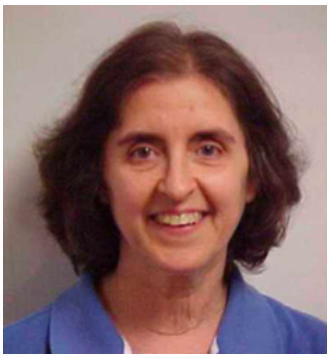
Inter-American Journal of Philosophy Interview with Ofelia Schutte



Ofelia Schutte is Professor Emerita of Philosophy at the University of South Florida (USF). Born in Havana, Cuba, she emigrated with her parents to the United States as a young teen. She received a Ph.D. in philosophy from Yale in 1978 and has taught at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and USF in Tampa. She is the author of *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* (1984), *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (1993), and numerous articles on feminist theory, Latin American thought, and continental philosophy. Of these, among the best remembered are "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Thought in North-South Dialogue" (1998), "Negotiating Latina Identities" (2000), "Continental Philosophy and Postcolonial Subjects" (2000), and "Dependency Work, Women, and the Global Economy" (2002).

Professor Schutte is coeditor, with Susana Nuccetelli and Otávio Bueno, of *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). She was a Fulbright Senior Research Fellow at UNAM, Mexico City (1985) and served as Associate Editor of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* (1990-2006), among many other professional appointments and distinctions. Her service in APA national committees included Hispanics/Latinos in the Profession (which she also chaired for one term), International Cooperation, and Inclusiveness. Recent professional memberships include the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), the American Philosophical Association (APA), the Feminist Ethics and Social Theory Association (FEAST), the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), and the Retired Faculty of the University of Florida (RFUF).

Her current research interests include feminism in Cuba, decolonial theory, and Latina/ Latin American feminism (downsized for retirement).

Recent publications include: "Crossroads and In-Between Spaces: A Meditation on Anzaldúa and Beyond," in *Theories of the Flesh: Latina and Latin American Feminisms, Transformation, and Resistance*, ed. Andrea Pitts, Mariana Ortega, and José Medina (Oxford UP, 2020); "Border Zones, In-Between Spaces, and Turns: On Lugones, the Coloniality of Gender, and the Diasporic Peregrina," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8:1-2, 2020 (Special Issue guest edited by Nancy Tuana and Emma Velez); and "De la colonialidad del poder al feminismo decolonial en América Latina" [From the coloniality of power to decolonial feminism in Latin America], in *Sujeto, descolonización, transmodernidad. Debates filosóficos latinoamericanos*, ed. Mabel Moraña (Madrid / Frankfurt: 2018).

Q: To what extent, if any, do you think that the indigenous philosophies of Latin America (e.g., Mexica, Inka, Maya, Mapuche) have influenced non-indigenous Latin American philosophies?

> Dr. James Maffie, Senior Lecturer, Department of History. Affiliate, Departments of Philosophy, Latin American Studies, & Religious Studies. University of Maryland, College Park, MD

There is certainly much room for growth and wider interest in indigenous philosophies. Having retired over eight years ago, I am not familiar with the current state of affairs defining the conceptions of Latin American philosophy throughout the Americas, or the degree to which philosophers are willing to collaborate closely with anthropologists, linguists, historians, and other specialists whose knowledge is necessary to develop the set of philosophies you mention. We owe you a debt of gratitude for your valuable and untiring work in this field.

In response to your question, I searched for each of these (Mexica, Inka, Maya, Mapuche) in the Table of Contents of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. I found none listed. Under "Philosophy in Mexico," I found the heading "Pre-Hispanic Philosophy," where some useful references to indigenous philosophies in Mexico were given. Professor Guillermo Hurtado, who authored the article, refers to your book (*Aztec Philosophy*, 2015). He also offers some surprising information for those of us who became acquainted with some indigenous terminology via decolonial theory or feminism in the Gloria Anzaldúa tradition. For example, Hurtado mentions that the notion of *nepantla* had already been noted in Western scholarship dating back to the 1950s.

A related issue that many of us have encountered (and where there has been notable development in recent times) involves research (again, mostly interdisciplinary but still philosophical) on indigenous lifestyles and value systems and/or preferences. One cannot avoid the topic in feminism, environmental studies, earth sciences, decolonial theory, social anthropology, and progressive social and political philosophies in countries with strong indigenous populations. For example, among recent authors, I love the work of social anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena. Among older authors, that is, those who have been working on this topic for many decades, as in the project of the Taller de Historia Oral Andina, I have found the work of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui to be very helpful. These are just two of the many feminists for whom indigenous thought and its interaction with mestizo communities has been foremost.

The epistemic issues regarding how to validate systems of thought whose ontological foundations do not match those of the Western world is philosophically fascinating. Here I side with approaches taken by De la Cadena and those who support paying attention to the excesses of meaning that cannot be captured strictly by logical equivalence or translation. My 1998 article on "Cultural Alterity" in *Hypatia* shows an early affinity with their approach to ontological difference.

