum. The grant was approved by the NEH, and this is a unique event in the history of the discipline in the United States. Thanks to that grant, Jorge Gracia and I were able to conduct the Summer Institute at SUNY/Buffalo in June 2005, gathering four invited scholars and twenty-five college instructors for a period of four weeks. The experience was fruitful and encouraging. I hope that this is just the first in a series of activities aimed at establishing Latin American philosophy in the profession.

This year the Committee also welcomed a new editor of the *Newsletter*, Arleen Salles. She brings to the *Newsletter* her experience as an editor of several collections of essays, and her interest in Latin American philosophy and ethics. She has formed an editorial board, which will soon bring about improvements in our *Newsletter*.

Furthermore, in December 2004 the Committee granted the first APA prize to essays in Latin American philosophy. Bernie Cantens's and Manuel Vargas's essays shared this prize. In addition, the Committee offered sessions at the three APA Divisional meetings, attracting considerable interest among participants of these conferences. Many stayed after the sessions to make inquiries about our committee and to show their support for other activities we may undertake at Division meetings in the future. As a result, we have broadened our reach.

Clearly, the moment is favorable for teaching and research in Latin American thought. I look forward to suggestions about how to accelerate this trend—and also welcome input regarding plans for possible panels, special sessions, and other events that we might sponsor at future Divisional meetings. The Committee will discuss these and other issues at its annual gathering in December 2005.

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## ARTICLES

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### ***The American Challenge: The Tension between the Values of the Anglo and the Hispanic World***

**Gregory Fernando Pappas**  
*Texas A & M University*

In 1975, the Cuban philosopher Jorge Mañach claimed that the “Americans of the North and of the South...have very different ways of feeling, of thinking, and of acting.”<sup>1</sup> He shared with the North American philosopher John Dewey<sup>2</sup> the belief that in the Hispanic/Latin and in the Anglo-Saxon worlds different values are emphasized. These differences are so acute that they lead to opposition or tension. In his notes on Mexico, Dewey said: “The contact of a people having an industrialized, Anglo-Saxon psychology with a people of Latin psychology is charged with high explosives.”<sup>3</sup> In comparing the “Anglo-Americans” with the “Spanish-Latin temper,” he said, “The two mix no better than oil and water.”<sup>4</sup> For Mañach to live in the “frontier,” as the place of contact between these two cultures, is to live in tension, instability, ambiguity, and perhaps anxiety.

For those of us who live in between these two cultures, there is much truth in these remarks. If many Hispanic-Americans live in between cultures that make implicit but conflicting demands about values, then perhaps there is more to the problematic and ambiguous character of their existence than just trying to make sense of their hybrid identity. But this issue is of importance not just to Hispanic-Americans. Today more than ever the contact between these two cultures is inevitable in and outside of North America. In “The Hispanic Challenge” and in a new book,<sup>5</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, a respected public intellectual, alerts us about a brewing tension that may undermine the values that he identifies with the United States. Hispanic culture is a threat not just to national identity and to the English language but to the “Anglo-Protestant values” derived “from the founding settlers and include the work ethic and individualism.”<sup>6</sup> Among the “irreconcilable differences” that tend to generate a “cultural clash” are differences regarding work, self-reliance (individuality), “the concept of time epitomized in the *mañana* syndrome, the ability to achieve results quickly, and attitudes toward history, expressed in the cliché that Mexicans are obsessed with history, Americans with the future.”<sup>7</sup>

Since the publication of Huntington’s “Hispanic Challenge,” there have been many refutations of Huntington’s views but none that confronts his claims about value from a philosophical or ethical point of view. This is what I intend to do in this paper. I carry on this sort of refutation by reconstructing the shared view of Mañach and Dewey, two philosophers (from the two cultures that concern Huntington) who seem to agree with Huntington about the tension of values but who derived a very different conclusion. They concluded that the tension between cultures regarding values is an unprecedented opportunity and is not a cause for alarm, fear, and protectionism. One can find in their philosophies an argument that would support welcoming the challenge posed by Hispanic immigration or, in general, the “Hispanization of America.”<sup>8</sup> Mañach goes as far as to claim that this would not be good only for America but for the world. In spite of the tension among the values emphasized by these two cultures, they are compatible and integral to an ideal life where balance is the key notion. “The ideal would be for both cultures to perfect themselves through each emulating what

the other has of positive worth. This would be the balance, the synthesis to which the cultural frontier invites us.”<sup>9</sup>

In sum, Dewey and Mañach seem to share with Huntington the following controversial tenets:

- (1) There is a Hispanic/Latino culture and an Anglo-Saxon culture.
- (2) In these two cultures different values are emphasized.
- (3) There is a tension between the values of each culture.

From these premises Huntington concludes that:

- (4a) This tension must be avoided. The values in tension are irreconcilable and will undermine the “Anglo-Protestant” values.

But Mañach and Dewey conclude that:

- (4b) This tension can be an opportunity to maintain an ideal relation of balance.

In this paper, I will be mostly concerned with how (4a) and (4b) can follow from (1), (2), and (3), but first, I must briefly address tenets (1), (2), and (3). Needless to say, there is much here that needs to be questioned. More importantly, it is worth noting that the agreement between Huntington and Dewey-Mañach regarding (1), (2), and (3) is superficial. Dewey and Mañach do not assume the simplistic and homogenizing view of cultures evident in Huntington’s view. To refute Huntington on this issue from a philosophical perspective, one would benefit from recent scholarship in multiculturalism about the heterogeneous nature of cultures.<sup>10</sup> I am not interested in carrying this refutation here. It may be objected that by focusing on (4a) I am granting too much to Huntington. But Huntington must be refuted at all levels. Moreover, underlying his support of (1), (2), and (3) are assumptions easy to refute. But it is necessary to confront his inferences regarding values.

#### **I. The Mañach-Dewey Thesis Reconsidered**

Are Mañach and Dewey, however, equally vulnerable in regard to (1), (2), and (3)? Is there any plausible way in which one can hold these premises without the need to abandon a pluralistic view of culture and their values? The difficulties here are similar to comparisons often made between “Western” and “Oriental” culture. We may doubt that there is any empirical basis for claiming even the vaguest of similarities among the many Hispanic cultures. Tenet (1) seems to homogenize what is in reality heterogeneous. One can also object that (1) is “stretching” the concept of a “culture” or of “identity.” Jorge Gracia, for example, has a strong fear of homogenization and a very strict view of “identity.”<sup>11</sup> I have no doubt he would question (1). But, recently, Jose Medina, Iris Young, and I have provided a more relational or functional view of identity where identity does not preclude differences and is relative to context.<sup>12</sup> I am not going to settle the issue here, but it is clear that even if controversial, (1) is not totally implausible. There may be a way to qualify (1) that avoids the problem of homogenization. The vague resemblance between Hispanic cultures in comparison to other world cultures may be a good reason to lump them together under one name, even if one acknowledges the cultural diversity of the Hispanic world.

However, even if we grant (1), (2) is also problematic. What empirical evidence is there for the claim that each culture emphasizes different values? How can Dewey and Mañach, two empirically minded and careful philosophers, dare to make such vague generalizations about cultures and their values?

We must be critical of the Mañach-Dewey thesis but not by assuming a “straw man” version of their view. The above tenets need to be understood in the context of their overall philosophies. First, there is no assumption here of a Latin or

Anglo “essence” necessarily and exclusively tied to certain values. Tenet (2) simply assumes a comparative judgment about values that are no more than emphases, dependent on historical conditions. We are comparing accents of temperament and of conduct, and not exclusive modalities. For example, Mañach explains that “the fact that Anglo-Saxons are mainly volitional does not prevent them from harboring sentimentalism, even though they may try to hide it. Neither does the predominance of sensibility in Hispanic people signify a purely emotional aptitude.”<sup>13</sup> However, this still raises some difficult epistemological questions about how to determine the “emphasis,” “accents,” or “predominance” of some values over others in a culture.

Scientific studies in the form of polls or any quantifiable method may be used to examine and support the Mañach-Dewey thesis. For example, plenty of studies done in the last decade support the generalization that work is highly valued in Anglo-Saxon cultures.<sup>14</sup> The importance of relationships over the individual in Hispanic cultures can be supported by studies that show the role of the family in all rituals and daily activities. However, neither Mañach nor Dewey appealed to these methods. The basis for their claims was their personal experiences.<sup>15</sup> But they did not find these experiences, therefore, subjective or irrelevant.

