

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”



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.

References

- Code, Lorraine. 1988. "The Impact of Feminism in Epistemology." *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*. Reprinted in M. Griffiths and M. Whitford eds., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 188ff.
- Frondizi, Risieri. 1943. "Contemporary Argentine Philosophy." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4, pp. 180-187.
- . 1949. "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, pp. 345-55.
- Gracia, Jorge J. E. 1986. *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books.
- Mariátegui, José C. 1925. "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?" In *The Heroic and Creative Meaning of Socialism: Selected Essays of José Carlos Mariátegui*, M. Pearlman ed. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996.
- Paz, Octavio. 1988. *Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Putnam, Hilary. 1987. *The Many Faces of Realism*. La Salle (Illinois): Open Court.
- Salazar Bondy, Augusto. 1967. *Historia de las ideas en el Perú contemporáneo: el proceso del pensamiento filosófico*. Lima: Francisco Moncloa Editores.
- . 1986. "Can There Be a Latin American Philosophy." In Jorge Gracia, *Latin American Philosophy*.
- Zea, Leopoldo. 1948. "The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America." In *Essays on Philosophy in History*. In Jorge Gracia, *Latin American Philosophy*.
- . 1989. "Identity: A Latin American Philosophical Problem." *Philosophical Forum* 20, pp. 33-42.

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 African 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.