Before closing, I must add a word for the need to develop a robust understanding of Africana (not only indigenous) philosophies in our approaches to Latin American

philosophies. Until the advent of the Caribbean Philosophical Association a few years ago, those of us who come from the Caribbean had little philosophical access to the African and African-descendant component. Much work also remains to be done in this area.

Q: *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* is an incredibly important book as it is one of the first philosophical introductions to Latin American thought in the U.S philosophical arena. Not only does it do justice to social questions but also to political questions in a context that is inclusive of Latin American feminist contributions. What lessons taught in that text do you think are being lost or not sufficiently acknowledged in current discussions of Latin American philosophy?

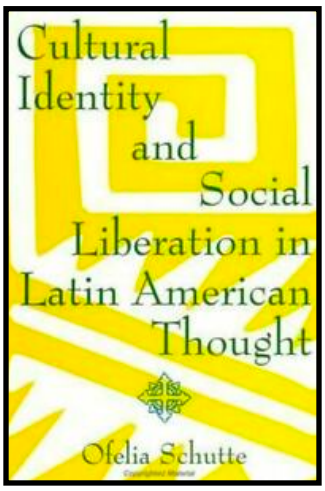
> Dr. Mariana Ortega, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Penn State

Well, as you note, one of the most important goals in my book was to integrate a feminist perspective into the study of Latin American philosophy. In the years leading to it I approached feminism from a critical analysis of women's subordination based on (a) the material division of labor between women and men, to which was added (b) an ideological gender-normative component of expected behavior (c) under patriarchal and masculine-dominant relations of power in societies. Philosophy itself then was an expression and product of the division of labor by sex, with Latin American men controlling the philosophy of culture and politics (in a masculine key) and only a handful of women philosophers beginning to do research on sex, gender, or feminist issues. Moreover, feminism was not seen as philosophy. That view was our Latin American version of Simone de Beauvoir's observation: he (the masculine) is the subject (in this case, of culture, of the entitled philosopher); she is the other.

Gradually, thanks to the growth of the feminist movement and the pioneering work of feminist theorists, feminist philosophers inserted their voices in recognized philosophical fields. In the 1990s I interacted with several Latin American feminist philosophers, primarily in Mexico and Argentina. They fought very hard to incorporate feminism into ethics, epistemology, the history of philosophy, political philosophy, and the like. Feminist philosophy and its interdisciplinary alliances with Women's Studies programs began gaining recognition. We have made much progress. But even to this day, the work of defending women's rights in philosophy and other feminist causes such as LGBTQ rights falls mostly on women and critics of gender-normative masculinity.

Another important goal of my book was to acquaint readers with a multiplicity of progressive theories. As a result of the influence of fascism on Spanish and Latin American countries, there circulated (and still do) persistent metanarratives built on oppressive notions of cultural identity. Perhaps in order to demystify the former, I could offer something like a big umbrella, sufficiently wide and diversely stitched, so as to provide a picture of multiple intellectual and social movements across time and places

in our part of the world where memorable concepts of cultural identity found expression in socially progressive thought.



Regarding lost or unnoticed lessons, of special interest today are at least three sets of arguments I elaborated in Chapter 6 (on the philosophies of liberation). With respect to some (not all) of these theories, I showed carefully and in very detailed ways (a) the problem of appealing to an absolute, uncontaminated source of directly revealed or received knowledge as the ground for a philosophy of liberation, alongside a Manichean dichotomized outlook of good versus evil; (b) the systemic and repeated confusions taking place in such thinking when, in a variety of claims and generalizations, there were constant confusions between the part and the whole, and how their categorical statements, avoiding empirical details, failed to distinguish between the general and the particular, further contributing to dichotomized, irresponsible, and unrealistic views of the world; (c) how such categorical claims resulted in homophobic and heterosexist pronouncements against people's rights and freedoms -- claims made in the name of the purest, God-given, even loving, ethical principles, and used in conjunction with rightwing recipes of liberation claiming to stand for authentic America against Eurocentric dominance.

One of the most important timely lessons, often forgotten, of my study is the nefarious degree to which a doctrine or discourse claiming liberation can feed into the worst prejudices of a nation or socio-economic group. When reading this chapter decades later, I urge you to bracket the names of the thinkers associated with such views whom I mentioned in my book. Simply look at the claims and the argumentation used to support them. I say this because, no matter how famous, individual philosophers come and go. Over the years some may even overcome their earlier views. Patterns of thinking, however, can be recalcitrant. They may persist over time, or fade and then reappear in new guises and with some changed rhetoric, exerting renovated mass appeal. Monitoring critically our own theories of liberation is therefore indispensable for the healthy pursuit of social justice.

Q: What is the importance of contemporary Latina feminist philosophical thinking in debates regarding decoloniality?