Dewey once wrote that “every culture has its own collective individuality.”<sup>16</sup> Not every Hispanic individual has (or needs to have to count as a Hispanic) the “collective individuality” of the group or culture as a whole. Nor can we assume that acquaintance with a certain number of individuals (i.e., the majority) will be sufficient to experience what is a “predominant” value in a culture. First-hand experience with works of art and habitual forms of association may be important. We experience the predominant tendencies or general values emphasized in a culture in a qualitative and immediate way.<sup>17</sup> We do this before we inquire into the usual empirical data that would support our judgments. Different ways of life have distinctive rhythms, accents, and patterns that can be discerned and compared by those who have the sensitivity to experience them. These personal experiences must be subject to criticism and to further inquiry in any of the academically recognized ways to prove and verify hypotheses about cultures, but there is no good reason to dismiss them a priori.

But one may object that there is no way to determine whether the personal and direct experiences of cultures are nothing more than problematic cultural stereotypes. How do we know that Dewey’s experience of Hispanic cultures was not distorted by the common prejudices of his time? Furthermore, it could be argued that polling as a corrective of cultural misinterpretations in people’s personal experiences does not work; the polling may still be capturing widely held stereotypes. Dewey’s answer to these skeptical challenges is straightforward, but I am aware it is not going to convince those who want theoretical certainty. We start where we are, in the midst of the pre-reflective personal immediate qualitative experiences we have of cultures. In open-minded people (an important condition!), these experiences change and are transformed by inquiry, but we must return to them as our guide. If we have prejudices or stereotypes that distort our immediate experience of other cultures then, hopefully, we will find out through inquiry and further experiences. There is no privilege-theoretical-objective (“God’s eye view”) standpoint in which we must come to know a culture. There is, of course, a lot more work to be done if one is to defend (1) and (2) from the empirical and pluralistic perspective of Mañach and Dewey. My aim here is merely to suggest that even with regard to these premises these philosophers have a more defensible view than Huntington.

Tenet (3) makes a very specific claim about the “tension” between two particular cultures. What does this “tension” come to? It seems impossible to determine this without having at least some vague notion of the particular values in tension. We encounter a similar problem in trying to understand (4). Tenet (4) is a normative claim that prescribes “balance.” We will shortly consider what this could mean, but without some examples of the particular values that are the subject matter of the Mañach-Dewey thesis, we are left with a very abstract, empty, and dubious analysis. What particular tension of values did Mañach and Dewey have in mind? I do not think it is all that difficult to come up with a tentative and incomplete list of values. They have been assumed countless times in the writings of philosophers and in personal accounts. Huntington’s recent remarks are also helpful in this regard. Let us then assume, for the sake of argument and content, that the following list represents a roughly adequate description of the traits or values that are emphasized in each of the cultures in comparison.<sup>18</sup>

Anglo-Saxon

Hispanic/Latin

Traits or Values:

- |                                 |                            |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| - Success                       | - Tranquility              |
| - Quantity, time                | - Quality                  |
| - Technique, information        | - Emotions                 |
| - Action, organization, control | - Appreciation, patience,  |
| - Individualism, merit, privacy | resignation                |
| - Fast, efficiency              | - Relationships, loyalty,  |
| - Classifications, rankings,    | community                  |
| rules                           | - Slow-tempo               |
| - Work                          | - Continuities, unity      |
| - Future, change, novelty       | - Play, celebration        |
| - Planning, prevention          | - Present, past, tradition |
| - Precise, concise              | - Spontaneity, intuition   |
|                                 | - Flowery, metaphors,      |
|                                 | rituals                    |

This is not the place for a detailed comparison between items in this list. We must, however, make sense of the claim that there can be a “tension,” and later a “balance,” between these values. We should be able to evaluate these claims even if we have serious doubts about the connection of these values with the two particular cultures. (In other words, tenets (3) and (4) may be defensible even if (1) and (2) are false).

Whether they are in a culture, a person, or a concrete relationship, the above traits do seem to be in some sort of tension. For example, **organization and efficiency** are many times the number-one enemy of the **spontaneity** required to enjoy and **appreciate present** experience. **Emotional involvement** and **play** often prevent one from adequate **planning, prevention, and work**. The tension between the importance of **relationships** and the values of **individualism** and **privacy** is, in fact, the basis of debates in contemporary political theory.

Notice that the “tension” here is not between what is contrary or opposite in meaning. From a moral point of view, the tension is not between good and evil but between goods (values) that “pull us” in a different direction in situations. The perfect scenario would be one in which all these values are maximized, but each can be a threat to the other if overemphasized. We can, for example, play while we work, but too much play tends to undermine work. Too much emphasis on community (relationships) is a threat to individuality. Moreover, some of these traits tend to degenerate (as values) if there is a total neglect or under emphasis of some other traits. For example, work without some play results in drudgery; individuality

without community results in isolated selves and the problems we associate with an excessive individualism. This gives us a clue as to how to understand the relation among these values according to the Mañach-Dewey thesis and, in particular, their prescription about “balance” ((4b) above). We must conceive our list of values as taking place between extreme poles. These poles are the result of excesses of the above values.

Vices:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| - Over-organization   | - Disorganization   |
| - Stress  | - Levity (Lack of seriousness)                                    |
| - Mechanization   | - Over-relaxed  |
| - Impersonality   | - Inefficiency  |
| - Impatience  | - Suffocating common bonds  |
| - Unrest, hurry, breathlessness                                       | - Laziness  |
| - Undervaluing of tradition   | - Overvaluing of tradition  |
| - Over-prevention of risk   | - Over-enjoyment of the present                                   |
| - Drudgery, boredom, routine  | - No planning   |
| - Quantification  | - Idle playfulness  |
| - Standardization   | - Reality is mystical   |
| - Instrumentalism   | - Social status is solely determined by history and relationships |
| - Loneliness  |   |
| - Social status is solely determined by individual effort and dollars |   |

There is a sense in which this second list is prior to the list of values. When members of the two cultures we are comparing seek to criticize the other, they usually appeal to one or more of these “vices.” The basis for the insults, prejudices, and stereotypes that people from these two worlds have of each other are based on the exaggerated manifestations of the traits valued by each culture. All cultures have their own possible excesses, but behind them are values. This is what is seldom recognized. Dewey notes how much easier it is for one culture to appreciate the vices of the other:

The Anglo-Saxon races have the habit of scoffing at the Latin races for what they regard as their levity and lack of seriousness in their moral attitude towards the world. It is a good thing to turn matters around and look at ourselves. The judgment which the Latin races pass upon the Anglo-Saxon is that they are hard, angular, and without the delicate susceptibility to attend to the needs of others; that they set up their mark and go at it roughshod, regardless of the feelings of others. If we call them light and frivolous, they call us hard, and coarse, and brutal.<sup>19</sup>

In the last section of this paper, I use this framework about values/vices to evaluate Huntington’s recent warnings about Hispanics (and his conclusion, (4a) above), but we can already begin to appreciate some crucial differences. From the standpoint of Mañach and Dewey, what Huntington seems afraid of are not the values emphasized in Hispanic culture but the excesses of these values that could occur with the increasing “Hispanization” of the United States. This and the fact that he is mostly silent about the possible “vices” of Anglo-Saxon culture seem to commit Huntington to a good/evil dichotomy (or rhetoric) where the Anglo-Saxon values are good and the Hispanic ones are antithetical or a threat to what is good. This is very different from the above Mañach-Dewey framework where there is the possibility of evil (as excesses) at both sides of the cultural divide. To guard against excesses on both sides is the ideal task. This is the task of balance, a task that can unite the

Hispanic and the Anglo-Saxon world. But what is “balance”? Can this be accomplished while these cultures preserve their distinctive emphasis on certain values? And is this nothing more than another utopian dream of philosophers out of touch with historical reality?

