

## **Palabras In Memory Of Jorge Gracia**

by Ofelia Schutte

For well over four decades of his life as a philosopher, teacher, mentor, and leading promoter of Latin American and Latinx philosophy in the United States, our colleague Jorge Gracia has left an imprint on our lives and profession, a wealth of significant and long-lasting achievements. Thanks to Eduardo Mendieta and everyone who has collaborated in organizing this Memorial Session for our cherished friend and colleague. I hope his memory stays with us for a long time.

Given that I'm part of Jorge's generation (only three years apart by age) I will start my narrative in 1981, before either of us knew the other very well. Our age has led me to realize that we are part of a generation that, in some respects, has become historical. It's in this light that I begin with events happening 40 years ago.

That October of 1981 turned out to be very significant for Latin American philosophy as we know it in the United States today. The Philosophy Department at Florida State University in Tallahassee was the site of the Tenth Inter-American Congress of Philosophy, whose theme, if I remember correctly, was Philosophy and Human Rights. By that time, both Jorge and I were teaching undergraduate courses in Latin American philosophy in our respective institutions (Buffalo and the University of Florida in Gainesville), but neither one knew what the other was doing. Years later Jorge recalled that he had met me at that congress. I have a similar recollection. Yet our affinity for the work we would develop in the future was not evident. I attended the conference with a contributed paper on Nietzsche and for me Jorge represented a specialist in metaphysics and medieval philosophy.[1] Where the conference was extraordinarily significant for me is that, for the first time, I was in the presence of many philosophers from Latin America who presented papers in Spanish, a remarkable experience since our education in the United States so far had made them invisible. This is where I met Leopoldo Zea and Enrique Dussel. I decided that once I finished my book manuscript on Nietzsche, my next project would explore their thought further in the context of the history of Latin American philosophy.

A few years later in 1986 Gracia published his groundbreaking anthology: *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Man, Values, and the Search for Philosophical Identity* (hereafter LAP, 1986a). In the Introduction he explains that unlike his previous anthology, *Philosophical Analysis in Latin America* [1984], which dealt exclusively with the impact of analytic philosophy in Latin America, this new anthology was needed in order to focus specifically on philosophical thought *as developed in Latin America* (my emphasis, page 9). In other words, he is asking, let's look at the *relationship* of philosophy and its history *in Latin America*. Interestingly, he was already

considering and addressing a type of situated knowledge, but with an angle on the relationship between universals and particulars.

In the Introduction to LAP Gracia notes that an important aspect of this anthology involves a prior collaborative relationship he had with the eminent Argentine philosopher Risieri Frondizi (1910-85), a selection of whose essays Gracia published this same year (1986b) in Mexico. He explains that the first two sections of the anthology were made in collaboration with Frondizi from an earlier collection edited by both, where Frondizi was the senior editor (1975; rpt 1980). What Gracia added in his groundbreaking LAP edition was the third and final section, "The Search for Philosophical Identity," which offers selections from the works of Leopoldo Zea, Augusto Salazar Bondy, and Arturo Andrés Roig. Looking at the design of this anthology retrospectively, we see here an early indication of Gracia's emerging and subsequent well-defined interest with respect to the search for philosophical identity in relation to cultural, ethnic, and racial identities.

Although we had met in the interim between 1981 and 1986, particularly on the occasion of the Eleventh Inter-American Congress of Philosophy in Guadalajara, Mexico (1985), it was around 1986 that my relationship with Jorge become firmly established. I adopted LAP as a textbook in my undergraduate Latin American Social Thought class as soon as it was published. We saw each other at numerous meetings especially after I joined the Society for Iberian and Latin American Thought (SILAT) where Gracia was on the Board and I would become an officer and Board member from the late 1980s through 1999. In those years SILAT met jointly with the APA Eastern Division, so we had many opportunities to meet on common scholarly interests.[2]