> Dr. Mariana Ortega, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Penn State

I think that it is very important for Latina feminists, including philosophers, to engage in these debates for at least two reasons. One is that decolonial thought has traditionally been male dominated, with only passing phrases or mantras intended to show some verbal recognition of feminism. To be sure, feminism can be acknowledged in such

ways, perhaps to some extent, but only superficially. We need to contest that. I did find a book by Professor Omar Rivera where Latina philosophers are engaged centrally in the argumentation. In *Delimitations of Latin American Philosophy* (2019) he uses an innovative approach by keeping each chapter focused on a topic addressed by a Latina feminist philosopher (insofar as we have addressed topics other than feminism). It's an interesting approach for a liberation/decolonial reading of Latin American philosophy.

The second reason is that decolonial theory is not limited to Latinx interests or conditions. It covers the whole world: whole peoples and cultures, islands and continents, air, land, and water. It proposes its own kind of universal validity, affecting all socio-cultural groups on earth and our collective relation to the entire planet. As Latina feminists, we need to place our concerns at the front of debates and show how we relate to these issues, not let them fall by the wayside.

Apart from the general importance of having Latina philosophical voices involved in and leading some of these debates, it is also the case that Latinas differ among ourselves as to the positions we take with respect to the critical analysis of modernity, race, imperialism, coloniality, gender, and so on. Here, I support keeping the forum open to a multiplicity of perspectives and avoiding the trap of promoting oversimplified narratives. We need to take a hard look at the actual, empirical conditions of violence and oppression found in our societies so as to take theoretical and practical action to remedy them. At the same time, we need to foster aesthetic and imaginative outlooks so as to counter the will to power-as-dominance with healthy, creative, non-acquisitive lifestyles.

Q: Do you consider phenomenology useful? How so? What is the significance of the body in feminist existentialism?

> El Paso Community College Philosophy Club - advisor: Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Humans are embodied beings. The representation and meaning given to bodies (also, to racialized, sexed bodies) is fundamental if we are to overcome centuries-old biases affecting how we know, evaluate, enjoy, or suffer the human condition. My first acquaintance with a phenomenological-existential feminist approach to the body came from the work of Simone de Beauvoir. For example, in her analysis of freedom, she discussed how the relationship between freedom, biology, and pregnancy was complicated. A woman could want or try to become pregnant, yet without success, while another might be forced against her will to carry a pregnancy to term. Her analysis of freedom was so powerful, and so aware of women's embodiment.

Professor Mariana Ortega has published a recent book on Latina phenomenology, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (2016). I recommend it highly.

Q: What is your experience as being a Latin American feminist in a field that is very underrepresented?

> El Paso Community College Philosophy Club - advisor: Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

It would take me too long to describe this. I think it depends on every person and on the timing of the historical situation. There were no courses in Latin American or feminist philosophy when I went to undergraduate or graduate school. By the time I was in graduate school in philosophy, I had feminist friends in other fields. There were a few feminist students, but no Latina feminists. In the early years of my career, which are crucial for getting tenure, I was completing a book manuscript on Nietzsche in a field where there were no feminists (to my knowledge) at the time, and no Latinas. One day, in the midst of writing, I felt so frustrated and alone in this work that I wondered whether I should just quit philosophy and become a union organizer to make sure Latina girls and young women would have access to higher education in the United States.

Then I thought about all the historical accidents and conditions that had brought me to this point, to earn tenure as a young philosophy professor in Florida. I figured it might take a decade or another generation of Latinas before more of us would be here. Should I give up my place, which was a mark of privilege relative to my group, yet also such a hard-fought achievement? Resolved: I will go on with my work, but also in such a way that I don't forget those who haven't been able to get here.

Ofelia Schutte at the SWIP meeting held with the APA Central Division, April 1984)

The rest is just what happened after that. Many challenges, many successes, many moments of solidarity and support experienced together with like-minded friends, colleagues, and students. Also, many years of continued efforts to overcome recurring biases and ignorance.

Q: Being a feminist Latin American philosopher, what is some advice you have for navigating colonized academia?

> El Paso Community College Philosophy Club - advisor: Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

I would say, stay focused on your work and give it all you've got. Find kindred colleagues or friends in the profession who will support you and, if possible, provide

valuable feedback. If you feel your environment is totally colonized, move, if you can, to some other program or department that values your work and/or your potential.

I suggest not viewing the entirety of academia as colonized. Even if your immediate environment is oppressive, seek and make use of free spaces and projects already functioning in the institution. The general advice is to avoid getting stuck in a place where there is no room to grow or advance with integrity, in terms of who you are as a person.

We are also lucky as philosophers that there are theoretical sources we can use to encourage critical thinking in research and teaching practices. For example, in my early teaching I often used Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, just as in later years Foucault's conception of "regimes of knowledge" became widespread. One of my first articles, "Overcoming Ethnocentrism in the Philosophy Classroom," appeared in *Teaching Philosophy*. At the time I had introduced an undergraduate course in Latin American Thought which stood out for its novelty in an Anglocentric curriculum, even as conceptual orthodoxies disliked it.