## II. Balance as the Ideal

Mañach claimed that the two cultures in question “have no reason to exclude one another, but on the contrary they are called to complement and enrich one another” in a relation of “balance.”<sup>20</sup> “It is of great importance for America and for the whole world—above all for the world of Western values—that these two great areas of culture not only comprehend each other but that they establish real mutuality. It is important that each of them preserve its particular values and emulate the universal values of the other.”<sup>21</sup>

If there is a tenet in the Mañach-Dewey thesis that requires philosophical clarification it is (4), since it is a normative claim. There are different traditional philosophical conceptions of “balance.” Which one is assumed and worthy of our aspirations in the confrontation between Hispanic and Anglo culture? There is a quantitative notion of balance as the maintenance of a certain measurable proportion between things. Usually the proportion is one of equality (i.e., same in magnitude, quantity, degree, or worth). There are at least two versions of this quantitative notion of balance. Neither one can be the ideal sort of relation prescribed by the Mañach-Dewey thesis.

First, there is balance as compensation. This notion of balance is assumed by ancient religious doctrines, according to which there is a law in nature by which events tend eventually to be balanced out. If in this life we engaged in too much pleasure, our next life will bring much pain. Notice that in this sense, the notion of balance does not entail that the elements to be balanced out must interact or affect each other in any significant way. In fact, it does not even require that the elements in question coexist. One can achieve balance by a compensation that takes place across time. An excess of  $x$  at time  $t$  could be balanced by procuring deficiency of  $x$  (and perhaps excess of  $y$ ) at some other time. For example, one might say, “I will spend three days engaging in excessive play, to compensate for the last three days of drudgery.” Is this what Mañach and Dewey had in mind? This view would entail that a balanced life could be one of a continuous alternation (i.e., compensation) between the excesses of Latin and Anglo culture. Yet this is hardly worthy of aspiration.

There is also the quantitative notion of balance as moderation (or as the mean between extremes). In this interpretation balance is simply an equidistant midpoint between the extremes of each culture (i.e., between the vices I have presented). Excesses and deficiencies can be measured and can be corrected by simply adding or subtracting accordingly. So, for example, there is in principle a measurable mean between the two poles of being too organized and being totally disorganized. To maintain moderation is to avoid moving beyond that mean. The problems with this view should be obvious. How does one determine equal amount or distance relative to the extremes? Does the mean fall inside the Anglo side or the Hispanic side? But even if we could find some exact equidistant midpoint, is it worthy of aspiration?

This conception of the ideal has undesirable consequences. It discourages the particular cultures from excelling in any one-value dimension for the sake of moderation. Is it desirable that the plurality of distinctive cultures in North and South America should aim at the same mean, so that the whole hemisphere becomes one balanced but homogenous culture in regard to values? Does this mean, for example, that people in the Anglo

world for the sake of moderation must not continue to be encouraged to excel in what they are particularly good at, for example, planning and organizing events? If this is what balance means, then many would rather live in a world where excess is the norm. Furthermore, this interpretation just fails to capture an important aspect of the Mañach-Dewey vision: the notion that the tension between the values of these cultures is something to be embraced and not superseded.

Is there in the philosophies of Mañach or Dewey a different conception of balance than the ones we have considered? There is in Dewey, though he was not always explicit about it.<sup>22</sup> Here are, in concise form, its main tenets:

- a. Balance is a relation between forces in opposition or tension.
- b. Balance is an interactive process where these forces are transformed in a tensive but reinforcing relation.
- c. Balance is a relation between elements of an organic whole that avoid excess and deficiency.

The notion of balance as the opposition between contrary elements can be traced as far back as pre-Hispanic Latin America. According to Alfredo Lopez Austin it was essential to the worldview of the Anahuacs, the inhabitants of Mesoamerica in the central plateau of Mexico.<sup>23</sup> Dewey's notion of balance arose from his interest in biological and artistic models.

Balance in the life of an organism is something temporal and dynamic. It is achieved by a counteraction of forces that is not achieved for all time. Rather, it is like riding a bicycle; individuals continuously correct tendencies to tilt excessively in one direction or the other. The restoration of balance is not a return to a prior state of balance. In fact, no particular balance is ever strictly speaking the same balance. In the shift from imbalance to balance, there is a transformation of the factors in opposition. Moreover, this transformation is not one in which the factors are dissolved into an undifferentiated new unity (i.e., where there is no longer tension). There is instead an "organic unity," which "must be interpreted in terms of the interaction, of actual reinforcement between the parts, and not in terms of any one thing which somehow includes all others."<sup>24</sup>

The notion of balance as a unity where tension is preserved is present in art. In art, "equilibrium comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of, and because of, tension."<sup>25</sup> In the balance of an organic whole, the parts are interdependent in that what happens to one affects the other. When there is an excess of one of the parts (too much), there is also a deficiency (not enough) of some other part. Dewey explains this in works of art. "There is no such thing as a force strong or weak, great or pretty, in itself... To say that one part of a painting, drama, or novel is too weak, means that some related part is too strong—and vice versa."<sup>26</sup> This is important from the point of view of someone who seeks cues from experience as to when a balance might be threatened, or how it is to be maintained. The artist becomes aware that he has introduced too much variation only when he experiences not enough order. Not enough stability or order might be a sign that we are being too flexible. What is sometimes referred to as the excessive individualism of our American society is, in fact, experienced as a deficiency in our communal bonds.

There are many possible relations between the elements that make up an organic whole. One reason for preferring a one-sided, unbalanced relation is that it is often assumed to be a sign of strength. There are works of art that succeed in getting noticed because of an "effort to get strength by exaggeration of some one element," but Dewey believes that "such works do not wear...no real strength is displayed, the counteracting energies being only pasteboard and plaster figures. The seeming strength of one element is at the expense of weakness in other

elements."<sup>27</sup> The problem with excesses is that they usually are accompanied by, or lead to, deficiencies. Painters and writers have the problem of "keeping down" a part so that other parts can be "kept up." This does not mean that all parts must remain equal, as required by the quantitative notion of balance. In Dewey's organic conception, a relative predominance of one element over another is compatible with balance. But the strength or excellence of this element must significantly take into account and be affected and reinforced by the other parts that make up the whole (even if they are downplayed and in tension with it). An "excess" or a "deficiency" is a problem that results from the relative seclusion, confinement, oppression, and suppression of one element over another in an organic whole. Therefore, if balance is the mean between extremes, it is not a fixed equidistant midpoint that we either attain or we are out of balance. There is an indefinite number of ways in which one can stay within the mean without falling into an extreme. The balance of a bicycle rider is such that, at different times, he can tilt to one side more than to the other without falling down (i.e., off balance). In art this is done on purpose. The artist might add a "touch of disorder" to add emphasis without falling out of balance. She takes advantage of the "room" she has between extremes.

This is the conception of balance presupposed by the Mañach-Dewey thesis. It describes adequately the sort of relation explained earlier between our two columns of values. The values are in tension, but they are interdependent. How could this view be used today to answer to Huntington and his concern for the values that are threatened by the "Hispanic challenge"? What are the skeptical challenges this normative thesis faces today?

### III. Balance and the "Hispanic Challenge"

The above analysis of balance conceives the "clash" of values that worries Huntington in a very dynamic, open, and interactive way. The Hispanic and the Anglo values do "pull" in opposing directions, but their effect on each other and their tension can be positive as part of the "counteracting of energies" required for balance. Huntington perceives Hispanic culture as a threat, but perhaps he confuses the values with their possible excesses, or he just fails to appreciate the importance these other values can have in keeping the Anglo-Saxon values from moving in an exaggerated and stagnant direction. According to the Mañach-Dewey framework, the best safeguard that the traits Huntington considers as values will continue to be valuable is that they remain in balance. They must hold a tensive relation with the values that happen to be emphasized in Hispanic culture. There is, therefore, at least a *prima facie* reason to consider the "Hispanization" of America as a possible good thing.

Huntington wishes instead that Hispanics (and their culture) assimilate to the Anglo-Saxon "melting pot," but this would lack the differences and tension that could benefit both. Perhaps an analogy with marriage can help. My wife and I value work and play, but she "tends" more toward work and I more toward play. This is a source of tension, and sometimes there is no easy way to solve our conflicts, but the tension is also an opportunity to keep each other in balance, and with a marriage that has enough variation (rhythm) to keep it interesting.