Moreover, between 1987 and 2007 (a period of 20 years), I participated in five of the many conferences organized by Gracia at Buffalo. Jorge was so creative in his research agenda that he found theme after interesting theme around which to organize and fund conferences pertinent especially to Latino/a topics in philosophy. At these meetings he would bring together people with a variety of views, young as well as established scholars. These conferences provided a stimulating environment for discussion and social networking. He would then either edit or co-edit, usually with younger philosophers, outstanding anthologies on issues pertinent to Latinx in philosophy. Among the most memorable of these conferences, in my experience, were his 1998 Philosophy Symposia on Ethnic Identity, Culture, and Group Rights: A Discussion Across the Disciplines on the Situation of Hispanics/Latinos in America." The list of participants was so impressive! Eduardo Mendieta, Linda Alcoff, Elizabeth Millán, among others, must remember, because they also participated, although we did not all meet at once. A selection of our essays was published in *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*, edited by Gracia and Pablo De Greif (2000). That's where I read my paper, "Negotiating Latina Identities" (Schutte 2000) which was included later in Gracia's second outstanding textbook anthology, co-edited with Elizabeth Millán, *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (2004).

Since the terminology of how to refer to ourselves has evolved over the last few decades, let me insert a parenthetical note here regarding the use of terms. As immigrants in the early 1960s Gracia and I came from parts of the country where the official and even everyday terminology to describe people of Latin American descent was “Hispanic.” It turned out that in other parts of the U.S. people used “Latino or Latina.” Moreover, due to the potentially binary gender classifications marked by the “o” and the “a” in Spanish, more recently many people in journalism and education use “Latinx.” There are political as well as cultural issues involved in the adoption of each of these terms. In this presentation, I move from one to the other, hoping the reader will keep in mind the historic evolution of the terms, especially since some of Gracia’s older publications rely on the term “Hispanic.”

Foregrounded in the theme of Gracia’s 1998 Symposia was the topic of Latinx identity in the United States. Two years later in 2000 his groundbreaking authored book, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective*, was published. Personally, I found it very interesting that the identity theme captivating Jorge’s philosophical attention as *author* was that of our identities as Latinos and Latinas in the United States. You see, despite his multiple original publications in the U.S. on the importance of philosophy in Latin America, he was fond of telling me, you (meaning you, Ofelia) are the one who wrote a book on Latin American philosophy, not I. He was referring of course to my *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Schutte 1993), whose publication he had supported for inclusion in the SUNY Press series on Latin American and Iberian Thought and Culture he established in 1989.[3]

When some of us heard that Gracia would be publishing a forthcoming authored book on Latino/a identity, it was both novel and exciting news. Gracia was now talking about us *here*, not there. I asked him once, how did you get interested in U.S. Latino identity? Basically, he told me that we are living in the States and this presents its own complexity of philosophical questions regarding our social and cultural identities. Moreover, it was a crucial issue for future generations. I understood that this meant something special for him. He told me, “Look, I’m Cuban, I’m married to an Argentine, and our two daughters are from here. They have a Latin heritage, but they are neither Cuban nor Argentine. What identity is there for them?”

Indeed, for Gracia Hispanic/Latino identity is like being part of a big family. He has defended this family view of our identities since his 2000 publication. Philosophers usually tweak arguments around and disagree with each other, so his views have been a source of debate. However, he has persisted in his position, defending and further clarifying it at every turn. Here’s part of what he chose to quote from his own work in a volume he co-edited in 2008 dedicated to the contributions of Cuban-Americans to U.S. culture.

Certain groups of people are best conceived as extended historical families whose members have no identifiable properties, or set of properties, that are shared by all their members throughout the existence of the groups. This

accounts for the lack of agreement concerning any particular conditions, or even kinds of conditions, that are necessary and sufficient for Hispanic identity in general, or any Hispanic identity in particular....

Latin Americans ... or Cubans ... are tied by the same kind of thing that ties the members of a family. There may not be any common features to all of them, but nonetheless they share an identity because they are related in ways similar to those in which members of a family are and this identity is a source of feelings and actions.... The family metaphor also entails that any requirements of coherence or of homogeneity among members of the group do not apply. Families are not coherent wholes composed of homogeneous elements; they include members that differ substantially from each other and often clash.... (Gracia 2008, 254-55)

Indeed, Jorge understood well how ethnic and racial stereotypes distort our sense of reality.