There are so many things we can do to help advance and move the direction of knowledge in academic life. For this we also need a firm back-up system of support in society such as labor unions and professional associations that defend our academic rights (in both good and bad times) as well as progressive social movements that raise social consciousness about overcoming racism, sexism, and other patterns of discrimination.

Q: Who is your philosophical inspiration that made you become a philosopher?

> El Paso Community College Philosophy Club - advisor: Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

I don't know that it was ever a "who." Initially I was fascinated by whatever philosophy book came my way. I loved the world of ideas. When given the opportunity I looked through rows of books on library stacks, sitting in quiet corners and browsing through them for worlds of knowledge I did not yet know existed. At first, I barely understood what I read. Perhaps, if it was a "who," it was the first teacher I had in college who identified herself as a philosopher. I went to a small, local Catholic women's college. In that case, it would have been the Dominican sister who taught our freshman theology class. I admired her exceptional clarity of mind and her ability to navigate arguments by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Back then, that was all I was exposed to. To be a philosopher, though, took many more years and several important turns in my life well beyond those days.

Q: What advice do you have for newer generations of Latina feminist philosophers?

Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, El Paso Community College

I would say, learn from the sources currently available to you and then trust yourself to raise the questions you need in order to keep pursuing your thoughts in meaningful ways. If possible, find a balance between working with affinity groups with whom you share close goals, but keep an open mind as to arguments and ideas that might come from outside your specific environment. Look around, travel, consult with others. In my case, it was a good practice to remind myself from time to time to listen to something that was foreign to me. I think that as much as we need to defend our identities, if we did not practice a certain de-centering, we might miss hearing the plight of those with whose oppressions we are unfamiliar or whose knowledge might make us wiser.

With regard to philosophical methodologies and areas of specialization, follow what makes you thrive as a young philosopher. Then use your judgment to apply that knowledge to the new questions and issues that come your way. With regard to career development, it's never too early to look for information and advice regarding graduate programs, fellowships, publishing venues, and other opportunities.

Q: How can we use philosophy to improve democracy in the U.S.?

Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, El Paso Community College

We can use it in our daily teaching practice by example, at any rate, in how we approach knowledge, support respectful dialogue and discussion, behave in nonauthoritarian ways, and reject authoritarian thinking. We can alert students about issues calling for civic attention even when we are teaching something other than social and political philosophy. Courses in informal logic and critical thinking may be excellent opportunities to unveil faulty argumentation (a leading cause of the type of misinformation that destroys democracy). Explaining what counts as reliable sources for scholarship and rejecting unreliable sources is fundamental. Consider existentialist warnings against "herd morality" and mass values born out of resentment. We need to remain alert about the human need for acceptance and validation from others, and the degree to which this can be manipulated by some to serve their own ends. There is also a growing need for criteria on the ethics of using technology and social media for a variety of ends. In addition to our teaching practice, we can also sponsor colloquia, conferences, and public events directly connected to the question of democracy, among other things.

Q: How can we bridge the gap between philosophical ideas and concrete actions to help the sociopolitical challenges of Latin America?

> Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, El Paso Community College

Perhaps because of my personal relationship with Cuba, I have followed a strict practice of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries outside the United States. I feel that it is right here, where I live and vote, that I have an on-going responsibility for taking concrete actions with respect to U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean, given its history of extensive abuses of power.

When I present my scholarly work in Latin America, I express my ideas and point of view, to be sure, but always relying on my scholarship and in the spirit of presenting one set of views to be offered for discussion.

One area of work where feminists can help lies in the area of preventing violence against women. As a feminist I feel very strongly about stopping violence against women and LGBTQ persons living in Latin American countries. In recent years (at their invitation) I have developed a very good relationship with a group of feminists in Cuba whose research and community service are dedicated to this project. It is very satisfying to see the types of collaboration that feminist faculty can undertake with local communities and a local NGO. In the case of the faculty (they are sociologists) they conduct a commendable combination of research and advocacy since there is a necessary link between raising awareness of gender-related bias at the level of communities and the effective action proposed to prevent the violence and provide assistance. Feminist theory can be adapted by activists so as to guide popular education programs in ways that help advance the well-being of communities. Just as importantly, feminist scholars trained in research methods can conduct studies aimed at documenting the necessary data to demonstrate where and how the problems exist and the issues needing urgent attention.

All of this requires enormous dedication and work. I think that, compared with philosophers, social scientists working on applied issues are in a much better position to engage in such projects. Still, given our interdisciplinary interests such as Women's Studies, Latin American studies, or indigenous and environmental studies, philosophers can form part of a larger team of members working on and helping evaluate group projects. For example, in Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser's edited *A World of Many Worlds* two chapter contributors have worked in philosophy.

I think the connection to like-minded groups in Latin America who share your research interest is a great way to bridge the gap of distance that, really, may feel very frustrating when we want to be closer to a goal that does not seem within reach.