The problem with Huntington is that, for him, tension is something that leads to fracture. He assumes that the only other alternative to assimilation is a divided (or culturally schizophrenic) society in which the United States loses its distinctive cultural values. Mañach and Dewey provide an alternative to this simplistic either/or. Neither homogeneity nor the sort of heterogeneity in which there is no interaction among cultures (and their values) is the ideal condition for the flourishing of cultures. These are, in fact, the most common

conditions in which cultures, people, and relationships are prone to excesses in what they value.

Huntington is opposed to multicultural policies at home and abroad because they lead to an undesirable kind of fragmentation. He assumes, however, the same simplistic either/or of his opponents: either there is one homogeneous whole (a “melting pot”), or we are left with a pluralism of radically separated parts. What the Mañach-Dewey thesis proposes is the possibility of unity among diversity. This kind of unity, though applied in a more political context, was what thinkers like Simon Bolivar, Jose Marti, and Alain Locke hoped for.<sup>28</sup> It is the possibility of a unity that confronts and relies on the tension created by our differences.

In so far as multiculturalism is a move away from monistic and hierarchical ways of conceiving the status of cultural differences in our society, it is well-intended. The problem is that in extreme forms it assumes a pluralistic ideal that is also separatist. According to such views, a multicultural society is preserved by protecting, sheltering, and separating all cultures. Sometimes this is necessary and justified, but Dewey would not see this as ideal (i.e., as the best we can hope for). The best we can hope for is a society that maintains the relation of balance I have described, where cultural interchange goes well beyond mere cultural tolerance.

To be fair to Huntington, he is not against pluralism. In fact, he is against the imperialistic notion that the Anglo values must be spread across the globe. Instead of trying to spread our values across the world, Huntington thinks Americans should be concerned with their own house. There is a need to “reassert pride in our core values” because these values are being weakened or diluted by a multiculturalism that has accommodated other cultures. But he thinks this is especially worrisome in regard to Hispanic culture because of the present demographic, political, and geographical circumstances. More importantly, it is a strong culture with very different (almost opposing) values. It is hard to predict what will happen as a consequence of the Hispanization of the United States. We may end up in fracture, war, and moral decline even if we were to try what Mañach and Dewey propose. They would, however, argue that we are not doomed to fracture into two opposing ethnic parts solely on the basis that the values of these two cultures are antithetical or in tension. In fact, in their view, this would be a reason for optimism.

Huntington may reply that even if he were to agree with Mañach and Dewey about what would be ideal, there are way too many obstacles for this ideal to be applicable to this particular confrontation between cultures. In theory, the values in tension can be reconciled, but the ideal requires a willingness on both sides to be open and affected by the other. This is not what we can expect of Hispanic culture. According to Huntington, unlike other cultures that have been part of the history of America, Hispanics are very resilient and they resist assimilation. The problem with his view is that the evidence points elsewhere. One could make the case that if there is a culture in the world that has been open to change and to interactions with other world cultures it is the Hispanic culture. What characterizes the history of Hispanic culture is an evolving “mestizaje,” which is almost the opposite of any tendency to remain pure or homogeneous. Hispanics may resist assimilation, but this is not necessarily because they are close-minded or ethnocentric. Openness does not require a willingness to assimilate; it just requires a willingness to be affected.

According to Mañach and Dewey, a United States that lives in tension between these two cultures (regarding what it values) is ideal provided balance is maintained through mutual interaction. There is no doubt that as a result of this transaction

a transformation will occur. This does not mean, as Huntington fears, that these cultures must abandon the emphasis on those values that have made them distinctive and unique. For what is crucial to Dewey’s notion of balance is that the “parts” in tension have a supporting-adjusted relation and not that they have equal weight. When the display of strength and excellence of one factor is achieved by taking into account (or being affected by) other counteracting factors, there is the kind of reinforcement required for balance.

It is not clear why Huntington wishes the United States to remain a place where “Anglo Protestant” culture and values predominate. But even if we were to agree, his view that this predominance is better achieved by protecting the Anglo culture or expecting the assimilation of Hispanics is questionable. The values that Huntington cares about can predominate in the United States even if it is affected by and it affects the Hispanic culture that it coexists with. In fact, there is an indeterminate plurality of ways in which the balance between Latin and Anglo values can be achieved or maintained (i.e., an indefinite amount of possibilities that are still within balance). The ideal America could be comprised of a variety of cultures, each having a different proportion of the values presented (e.g., some “tilted” more toward play [and less work] than others). There is no reason to think, as Huntington does, that the collision between these two cultures will result in the United States losing its distinctive concern for certain values. What can give America genuine unity and strength is embracing its unity in tension. This is the best way to reassert and safeguard the values that Huntington thinks are in peril. The Anglo culture may need the Hispanic one to guard against its own excesses.

I return to my analogy. In the tension I experience with my wife (because of differences in character), the fact that we are able to keep each other in balance does not mean that we each have the same balance. We have not sacrificed our individuality to the unity that we have established. She remains the person in our relationship in whom “work” predominates; that is her character excellence even though in an indirect way I contribute to it. The marriages in which there are no differences (regarding our list of values), and the ones in which there are differences but there is no mutual transformation, are the most vulnerable to excess (vice).

Huntington can reply that my marriage analogy is misguided and reveals what is wrong and naïve about the view I have defended. The unity of a marriage implies a special commitment and loyalty, and this is precisely what is in danger of disappearing in the United States because of the differences between the two cultures that are coming into contact. I would first remind Huntington how important loyalty is in the Hispanic world, but, more to the point, I would remind him of the particular way in which the analogy seems relevant. The sense of identity and mutual commitment in a marriage need not be based on homogeneity or assimilation. It can be based on the differences and on the tensive balanced relation this creates. Mañach and Dewey would argue something even stronger. A marriage in which one spouse is “assimilated” to the other erases tension, but it also diminishes the opportunity for growth and for preventing extremism (vices). The stability of this sort of marriage may seem attractive, but it makes for the sort of homogeneous and monotonous harmony where there is no variation or rhythm. The ideal sort of marriage is not easy, this is why it is an ideal. Both spouses must acknowledge as values the different values that predominate in the other and have a sense that they need each other. This is the possibility of reasserting one’s own values while also recognizing the values of the other.

In sum, the Mañach-Dewey vision does not provide an easy answer to the “Hispanic challenge,” but it does point to an alternative to value assimilation (homogeneity) and the sort of divisive-separatist scenario that worries Huntington. But we must confront some skeptical challenges. One may still object that we must be more realistic. Is the alternative direction envisioned by Mañach-Dewey a real possibility? Can contact between two cultures in tension result in not hindering the values that are cherished by each culture while also enriching both? One might concede that in principle (or theoretically) there could be instances where the above values are in tension but reconcilable. However, these situations are rare and, in any case, ephemeral. They are so ephemeral, and at so much cost, that for all practical purposes the effort to maintain a balanced integration (and avoid one-sidedness) is in the long run impossible and counterproductive. For to one who sees the desirability of one extreme, the attempt to introduce balance tends to lead one further and further into the opposite and undesired direction. For example, those who defend the spontaneity and emotional aspect of Hispanic culture might claim that any attempt to add Anglo order or organization would lead eventually to fixity and is therefore a threat to Hispanic values. Huntington may be thinking that the value of individuality may be in jeopardy once we allow the emphasis on relationships (and collectivism) that will come with the Hispanization of America. He could argue that we rather suffer the evils of our excessive individualism than take the risk of losing it or moving toward collectivism. Notice that in this sort of argument the notion of a balance is undermined by a “slippery slope” fear. In other words, attempts to balance opposing tendencies eventually lead to a vice or failure. Therefore, since one cannot have the best of both tendencies, we might as well embrace one. In this debate, both sides will claim that any compromise or “in between” is deceptive or open to suspicion. However, these “slippery slope” arguments only show the risk and difficulties involved in trying to keep a workable balance; they do not prove that the possibility envisioned by Dewey and Mañach is not workable.

A more challenging argument to the Mañach-Dewey ideal would be based on the fact that it ignores political and historical realities. The optimistic vision of a common future for the Americas achieved through intercultural communication and mutual understanding between the Anglo world and the Hispanic world is not new. As I mentioned before, this was also the vision of Jose Marti and Simon Bolivar. But many philosophers have dismissed this as utopia unless we first confront the present political and economical conditions that continue to work against this vision. How can we even dream of balance and learning from each other if both the people and the nations in this “confrontation” are not equals in a significant moral or political sense? The unequal power relation, class struggles, and injustices have undermined the ideal relation between these two worlds.