The idea of an extended family whose parameters are given historically and whose properties are neither fixed for all time nor homogeneously spread among its members also lies at the core of Gracia's generous embracing form of mentorship for Latinx students and young members of the profession. The testimonials and accolades from his former students at Buffalo and younger members of the profession attest to this. In this extended family one sub-group I occupied, along with Ernesto Sosa and Oscar Martí, was being a Cuban-born philosopher of his same generation working in the U.S.[4] Jorge appealed to our common Cuban roots by asking me to write about José Martí on more than one occasion. The most memorable of these was an invitation to participate in SUNY's 2007 workshop and conference entitled "Forging People: Race, Ethnicity and Nationality in Latin American and Latino Thought" (see Gracia, ed. 2011; Schutte 2011; Gracia 2012, p.7). The theme is indicative of how the issue of race grew in importance for Jorge in response to challenges brought by Linda Alcoff, among others, that ethnicity needs to be analyzed critically in relation to race.[5] It's at this point, I think, that the conversation becomes deeper, both among ourselves as Latinos/as and across the board throughout the U.S., the Caribbean, and the rest of the Americas. The evolution of Gracia's thought in this direction also shows his far-reaching understanding of what he called metaphorically "the tide of scholarship" (Gracia 2007a, p. 79).

Lastly, I would like to say a word regarding the founding of the APA Committee on Hispanics in 1991, of which Jorge was the original founding Chair and where I was honored to serve with him as one of the original committee members from 1991 to 1994. Subsequently from 1995 to 1998 I served as its Chair, following Jorge. Thanks to Jorge's leadership and the support of the APA Board of Officers, this committee and its subsequent development over time allowed us to act on behalf of Latinos/as in philosophy. It was always clear that given Gracia's professional knowledge and experience, along with his dedication to make professional philosophy more inclusive, he was just the right person at the right time to lead this effort. But it occurs to me, remembering his life, that there is a bit more to be said about this.

In other words, without pushing the metaphor to an extreme, I think that those gatherings at Buffalo and his work as Chair of the APA Committee may have been loosely conceived while thinking of us, without romanticizing it, as a very large family. He also never lost sight of each person's individuality. In a conversation I had with him at the start of our mentoring work for the Committee I asked him whether we had to keep any specific criteria in mind for mentoring. "My idea," he told me, "is to mentor everyone, even if it's a lot of work." I recall his exact words as he exclaimed: "*There are so few of us* [in philosophy]!"

Jorge, there are still just a few of us, but thanks to all your work and dedication, we have grown so very much. Thanks for your friendship, for your collegial support, for your love of the arts and of Cuba, the trips to Niagara Falls, your hospitality, along with Norma, at your family home in Buffalo. Thank you for your farewell when you joined Elizabeth Millán, Mariana Ortega, Elena Ruíz, and a group of students and colleagues at the retirement celebration Elena organized for me in Florida—and for so much more that we all remember of your insights, laughter, and generosity.

*Gracias a la vida por habernos dado nuestro amigo y colega, Jorge Gracia.*

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## Notes

[1] For an interesting and complementary comparison of some of Gracia's recollections of those years and our affinities as Cuban philosophers in the U.S., see Gracia 2012.

[2] Among the early SILAT leadership were also Amy Oliver and Oscar Martí, who worked on Leopoldo Zea and/or the history of ideas in Mexico.

[3] Gracia offers some interesting remarks on what led him to establish the series in 1989, explaining that at that time there was an absence of publication venues for work on Latin American philosophy in the United States. I recall a similar situation. Gracia states that what gave him the idea to launch the series was a book by Iván Jaksic, one of his students at Buffalo. He mentions how he got interested in publishing my study when he learned of my book project (Gracia 2012, 6).

[4] In the co-edited volume on the contributions of Cuban-American artists, writers, and philosophers (2008b) the editors included four interviews, namely, of Jorge, Ernesto, Oscar, and myself (pp. 205-50). Of particular interest is Gracia's interview

where – in response to Jaksic’s observation that Jorge does things “contrary to the stereotype of Cubans” he tells Jaksic that there is also a sense of “a Cuban experience outside politics” and that it’s his wish to bring this “to the American people and the world” (2008a, p. 212).

[5] See also Jorge J. E. Gracia, ed., *Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity* (2007b).

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