Q: On that note I would like to ask her about her dialogues with Latin American filósofAs, and how has she dwelled into the possibilities and tensions of connecting Latinx and Latin American feminist philosophy and philosophers, has she experienced as many of us, a rejection and non engagement because of the mere fact that we work in the US (and the monolithic appreciation of the US that many scholars have in Latin American academies), how has she responded to it (at the practical and philosophical level)?

> Dr. Gabriela Alejandra Veronelli, Affiliated Researcher at Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Philosophy, Interpretation, and Culture (CPIC), Binghamton University

The world was different when I began connecting with feminist philosophers in Latin America. My first contact was Graciela Hierro, in those days the leader of Mexican feminist philosophy. I introduced myself to her after she read her paper (in English, per the Congress requirements) at the 1983 World Congress of Philosophy in Montreal. We struck an instant friendship. We kept in touch subsequently for many years in what turned out to be a rewarding intellectual relationship. Graciela was a powerhouse of feminist promotion in Mexico. Among her many distinctions and projects, she organized, along with Midwest SWIP, the first joint meeting of U.S. and Latin American feminist philosophers. It was held at UNAM in Mexico City in January 1988. This was followed by a second Encuentro organized by Clara Kushnir and Diana Maffía in Buenos Aries in November 1989. Both meetings were ripe for important relationships between U.S. and Latin American feminist philosophers. At that time (more than thirty years ago) there were hardly any Latina feminist philosophers in tenured departments in the United States. To my recollection, the only U.S. Latinas at the Mexico City and Buenos Aries conferences were María Lugones and myself.

By now most of my feminist friends in Latin America have retired (like myself); sadly, a few have died. Back then, we had much in common even though the contexts in which we worked in each country were different. Sure, there were tensions and some people held far more radical political positions than others. But we could sit together, go out for a meal, or hear each other's views at plenaries while attending the same meeting.

It pains me to hear about the experience you report. I have seen people disagree at meetings, sometimes strongly, regardless of gender or area of specialization. The incidents you mention are different, though. You mention some *compañeras* experiencing indifference and rejection on account of your being Latina (or perhaps Latin American) in the United States.

Not knowing the specifics of the case, I don't know if anyone said this to you in so many words. Whatever else is going on, there is a confusion between the general grievance anyone could have against Latinx who emigrate to the United States or live here, and you and your friends as individuals. Any number of things could be going on. My practical advice would be to use the web to find information ahead of time about the places or people you want to visit; then write to them mentioning you would like to meet them. If they don't respond, look for other contacts. I have generally been welcome and

appreciated. Some of my papers have been published in Spanish, including two feminist papers published in Cuba. To me, that says a lot.

Much could be said on this topic. Here I'll just add that it's very unfair to classify people under ethnic or national stereotypes. The stereotype that has chased after me has been that of the Cuban-American in Florida. Well, guess what, you have to check and see who's who in each case, before rushing to conclusions.

As far back as *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*, I argued strongly against failing to distinguish what is individual and different from generalized stereotypes. In the same context I argued against using hastily drawn generalizations within Manichean deployments of the valuations "good and evil."

Taller at the Mexican National Congress of Philosophy in Cuernavaca, September 1993. "International Round Table on Mexican Philosophy" organized by Graciela Hierro. Left to right, Graciela Hierro (Mexico), Ofelia Schutte, Diana Maffía (Argentina), and Celia Amorós (Spain)

For my latest philosophical take on territoriality and exclusion, you could check my recent article on the Diasporic Peregrina in *Critical Philosophy of Race*. There I speak metaphorically of a "Decolonial Gate" where a Gatekeeper makes sure no one can pass through unless they have the proper credentials. Whereas as a group many of us have felt excluded from equal recognition in the profession at large, in this paper I'm asking us, as Latinx, to become critically aware that we must not do this to one another right here, in the United States. I would like to see this type of practice stopped so that Latinas, especially young Latina feminists who need so much professional support, are encouraged to contribute their thoughts without fear of rejection just because they come from elsewhere than expected.

Q: What has been the biggest hurdle to greater reception of Latin American philosophy in the US during your career?

Dr. Manuel Vargas, Professor of Philosophy, University of California San Diego

Speaking now on the broader field of Latin American philosophy, there are a number of factors, some of which work independently from others. But when all are combined, as often happens, they place a formidable weight on the reception of the field.

On one end of the spectrum is its prior invisibility in the curriculum and the scarcity or lack of economic resources for program development. The latter involves the training and hiring of qualified faculty and reshaping course offerings in the undergraduate and graduate curricula. You also need publication outlets, journals, fellowships, awards, and so on.

Countering invisibility begins with admitting Spanish, Portuguese, and the relevant indigenous languages needed for advanced research into the roster of accepted philosophical languages This could be accompanied with available simultaneous translation at international meetings so that people don't get stuck in separate corners unable to hear presenters from Latin America using their native languages.