I am not interested here in challenging the truth of these sorts of criticisms; they do need to be taken seriously. I must, however, say something in defense of the Mañach-Dewey vision. First, they do not deny that inquiry into actual conditions should be an integral part of any responsible examination and application of an ideal. In any case, the ideal relation that I have presented can make room for political considerations. Recall that the enemies of balance are “excess” or “deficiency.” These were defined as problems that result from the relative seclusion, confinement, oppression, and suppression of one factor over another in an organic whole. There is no reason why “factor” here applies just to values and not to the relation among the people who represent those values. It is, in fact, a condition of the “healthy” tension that I maintain with my wife that there

also be an equal or balanced power relation between us. But even if this is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient. This leads me to the second point I want to make on behalf of the Mañach-Dewey thesis.

We cannot dismiss the Mañach-Dewey thesis because we must first wait for more favorable socio-political conditions. We can wait if we want, but there is more to the brewing tension between these two worlds than can be reduced to these conditions. Mañach and Dewey are pointing to a different type of obstacle or challenge that seems worth considering independently of other types of barriers that keep us from achieving the ideal sort of relation. In other words, even if all the political and justice problems in this relationship were somehow resolved tomorrow, we would still have a serious challenge in our hands with regard to values. In this Dewey and Mañach would agree with Huntington; culture does matter. There are deep cultural differences that cannot be pushed aside or reduced to any other challenge. Huntington’s emphasis on cultural differences (values) is a welcome alternative to the common tendency to reduce, and thereby oversimplify, national and international antagonisms to political conflicts motivated by self-interest.

Huntington is alerting us that the Hispanization of the United States could be “the end of the America we have known for more than three centuries. Americans should not let that change happen unless they are convinced that this new nation would be a better one.”<sup>29</sup> If Mañach and Dewey were alive today, I think they would argue that this change does hold the promise of a better America. Huntington could argue that the Hispanic contribution toward a more balanced America is not needed, that things are fine the way they are. But if so, he is blind to the exaggerations of his own culture. I am sorry to say that the unbalanced America that Dewey criticized is still around. It is still the case that organization, efficiency, and “getting ahead” at all costs are predominant values and that many people are lonely. The recent wave of communitarians and call for civic responsibility in American society can be interpreted as a reaction to the rampant individualism that has affected our American society. Americans are spending more time at work than they did twenty years ago. In fact, America is the only high-tech (industrial) society for which it is true that the more it progresses financially and technologically, the more people work. To make things worse, it is a country where many people, while obsessed with the value of work, find themselves hired in meaningless work. Quantification is still the standard in many aspects of American life. For many Americans, better communication only means faster and with more people. America continues to be a restless place where one must protect oneself from waiters in restaurants who are ready to remove one’s plate if one is not eating. There seems to be no time to rest or to savor the consummations of life. James’s essay “The Gospel of Relaxation” is as relevant today as it was ninety-eight years ago.<sup>30</sup>

Let me clarify what I am suggesting. I am not claiming that the gradual “Hispanization” of America is the solution to the excesses of American life. Moreover, there is no guarantee that this will contribute to a more balanced America. The outcome might be a worse situation, given that the cultures that are coming into contact (i.e., what has to be balanced) seem almost to be in opposition. Dewey was keenly aware of this. This is why he characterized the contact as “charged with high explosives.”<sup>31</sup>

One must also worry about the human tendency to try to correct an excess with the opposite excess. America is no better off if it simply replaces its present excesses with those that characterize Hispanic culture. Dewey would agree that what

is needed is an intelligent, piecemeal transformation coming from within. This “from within” is important. Huntington makes the mistake of assuming that the “Hispanization of America” is coming from the outside, that is, from south of the Rio Grande. Hispanic culture has always been part of America, but it has remained dormant or at the margins.

As we begin a new century, the new frontier and challenge of America will be to achieve a complementary and enriching integration between its Anglo and Hispanic sides. But by assuming that there is something irreconcilable about these two cultures when it comes to values, Huntington is helping divide the United States as much as the Hispanics he fears. It is openness to change and transformation that will unite us, not fear. The ideal relation is not assimilation to some antecedent and homogeneous value core but an evolving mutual modification where we learn from our tension. For Mañach and Dewey, if there is any evil it is the excesses that each of these sets of values can take. To guard against excesses on both sides is the ideal task, a task that can unite us. There are no magical safeguards or antecedent prescriptions that can help us in securing balance.

#### Endnotes

1. Jorge Mañach. *The Frontier* (New York: Teachers College-Columbia University, 1975), 48.
2. Citations of the works of John Dewey in this article refer to the critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press. In the citations, the initials of the series are followed by volume and page numbers. Abbreviations for the critical edition are:  

<i>EW</i>	The Early Works (1882-1898)
<i>MW</i>	The Middle Works (1899-1924)
<i>LW</i>	The Later Works (1925-1953)
3. Dewey, “From a Mexican Notebook” (*LW* 2:209).
4. Dewey, “Imperialism Is Easy” (*LW* 3:162).
5. Huntington’s controversial essay “The Hispanic Challenge” appeared in <http://www.foreignpolicy.com> (March/April 2004). It was a preview to his book *Who We Are? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2004). Huntington is a political scientist at Harvard University.
6. From an interview by Deborah Solomon (May 2, 2004, *The New York Times*).
7. Samuel Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” 12.
8. This is a term that is now commonly used as a reference to the changes to the United States as a result of the rapid dramatic demographic changes of its growing Hispanic population.
9. Mañach, *The Frontier*, 71.
10. See, for example, Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (Routledge University Press, 1997) and Seyla Benhabib, ed. *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1996).
11. See Jorge Gracia. *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), chapter 2.
12. See Jose Medina, “Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the Problem of Difference.” In *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (London: Sage Publications, 2003); Gregory Pappas, “Jorge Gracia’s Philosophical Perspective on Hispanic Identity,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 27:2 (2001); Iris Young, “Structure, Difference, and Hispanic/Latino Claims of Justice.” In *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*, edited by Jorge Gracia and Pablo De Grieff (New York and London: Routledge, 2000).
13. Mañach, *The Frontier*, 49.
14. See use of this sort of evidence in A. R. Gini and T. J. Sullivan. *It Comes with Territory: An Inquiry Concerning Work and the Person* (New York: Random House, 1989); Steven Greenhouse, “So Much Work, So Little Time,” *The New York Times* (September 5, 1999), Steven Greenhouse, “Workaholics Anonymous,” *The Economist* (Oct. 22, 1994).
15. Jorge Mañach (1898-1961) lived in Cuba, Spain, and the United States. He is known for his work on Jose Marti, but he also wrote about John Dewey. For Dewey’s experiences with the Hispanic world, read Jaime Nubiola’s “La recepción de Dewey en España e Hispanoamérica,” *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 2001 (Spain).
16. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (*LW* 10:330).
17. See Dewey, “Qualitative Thought” (*LW* 5:243).
18. For this I have relied on the writings of Latin American and North American philosophers, as well as consulted the experience of many who have been sufficiently exposed to both cultures. Some of these values are mentioned by Huntington in *Who We Are?* Dewey’s cultural comparisons can be found in “Pragmatic America” (*MW* 13:306-310), “Mexico’s Educational Renaissance” (*LW* 2:199-205), “From a Mexican Notebook” (*LW* 2:206-210), and “Imperialism Is Easy” (*LW* 3:158-162). See also Patrick Romanell, *The Making of the Mexican Mind* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952). Among Latin American philosophers who have written about this issue are Jose Enrique Rodo in *Ariel* (New York: Las Americas Pub. Co., 1967), and Jorge Mañach in *The Frontier*.
19. Dewey, “Educational Lectures Before Brigham Young Academy” (*LW* 17:343).
20. Mañach, *The Frontier*, 70.
21. *Ibid.*, 78.
22. In Dewey one finds not only a description of balance consonant with Mañach but also a philosophical justification for why balance is essential to ideal activity in all of the different dimensions of human life. Dewey held the hypothesis that balance is the relation that can make experience educative, enriching, and aesthetic. Excessiveness and deficiency, on the other hand, are what characterize our most unfulfilling and non-educative moments.
23. Alfredo Lopez Austin and Lujan Leonardo Lopez. *Mexico’s Indigenous Past* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).
24. Dewey, *Lectures on Ethics*, edited by Donald F. Koch (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 342.
25. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (*LW* 10:20).
26. *Ibid.*, 185.
27. *Ibid.*
28. For a reconstruction of this notion in these thinkers in the context of the problem of identity, see Jose Medina, “Pragmatism and Ethnicity: Critique, Reconstruction, and the New Hispanic.” In *Metaphilosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 115-44.
29. Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” 12.
30. William James, “The Gospel of Relaxation” (1898). In *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
31. Dewey, “From a Mexican Notebook” (*LW* 2:209).

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***Knowing Self in Power and Truth: An Interview with Linda Martín Alcoff, Professor of Philosophy, Political Science, and Women's Studies and Meredith Professor for Teaching Excellence, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York***

**Ivan Marquez, Interviewer**

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Linda Martín Alcoff works in the areas of continental philosophy, epistemology, feminist theory, and race theory. From her first ground-breaking anthology, *Feminist Epistemologies* (Routledge, 1993), through her recent collection of autobiographical pieces by contemporary women philosophers, *Singing in the Fire* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), to her upcoming book on identities (forthcoming with Oxford University Press), Alcoff's work has been marked by an interest in knowledge's relation to historical/social context and subjectivity.

In her book *Real Knowing* (Cornell University Press, 1996) and in many articles, she argues, in opposition to many post-structuralists and pragmatists, for the preservation of a notion of truth as partly referential albeit inextricably tied to a context. Furthermore, and in connection to this, she also critiques pure proceduralism in the normative dimension, defending instead a notion of normativity that is substantive but context related, thus, not universal or absolute.

Alcoff, the daughter of a Panamanian professor of history, is conscious of her half-Latina identity. And her philosophical interventions oftentimes look at the connections between one's knowledge and one's particular positions as epistemological subject. Her next book will continue in this vein, sketching out a program in what she refers to as "political epistemology" that explores and exploits the emancipatory potential of the dynamic, constitutive, and ever-present relations between knowledge and knowing self.

**I. Knowledge in the Contexts of Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Post-Structuralism**

**Marquez:** You use phenomenology, hermeneutics, and post-structuralism to do critique. Can you explain how these three elements come together in your philosophical interventions?

**Alcoff:** I think of phenomenology and hermeneutics as approaches or orientations to philosophical problems that each help to reveal different aspects of an idea or object of analysis. Phenomenology counsels us to consider how the idea is related to lived experience, and hermeneutics instructs us to consider the effects of historical context on the interpretation and understanding of ideas. Both phenomenology and hermeneutics are necessary for philosophical analysis. For example, in regard to something like "the body," phenomenology would suggest that we check how our philosophical representation of the body is related to our lived experience of embodiment. Sometimes this might cause us to reassess the philosophical representation, but at other times this might cause us to experience differently our lived embodiment. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, would suggest that we avoid assuming that what we understand today by a phrase like "the body" is what that phrase has always meant, or that how we understand it today is natural and self-explanatory. Thus, both phenomenology and hermeneutics help us to develop a critical and reflective consciousness about everyday beliefs and intuitions as well as the very formulation of philosophical problems. (For a good example of how to do

this, by the way, see Jack Caputo's essay, "Heidegger's Scandal: Thinking and the Essence of the Victim," in which he uses both phenomenology and hermeneutics to critique Heidegger's formulation of the problems of philosophy). Post-structuralism is a different kind of fish. It's more of a substantive theoretical tradition (such as existentialism, for example) than it is an approach or a method. Like existentialism, it is an historical development of a collection of thinkers who sometimes disagree, but there is a family resemblance among them nonetheless. These days I find myself more often frustrated with the limited way in which post-structuralism allows philosophy to proceed than I find it useful. It's too unmoored and undirected in its critique, and I hate its strategic reductionism of everything (i.e., truth is strategic, articulations of the "good" are strategic, epistemology is strategic, and so on). Derrida's critiques of metaphysics and Lyotard's critiques of epistemology were interesting, useful, and partly right. Deleuze and Guattari's attempt to think metaphysics differently is sometimes pretty interesting (though its real fruitfulness has not yet been shown). Irigaray has done a convincing archaeological analysis of some of the hidden forces behind Western philosophy. But I believe that post-structuralism has about outlived its usefulness, in my view. It is still stuck in critique, but what we need now is a new vision, and I haven't found any of the recent attempts to pull an ethics or politics out of post-structuralism at all useful or convincing, which shouldn't be surprising since that is not what it was intended to do.

**Marquez:** Your work reminds me of Marilyn Frye's work in *The Politics of Reality*. You both use a robust phenomenology that looks inside and outside the self and in between selves to do critique. How/Why did you settle on that way of doing critique?

**Alcoff:** That's a flattering comparison. Marilyn is a good analytic philosopher who often starts from linguistic usage to do critique and has the ability to come up with wonderfully concrete and memorable examples. I have learned from both elements of her work. It is fairly common in some parts of analytic philosophy to use concrete examples to do philosophical analyses. Often, however, those examples are made in the form of wild thought experiments (the violinist tied to one's back, the brain in a vat), or excessively simple descriptions (Descartes' wax, or Wittgenstein's bricklayers). Marilyn makes use of more real world examples of social interaction (meeting a person of ambiguous gender and not knowing how to act). I try to do that as well. The point is not to make a real event the absolute judge and jury of philosophical ideas but to have a dialogue between the event and philosophical analysis—where each interrogates the other. In this case, her concrete examples have layers of complexity fruitful to unpack. I did not consciously settle in on any one way of critique. My philosophical training was pretty much split evenly between analytic and continental traditions, and I actually find the two work very well together. I do believe in exploring how things look from "inside" the self, as you put it, but that is never sufficient. Because what is "inside" is constitutively related to what is "outside."

**Marquez:** Your approach is not only phenomenological but also post-structuralist. However, in opposition to many post-structuralists, you want to preserve a notion of truth as something more than justified belief, and a normative dimension that goes beyond the notion of "this is how we do it here." Why is that so? And can you explain from your philosophical point of view how one takes that middle road between absolutism and relativism that seems to escape most post-structuralists?

**Alcoff:** Truth has a referential aspect to it, and it is a mistake to think that if we reject naive referentialism then we have escaped reference altogether. I disagree with those in the pragmatic

tradition, such as Putnam, who argue that the concept of truth is built out of our understandings of justified beliefs and does not go beyond this. It's easy to demonstrate that ordinary linguistic usage does not sustain such a view. Lots of times we hold out the possibility that a completely justified claim may yet not be true. What we want in seeking truth is not simply justification but to know what is really the case. Consider the example of the sexual abuse of children. In some of these cases, there is a lack of sufficient evidence even for the victim herself to know for sure all of what happened. But the truth matters enormously. This is not to deny that that truth may have multiple layers, that it may be open to a certain variability in interpretation. But the basic facts of touching, feelings, words spoken, actions taken, have less variability and have a referentiality to events that we aim for in aiming for the truth. The middle road between absolutism and relativism allows for interpretation that is indexed to historical and cultural context, but this doesn't give us a dysfunctional relativism. Contexts, if I can put it like this, can speak to each other, can question each other, and can even be unified. Relativists like Rorty think that cultures are like linguistic prisons with no escape; he's apparently never met a person fluent in more than one language.

**Marquez:** Your relationship to Foucault is strong and deep but not devoid of conflict. Can you briefly explain what you consider to be the richness and the limitations of Foucault's (rather than "a Foucaultian") perspective?