In order to counter invisibility in the United States we need leadership. We owe a huge debt to Professor Jorge Gracia for his efforts to make this field visible in the United States. Over the years he worked tirelessly to bring Latinx philosophers together. He published anthologies, coordinated a series on Latin American thought for SUNY press, held countless invited colloquia at the University of Buffalo, chaired the APA Committee on Hispanics and Latinos in the Profession, and wrote prolifically. I worked closely with him when the APA Committee was established and eventually chaired it myself. Jorge viewed our task as proactively inclusive. He told me he believed we should mentor everybody, all the young Latinos/as coming up in philosophy, no matter if they were not doing Latin American philosophy. "There are so few of us," he said.

I could go into numerous examples of personal efforts many of us took to develop this field. The bottom line is, establishing a field requires qualified faculty, the resources and labor conditions to support them, and the demonstrated potential to generate interest among colleagues and students. Over time you need to demonstrate that if you award a Ph.D. to a graduate student writing a dissertation in Latin American philosophy, that graduate is eligible for a teaching position once the degree is awarded. I cannot overemphasize the need for faculty lines and material resources. During my career I worked at two state universities in Florida where philosophy departments were usually underfunded. This situation created a series of other adversities insofar as faculty positions were scarce. People and chairs competed for money just to staff the departments at a bare minimum, not to mention inviting new areas of learning into the existing programs.

It's at this point of financial stress, I believe, where orthodoxies and biases against Latin American philosophy acquire their strongest force. In the cases I experienced in Florida, despite the state's large Latinx population, our field ended up in the classical column of "not essential" to major offerings and requirements.

There are broad and often implicit socio-cultural biases underlying such a view. It has to do with undervaluing the cognitive performance and achievements of Latin Americans. Loosely speaking, perhaps as Leopoldo Zea might have said, it reveals the dismissal of the Latin American mind. With philosophy being so keen on the mental, indeed, on the cognitive aspects of mind, if its practice erases or prevents access to the "minds" of the

global South (or of women, for that matter), there is hardly any other outcome except erasure and dismissal. Racism, sexism, and Anglo-Eurocentrism further complicate the picture.

But why would intelligent people like philosophers succumb to such biases? I don't know if any psychological study has figured this out. Perhaps there are personality types who feel most secure when their areas of expertise (and by extension, that of the programs and departments they lead or join) correspond tightly to mainstream, already established fields of research. If so, this type of mentality wants to reproduce the fields they know well with as little alteration as possible. This behavior is linked to some notion of prestige-by-association. So, if traditional field X or Y claims a high seat at the table of philosophical prestige today, they don't want to stray too far, for fear of being devalued. Such practices simultaneously keep relatively unaltered the prior ethno-racial and gendered distribution of jobs in philosophy.

To be sure, there are plenty of philosophers practicing mainstream fields who support Latin American philosophy and comparable newer fields. I'm not referring to them. I'm just hypothesizing on what kind of motivation might lock others inside their blindness.

Objecting to our knowledge is a sad situation for philosophy, apart from the unfairness of it all. In fact, our field energizes, enriches, and rejuvenates mainstream philosophy, especially insofar as it speaks from the margins and the as-yet-come-to-light cognitive efforts and contributions of a much wider sector of humanity. By engaging Latin American philosophy and other similar emerging fields, philosophers are forced to look outside the straight and narrow to become newly acquainted with the actual world around us. It's not a perfect world by any means but it's our task to deal with it. Breaking with the straight and narrow is also very healing to the students taking our courses because they will find in philosophy a home that cares about a plurality of ethnic and racial backgrounds.

By now there is, indeed, a recognition of prestige and academic merit attached to our knowledge. What we still need is a climate of inclusion in more philosophy departments and a strong policy of university resources to support programs that meet a diversity of students' needs with solid plans to hire and retain faculty.

Q: Do you think the main strands of the philosophy of liberation have adequately taken on board the criticisms you raised about gender and sexuality?

Dr. Manuel Vargas, Professor of Philosophy, University of California San Diego

My study was focused on ideologies and tendencies found in various strands of the philosophy of liberation from the 1970s to the time close to the publication of my book in 1993. After I published my book I went on to other projects, mostly focusing on feminism. I have not written about further developments of the philosophy of liberation since that time. Nor have I followed the course of the philosophy of liberation in Latin

America. Currently, I have friendly collegial relations with a few colleagues working on the philosophy of liberation in the U.S. today, but can't make judgments about the field as a whole.

My criticisms probably had a modest effect, basically calling attention to the need to overcome LGBT bias and heteronormative assumptions when addressing sexual ethics in liberation philosophy. I wasn't the only one to speak out. When Dussel began speaking to U.S. audiences, he found similar criticisms of one kind or another – only mine were more detailed and systematic because I had read his early untranslated work rather thoroughly.