**Alcoff:** Foucault is enormously important to me. Foucault provided a critical analysis of European modernity almost as useful as Marx's critical analysis of European capitalism. His account of discipline helps us to see modernity's "freedoms" very differently; his critique of the pathologization of the modern subject helps us gain some distance from the hegemonic psychological discourse of our own time; and his account of the interweavings of power and knowledge points the way forward to reviving and resuscitating an impotent epistemology. That said, I also find Foucault very problematic; he was androcentric and Eurocentric and shamefully unconcerned about the particular forms of violence suffered by women and children. And I am worried about the way in which Foucault's work has been taken up in feminist theory and LGBT studies to justify the repudiation of identity politics and identity-based political movements. But you want me to stick to Foucault himself, and not the Foucaultian institution. I have found Foucault particularly useful for my own philosophical work because he combines two of my main interests: the analysis of subjectivity and the analysis of knowledge, and he approaches both with an effective historical consciousness (to import Gadamer's phrase) of the political context within which both develop. Lyotard and Habermas are the other two principal continental philosophers who do epistemology, but Lyotard's account is too one-dimensional and focused on the challenges to knowing, and Habermas's early, wonderful work has been left behind in an increasingly untenable, pure, procedural model. Foucault has many problems as well—he does not pay enough attention to reference especially—but, as I said before, he gives us a good place to begin by announcing the equal importance of the power and the knowledge aspects, without reducing power to mere strategy or opportunism. I think Foucault gives us an invaluable starting point for reconfiguring the problematic of epistemology, but it is only a starting point.

**Marquez:** Martha Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, and Alasdair MacIntyre all have tried in their different ways to reformulate an Aristotelian naturalized perspective in order to avoid the very same problem of relativism that you seek to avoid. How does your own immanent perspective differ from their Aristotelian naturalized points of view?

**Alcoff:** I am less familiar with Sen's than with Nussbaum's or MacIntyre's accounts, but my sense of all three is that they try to develop a minimal common denominator in order to provide a means for cross-cultural critique, so that we can have a yardstick to judge various practices by. And they do have a naturalized approach to what that common denominator is. My problem is not so much with their naturalized approach but with the ahistorical and decontextualized way of finding and presenting the natural. In other words, Sen and Nussbaum take Aristotle to be in a sense timeless and culturally universal. In contrast, I think the applicability of Aristotle should be on the table, not set aside as the grounds for being able to be at the table in the first place. This might seem to put me in the camp of the proceduralists, but your question assumes (rightly) that what I do share with the group of three you mentioned is their critique of pure proceduralism. I don't think such a beast exists, and that we are always putting forward substantive values in setting out procedures. Those values need to be open to critical reflection, and historical and cultural self-awareness (which calling them universal absolutes tends to foreclose). Sen seems to me to be closer to proceduralism than Nussbaum because he doesn't give a list of the actual human capabilities' attributes as she has done. I agree with much of Eva Kittay's critique of Nussbaum's list and listmaking. The issue of cognitive disability is a good case, as Kittay points out. Nussbaum uses our historical and cultural moment's understanding to suggest that people with severe cognitive impairment cannot exercise human capabilities, but this is just the kind of claim we need to be careful to remain open about as we are able to learn more from the cognitively disabled themselves (I'm thinking about the astounding changes in the way we think of autism now that some persons with severe autism have been able to write down their thoughts—on this see Doug Biklen's amazing work). So we need a substantive universalism that will not close the door to its own cultural and historical locatedness. Two good examples of this are Satya Mohanty's discussion of moral objectivism and Edward Said's work at the end of his life on humanism. Mohanty suggests that at this historical stage we really have no idea whether there are moral universals because, given the pattern of colonialism, we have never truly tried to find out through real dialogues across difference. So he suggests we start the process. I think he is right to make this at least partly an empirical question. Said suggests that humanism involves the capacity of self-critique and that that critique must involve a consciousness about power as well as history and culture. This approach seems to me to be smarter than the capabilities approach alone, which can devolve into dogmatism. Humanism can be universally applied, but this means simply that critical and reflexive dialogues are universally applied. Relativism is not entailed from recognizing something's cultural embeddedness. One must be honest about one's own embeddedness and be open to learning something new. The anthropologist Renato Rosaldo is very good on showing why cultural relativism (which he supports) in no way entails ethical relativism (which he rejects). There may be some versions of cultural relativism that do entail ethical relativism, but this is not the kind that Rosaldo, Said, or many others, including myself, would support. In fact, the whole point of developing a critical self-awareness of one's own positionality is to aim toward greater truth and understanding, not to stop the process of critique by claiming a relativism born of the particularity of one's intellectual foundations. The more one comes to understand that particularity (i.e., one's embeddedness), the more expansive and reliable one's judgements can become.

**Marquez:** Your immanent approach uses concrete, particular data and descriptions of instances of daily life to develop philosophical positions. In this regard, it is very empirically

informed. However, you do not use much data coming from the natural and social (a.k.a., human sciences). Are there reasons beyond sheer contingency why you do not use contemporary scientific knowledge in your work?

**Alcoff:** I'm not a philosopher of science and so I don't trust myself to say original things about the natural sciences. I wanted at one time to go into philosophy of science—I wrote an M.A. thesis on Kuhn, and I had originally been a physics major in college—but good work in philosophy of science really requires one to have a high level of knowledge in at least one field. I have heard physicists and other scientists make fun of the work by some of our leading philosophers of science who seem to many of us to be really well-informed! But I do read widely in the social sciences and try to use that to inform my work. Probably over half of the bibliographical entries in the book on identity I am finishing up now come from the social sciences. In working in women's studies and in critical race theory in particular, our work has to be informed by the empirical work on social movements, history, and so on. In fact, one of the main ways I criticize the critics of identity politics is their amazing inattention to any real empirical studies of identity politics in action, of which there are now quite a few and some very good ones. Instead, the critics will share personal anecdotes or simply move to idealized representations. But when we are trying to think about something like social identities, it is not enough to do conceptual analysis without relating concepts to real practices.

**Marquez:** What is your take on the notion of human nature? Do you think that there are universals (temporal or atemporal) that apply to our species and that philosophers should take into account as data or horizon in their analyses?

**Alcoff:** My answer to the previous question on neo-Aristotelian approaches relates to this. If there is such a thing as human nature, I believe like Marx that it is historical and dynamic. Thus, it cannot play the absolute yardstick role that it has in much European modernist philosophy. It's such an ideologically laden concept that it seems to be more dangerous than it is useful.

## II. Identity, Knowledge, Politics

**Marquez:** Can you talk about your Panamanian background?

**Alcoff:** I was born in Gorgas Hospital, in Ancon, Panama. My father, Miguel Angel Martín, was from a very interesting and kind of well-known family in Panama City. His father had owned a pawn shop in Balboa, and his brother and sisters (my aunts and my uncle) all were teachers at the main high school in the city. They were middle class but far from wealthy, and the neighborhood where my father grew up looks like a very poor neighborhood by U.S. standards. Family legend has it my aunt Ida demanded that the President of Panama give the family a loan so they could finally purchase a home, and he did it. She was quite a beauty, with a strong personality. My father had apparently been something of a troublemaker as a teenager, so the family did what is often done in such cases, which is to send him to live with friends somewhere far away. In this case it was Florida, where he finished high school and then went to Florida State University. There he met my mother, a white Floridian from a poor family who had made it to college on a scholarship. They married immediately after she finished her B.A. My parents had my sister Vicki in Florida, but my father was having trouble finding work. With both a B.A. and an M.A. from FSU, he was only able to get a job driving an ice cream truck. So they moved to Panama, which was back to Panama in my father's case. And there I was born. My mother worked as a secretary at the U.S. base there known as the Southern Command—the seat of operations for all U.S. military activity in Latin America. She was the secretary to a General (she had

majoring in business, but in those days that was the equivalent to secretarial school for women). My father did not work that I know of. They had a difficult relationship and she felt very alone. So when I was still a baby, my mother decided to leave him and return to Florida. I thus grew up in Florida with her and my older sister. My father has now passed away. He eventually got his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and became a Professor of History at the University of Panama, where he taught his whole career except during a period of the Torrijos dictatorship in which he lost his job for almost ten years. Besides my older sister, I have two younger sisters, Leslie and Aleika, and a younger brother, Rafael (we all have different mothers). When the Twin Towers fell on 9-11, my husband and I spent the day on the couch watching CNN and trying to get through to his family in New York (it turned out they were all okay, but traumatized). I had not felt so close to war since 1989, when I spent another day on the couch watching CNN and trying to get through to my family in Panama the day after the U.S. invaded. When I finally did get through on that day, I spoke to my brother who was crouching under his dining room table watching U.S. planes hitting targets in his neighborhood. I remember a colleague in Syracuse saying to me later that week that I must have felt so glad to be in the U.S.—but I didn't at all. It felt like being behind enemy lines. The demand that has become more insistent since 9-11 that Latinos here in the U.S. should assimilate and be loyal is so clueless about the conflicting feelings we so often have about living in the north. How can one be loyal to a country that oppresses our families?

**Marquez:** Speaking of conflicting feelings, there appears to be at least two big ideas about what America is: (1) "White America" (in this case borrowing the term from Eminem) and (2) the "America" of Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. The two Americas can be simplistically contrasted saying that one is antiliberal and the other one is liberal in J. S. Mill's sense of the term. We could say that the first one is not much different from any other so-called closed, traditional society. While the second one is conceived by some as the first true open society (à la Popper) that self-consciously engages in collective "experiments in living" (like Mill puts it) and that allows for individuals to do likewise. To me, the United States' present external "War on Terror" is a reflection of an internal war between two camps adhering to these opposing visions of America—camps that unfortunately seem to be evenly divided and thus deadlocked.

At least from our particular historical standpoint, an experimentalist, fallibilist epistemology, a democratic politics, and an open society seem to be mutually implicated in a constellation plotting the basic reference points for a form of life that would be congenial with the vague vision of America (2). And perhaps Latinos in the U.S. can be seen as representative of a kind of epistemological subject who, on average, can feel the division between these two Americas more intensely than the average monocultural white American.

Do you see epistemological subjects as being differently useful/capable to perform certain epistemological tasks? And if so, do you perceive this to be presently the case with regards to Latinos at this particular historical point in the U.S.? I am not suggesting that Latinos will save the world, but only that perhaps different experiences of being-in-the-world embody different epistemological ways that enable and nourish different political and social forms of life. And that Latinos' hybrid, mestizo, syncretic nature has on average an advantage when it comes to promoting the form of life of America (2) at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

**Alcoff:** I believe identities matter epistemologically, and their political salience is actually derivative on their epistemic

salience. Identities do not determine one's political judgement or orientation (Latinos are politically all over the map), but they are rough and ready ways to categorize experiences, and from experiences we develop perceptual practices, what Gibson called affordances and Merleau-Ponty called habits of perception. That is, we are attuned to different elements in any given event or object. For Latinos, speaking very broadly, immigration issues, and having a dual citizenship of the heart, if not of the passport, are never far from the surface of our perspective on what happens in the United States. Also, there is tremendous poverty and discrimination, which convey an emotional valence to our responses to political leaders who promise to help the underclass.

So, yes, I do think Latinos will make a positive difference. Perhaps the most significant potential we have to offer is the idea of an open-endedness to what it means to be "American." Because "America" encompasses a lot of territory, two continents, a plethora of nations, and several languages and cultures. Latinos are less likely than any other minority group to shed completely their old identities. Our nationalities are closer in geographical location to the U.S. than any other grouping save Native Americans. There is an inordinate amount of movement of bodies and monies between the U.S. and "home."

Chauvinists like Samuel Huntington can only see this as a threat. He seems to believe as Woodrow Wilson said that "Any man who carries a hyphen about him has a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of the republic." They can't imagine a patriotism that extends beyond a single nation, a love that crosses borders. Their humanism is at best a colonial humanism, but what we hearken after is a decolonized humanism.

The idea that cultural identity cannot be transcended and that identities matter is less threatening if we think beyond monocultural terms and embrace and acknowledge the reality of multicultural identities. Monocultural identity politics can become fundamentalist, but multicultural identity politics is expansive, internally heterogeneous and, thus, not at all antithetical to open and critical debate. This is what Mignolo and others mean by calling for a pluritopic hermeneutics, an account of multicultural horizons of intelligibility and meaning. I think that the late, great Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands* was taken up so widely precisely because it manifested a reflective pluritopic hermeneutics: a reflective engagement with her own heterogeneous identity without falsely smoothing over the conflicts but without a hopeless or fatalistic attitude about being multiple (as one got with the image of the "tragic mulatto" a generation ago).

The treatment of Barack Obama who is just now emerging onto the national political scene is interesting to watch as the pundits grapple with his complex identity. There are two salutary lessons that Latinos should learn from the treatment of Obama: first, that we are not the only ones with complex identities, and we need to recognize this and make alliances with others, and second, that even multiple identities can get co-opted by the power structure and used for the purpose of maintaining the status quo.

So there is definite positive potential in Latino experience for refashioning the imagery and self-understanding of the United States. But that potential is only a potential: we need leaders who will make coalition with others, as well as intellectuals who will formulate the full political fruits of the potential that exists.

**Marquez:** Can you tell me something about your current work on identity, in particular, as it relates to the construction of Latino identity/identities in contemporary U.S.?

**Alcoff:** I am finishing up a book on identity, race, gender, and the self right now (perhaps it will be in press when this interview comes out—it will come out with Oxford University Press). I have three chapters in the book that address Latino issues: the question of Latino identity in relation to racial categories, the relationship between Latino identity and the black/white paradigm of racial politics so dominant in the U.S., and the implications of mixed race and mestizo identity. The book as a whole is an extended look at social identities—race and gender in particular—and the way in which identity has become suspect in both political and philosophical discussions. For at least fifteen years now, identity politics has been criticized as reifying, constraining, irrational, and politically retrograde, and this critique has flowed from a certain characterization of what identities are. I am taking on the critiques both of identity and of identity politics in this book, and developing an account of what identities really are (as against their caricatured portrayal by critics). My account is a broadly realist one, so I develop a realist account of race and of gender identity. Then, at the end, I discuss the idea of a decolonized humanism.

**Marquez:** What do you see yourself pursuing next in philosophy?

**Alcoff:** I already have the next book half done, but at my rate of writing that only means I may finish it in five rather than ten years! But this book will be going back to epistemology, to chart and analyze the development of a political epistemology that would do to, and for, epistemology what Marxian political economy did to, and for, the study of economics. I want to lay out what a research program of political epistemology would look like and address its most serious challenges, which involve the questions of truth and of reference in my view. And I try to bring into being a canon of work that already exists within this rubric, and then analyze the contributions of this work, from Horkheimer and Adorno, to Habermas, Foucault, feminist epistemologists, especially Helen Longino, and some of the new work relating post-colonial theory to epistemological questions such as Mignolo pursues.

**Marquez:** Thank you very much for your time.

**Alcoff:** You are welcome.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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### **New Scholarly Society Organized:**

#### **The Southwestern Association for Latin American Philosophy**

At last summer's NEH Institute on Latin American Philosophy, held at the State University of New York at Buffalo, a group of participants met to form a new scholarly society, the *Southwestern Association for Latin American Philosophy*. They agreed that, for the purposes of the organization, "philosophy" would be construed broadly to include the work not only of philosophers, but also of social thinkers, historians, anthropologists, and writers on literature and the arts, insofar as they raise philosophical issues. Although the Association is envisioned as a regional society, meeting chiefly in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, it welcomes members from other states, and also from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Its purpose is to promote scholarly research in Latin American thought and the teaching of Latin American thought in the Southwest. It is also intended as a forum in which members can share ideas, read each other's work, and plan symposia and other events. For more information, please contact the

Association's president, Gary Seay, at the University of Texas–Pan American, Edinburg, Texas 78541. E-mail: gseay@panam.edu

**APA Prize in Latin American Thought**

I would like to bring to your attention that the essay prize in Latin American Thought now offered by the APA Committee on Hispanics is in need of a private sponsor. The prize amounts to \$500.00 and is offered every year. It is designed to contribute toward promoting Hispanic philosophy in the United States. It aims at engaging philosophers in the United States in the study of philosophical issues specific to the diverse experience of Hispanic Americans and Latinos. As it intends to encourage fruitful work in Latin American thought, essays qualifying for it contain original arguments and broach philosophical topics clearly related to the specific experiences of Hispanic Americans and Latinos. The APA National Office has provided initial funding to launch it, but to be able to continue to offer it after December 2006, we'll need your help. With a small private endowment we can continue to encourage scholarship on the history and experiences of Latin Americans and their descendants in other parts of the world. Please contact me at snucetell1@panam.edu