In terms of trends, I do not equate decolonial feminisms with the philosophy of liberation even though there may be some overlap. Broadly speaking, decolonial feminisms in Latin America emerge historically primarily out of feminist movements in the region, which have multiple roots over time and place. In contrast, philosophies of liberation, of the type I addressed, may be seen as emerging in Latin America during the 1960s and '70s out of the desire to engage with the question of national popular liberation from a variety of approaches. My criticism was directed only to those theories of national popular liberation that appeared to sound very radical (for leftists) but in fact could flip over into the ideological foundations for oppressive authoritarianism. If you notice some of today's authoritarian ideology and rhetoric (in the USA as well), you will see my point.

In other words, terms like "liberation" and "decolonial" can be tricky designations. Of current trends among authors who don't cover feminism specifically, I find most interesting those that approach decolonial studies from an aesthetic dimension and those that rely on methods of critical inquiry backed by documented research as grounds for analyzing social problems and proposals for change. In this regard although Dussel's path is different, his epistemic approach improved over time. For example, in his later work he deployed the concept of "transmodernity," much discussed by Latin American cultural critics, as a critical tool with which to engage Western philosophy.

On a personal note, it happened one day in the late 2000s, that the mail delivered a small package to my office. Already a colleague had told me at a conference that Dussel mentioned he was planning to send me a copy of his revised *Erótica*. What he called his *Erótica* (the title is much longer) is a small book he had published in the 1970s. On the first page he sent me greetings with the enthusiastic words: ¡*Versión corregido*! (Corrected version). Eagerly, I started leafing through it looking for the changes. But wait, it seemed to be the same book!

Then I noticed that he had added a new prologue. There he states that the essay had been written in 1972. While more than 30 years had passed, he considered it relevant to publish it again. He states that he would leave it as is because it stood as a historical document of an early Latin American philosophical reflection on woman. He thinks it still makes sense, but that one would have to complete it with a more complex notion of gender "as the latter is discussed in our days" (my translation) …and that some deficiencies should be attributed to the state of reflection at the time it was written.

I was very glad to receive this, even if he left the original one intact. To my current and future readers, I would make a similar request about aspects of *Cultural Identity* and many of my other works. There is still something in them that continues to speak to us today and the works shed valuable insights into the history of the problems they discuss. I acknowledge they are also limited not just by the times but by the author's multi-faceted contingency.

Q: If you could go back and give your younger self any particular advice, what would it be?

> Dr. Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University

If a theory sounds too good to be true or takes over you completely, proceed with the utmost caution.

Q: What was the most important thing you learned over the course of your career?

> Dr. Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University

Intellectually, I learned that finding and collaborating with colleagues, programs, and associations sharing your interests is fundamental. There needs to be a social, not just an individual base from which creative activity and thinking will grow.

Politically, I was thrust into learning how to assess the relative gravity and scope of adversarial challenges. Adversities don't all carry the same weight. I had to consider alternative strategies and plans of action if my preferred options didn't work.

Q: What do you hope for the future of the field? What would you like to see more of? Less of?

> Dr. Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University

In philosophy, because we tend so much toward abstraction, there's always a case to be made for remembering our existential roots in socio-culturally situated, concrete, embodied experiences.

I do trust that younger scholars will do a really good job pointing out what they see as important, just as I believe we tried to do in our own times. It gives me immense pleasure to hear them speak at conferences with such insight and eloquence, addressing today's issues.

As current and new perspectives on socio-economic and cultural rights emerge, more attention needs to be shed on material conditions and building a healthier environment and climate for planet Earth. It will be helpful to continue pursuing intersectionality approaches and inter/trans-disciplinary work.

Q: Do you have any regrets?

> Dr. Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University

If one tries to do the best along the way, one will make some mistakes, but one also learns from them. I agree with Beauvoir that there is freedom only in a situation. There is only so much at any given time that a person, inhabiting a finite situation, can undertake.

I also agree with Nietzsche that the inability to change the past leads many to resentment and revenge. This doesn't mean that we should stop working against ignorance and injustice. What it does is train us to switch existentially from a paradigm of lack to one of generosity and life affirmation.

Life hands us many situations that are just set; one needs to take off from there. I must be lucky that I don't tend to operate under the burden of regrets. For this I am very thankful.

Q: Did you develop any practices that were helpful in the development of your ideas? What was your thought process like? How did you relate to writing?

> Dr. Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University

Some people start with an outline and this works quite well for them. Other people (more like myself) start with a preliminary examination of issues and the work unfolds in stages from there on, seemingly on its own (lightly guided, but without a forced plan). Occasionally you may use a combination of approaches.

I had no models for my feminist books on Nietzsche or Latin American philosophy. I was reading currently available texts while also changing the discussion along the way. I would often be motivated to write because of what I saw missing in other scholars' works. After publishing my book on Latin American philosophy, thanks in large part to Professor Jorge Gracia including it in the series he coordinated for SUNY Press, I knew many more philosophers would write their own books, exploring their own thoughts and interests. For me, it was like breaking ice, with no models in front.

Q: What events in your life do you think precipitated your development of a sustained research interest in and critique of neoliberalism?

> Dr. Andrea Pitts, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at UNC Charlotte and is affiliate faculty of the Department of Africana Studies, the Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Studies, the Latin American Studies Program, the School of Data Science, the Social Aspects of Health Initiative, and the Women's and Gender Studies Program.

This is an interesting question since I'm not the kind of person who focuses much on material conditions or economic theory. But at the same time, much of what I theorize about results from my lived experiences. In the 1990s neoliberal policies intersected my life from multiple and often double-weighted angles. For example, I would be doing research on the precarious nature of women's lives in Latin America and, on a different but relatable plane, I would be faced with the limited health care resources available to my mother (also a Latina, but now in the United States) in the final years of her life. I could see how the horizon of possibility for agency was shrinking for women in the global South, along with parallels or counterparts, not as extreme, to be sure, but noticeable, as women (more so if they were economically vulnerable or minorities) were burdened with caregiving duties, increased impoverishment, and insufficient health care in the global North.

Moreover, there were other parallels and connections affecting labor relations at my workplace. Just as I was studying the decimation of labor organizing in Latin American countries, in the state of Florida we would also eventually face severe cutbacks in state budgets for education and the resulting economic re-structuring of state universities, which basically led universities to switch to a business model of management.

Neoliberal theory was based on the pre-twentieth-century liberal views that government's primary role is to foster business, defend private property, and enhance wealth. It rests on the premise that privatization of capital (not state funding) is the best way to produce jobs and wealth. These views regained impulse during the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the 1980s and became dominant globally in the '90s with the end of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies.

Back home, it wasn't just the case with my ailing mother. I felt the effects of neoliberalism in the university's management. When state universities lost state funding, for example, they were forced to make up for it through increased donations to their private Endowments and by raising student tuition and fees, among other things. Hence you see the enormous burden of student debt, all of which either prevents economically disadvantaged students from attending or graduating from college and/or overburdens them with immense debt upon graduation.

Supporters of neoliberalism say, why should the state pay when private capital can cover the cost and even do so more cost-effectively. While I believe that a balance of public and private capital is good for society, subject to considerations of distributive justice and fairness, neoliberalism tends to extract as much as possible from the public

sphere in order to empower the private (which it also tends to deregulate). It is an economy that places the different sectors of society out of balance with one another, enabling the rich to get richer and leaving the poor to get poorer. Similarly, on a global scale, the stage is set for an uneven accumulation of wealth in some sectors, with a negative balance of poverty, debt, or even unrelenting despair in others.

Q: What direction(s) do you hope Latin American and U.S. Latino/a philosophy will take in the years to come?

> Dr. Andrea Pitts, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at UNC Charlotte and is affiliate faculty of the Department of Africana Studies, the Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Studies, the Latin American Studies Program, the School of Data Science, the Social Aspects of Health Initiative, and the Women's and Gender Studies Program.

Ofelia Schutte at the LASA International Congress in Barcelona, Spain, May 2018. LASA panel on Attending to Violence Against Women, including participants from Cuba and Spain

As I mentioned earlier, I believe the younger people are the best suited to move these fields forward. I'm inclined to defer to the next generations to determine their goals. On issues of cultural identity, I miss the period when we were doing border-crossing and contact zones. I like the emphasis on multiplicity and the ability to examine things from an open set of perspectives. Celebrating our bodies in art, poetry, song, and dance enriches us and brings joy to our lives. However, there are certain ethical issues calling also for clear analytical boundaries: immigration rights, racial justice, reproductive rights, preventing violence against women (now extended to LGBTQ communities), and many others. Of course, there is always a case for work on current and historical philosophers of interest in our communities here and in Latin America.

Then there is the issue of public education and science. If I had to offer an opinion beyond my areas of expertise, I would say, based on the results of the 2020 U.S. general election and the degree to which the advice of the medical community has been blatantly ignored during the pandemic by vast portions of the population and their leaders, there probably needs to be some attention given to educating the public as to the benefits of science. Scientific inquiry involves socially responsible philosophical leadership. This issue comes up as well with regard to the climate crisis and the level of disbelief and self-deception demonstrated on the part of large sectors of the public and their political representatives.

As political observers note, there is a weakening of trust in science, to which is added the perennial right-wing attack on intellectual elites. For our part, we need to defend academic freedom and defend the relevance of our knowledge.

Certain trends in decolonial theory also attack science (as complicit with modernity and arrogantly dismissive of indigenous healing traditions and knowledge).

Given this situation, with science being attacked from the Right and some sectors of the Left, we need to find credible well-informed solutions to put into practice. This requires brainstorming among a variety of perspectives and strengthening metatheoretical approaches that sustain critical frameworks for civic education and public policy.

Thanks again, everyone, for your probing questions, and many thanks to the *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* and Editor-in-Chief Gregory (Goyo) Pappas for your generous invitation to participate among your community of inquirers for this interview. Special thanks to Kim Díaz, Managing Editor, for your helpful reliable, friendly support with the manuscript submission.