

## Latinx Philosophy Born of Colonial Struggle[1]

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### English Abstract

In this paper I return to some of the meta-philosophical themes Jorge J.E. Gracia discusses in his 2015 book *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity*. In particular, I am interested in a broader meta-philosophical question. How should we conceive of Latinx philosophy in the US? I am also interested in the specific answer Gracia offers to his iteration of this kind of question. While Gracia does not specifically answer my recent articulation of the meta-philosophical question, he does offer a helpful philosophical road map for thinking through these issues by arguing that we should conceive of Latino philosophy as an ethnic philosophy. In order to think through these meta-philosophical issues and Gracia's view I focus on his articulation of a specific question. Should we conceive of Latino philosophy as an ethnic philosophy? I develop the thesis that we should not. Instead, I suggest we should conceive of Latinx philosophy in the US as a colonial formation.

### Resumen en español

En este artículo retomo algunos de los temas metafilosóficos que Jorge J.E. Gracia aborda en su libro de 2015 *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity* (*Latinos en Estados Unidos: Filosofía e Identidad Social*). En particular, me interesa una pregunta metafilosófica más amplia: ¿cómo deberíamos concebir la filosofía latinx en Estados Unidos? También me interesa la respuesta específica que Gracia ofrece a su iteración de este tipo de pregunta. Si bien Gracia no responde específicamente a mi reciente articulación de la pregunta metafilosófica, sí ofrece una guía filosófica útil para reflexionar sobre estos temas al argumentar que deberíamos concebir la filosofía latina como una filosofía étnica. Para reflexionar sobre estas cuestiones metafilosóficas y la perspectiva de Gracia, me centro en su articulación de una pregunta específica: ¿deberíamos concebir la filosofía latina como una filosofía étnica? Desarrollo la tesis de que no deberíamos. En cambio, sugiero que deberíamos concebir la filosofía latinx en Estados Unidos como una formación colonial.

### Resumo em português

Neste artigo, retomo alguns dos temas metafilosóficos discutidos por Jorge J.E. Gracia em seu livro de 2015, *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity* (*Latinos na América: Filosofia e Identidade Social*). Em particular, interesso-me por uma questão metafilosófica mais ampla. Como devemos conceber a filosofia latinx nos EUA? Também me interesso pela resposta específica que Gracia oferece à sua iteração desse tipo de questão. Embora Gracia não responda especificamente à minha recente

articulação da questão metafilosófica, ele oferece um roteiro filosófico útil para refletir sobre essas questões, argumentando que devemos conceber a filosofia latina como uma filosofia étnica. Para refletir sobre essas questões metafilosóficas e a visão de Gracia, concentro-me em sua articulação de uma questão específica. Devemos conceber a filosofia latina como uma filosofia étnica? Desenvolvo a tese de que não devemos. Em vez disso, sugiro que devemos conceber a filosofia latinx nos EUA como uma formação colonial.

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## Introduction

Just before Jorge J.E. Gracia died, I participated in a conference at SUNY at Buffalo where we—his former students—focused on different aspects of his philosophical legacy. I presented a piece that did three things. First, I collected his over forty-five years of work in the field now often identified as Latinx philosophy so folks could use as a handy one-stop reference that provides easy access to chronologically organized paragraph chunks of each decade of his works in the footnotes of the paper. Second, I discussed the philosophical significance of some of his works. Along the way, I tried to respond to some objections against different aspects of his view in a non-repetitive way. Third, I offered a historical snapshot tracing his objections against philosophy of liberation. In the process, I showed that the force of his concerns diminish in light of rejoinders. After Gracia's death, I presented a more personal piece remembering how I came to meet him and, in the process, situated ourselves within a wider community of vibrant thinkers working in Latinx philosophy. Today as a way of remembering Gracia, I want to return to some of the meta-philosophical themes he discusses in his 2015 book *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity*.<sup>[2]</sup> In particular, I am interested in a broader meta-philosophical question. How should we conceive of Latinx philosophy in the US? I am also interested in the specific answer Gracia offers to his iteration of this kind of question. While Gracia does not specifically answer my recent articulation of the meta-philosophical question, he does offer a helpful philosophical road map for thinking through these issues by arguing that we should conceive of Latino philosophy as an ethnic philosophy. To think through these meta-philosophical issues and Gracia's view, I focus on his articulation of a specific question: should we conceive of Latino philosophy as an ethnic philosophy?

Jorge loved doing philosophy—writing, clarifying, critically evaluating perspectives, making distinctions, organizing conferences, offering prescriptions about how to make Latinx philosophy more visible in university philosophy departments in the US and the American Philosophical Association, and actually laboring to bring about some of the changes he wrote about. Gracia did not simply talk about doing things. Gregory Pappas is right when he observed at our memorial session at the 2022 APA Eastern that Gracia had an effective way of navigating these spaces in a way that got

things done. He made things happen. Gracia left us a body of work that is rich, complex, and generative. It invites critical evaluation. My nine-year-old son Alejandro came up to me and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Writing a paper that discusses and critically evaluates my teacher who passed away." He said, "If he died aren't you supposed to say nice things? Why are you pointing out his mistakes?" I laughed and said, "I am pointing out the strengths and limits of his theory. This is what philosophers do, and this is a way of respecting my philosophical ancestor. If I express a view that you are not sure about, I hope you challenge me because I need your help to let me see if I am mistaken. Sometimes I cannot see myself. We sometimes need others to help us see ourselves." After I said this out loud Elizabeth Millán interrupted and said, "Wait when he becomes a teen Ernesto." We all burst into laughter. It is in this spirit of respect that listens to, thinks through a perspective, points out the strengths and cares enough to note the limits of a theory that I offer the following take on Gracia's proposal that we should conceive of Latino philosophy as an ethnic philosophy. Before delving into the main question, I wish to pose a preliminary framing of the problem to offer a sense of what is at stake. Why should this meta-philosophical question matter, if at all?

### Why Does the Meta-Philosophical Question Matter?

Gracia devoted a lot of time and effort to addressing this question in its pre-Latinx variants going as far back as the early 1970's.[3] He is a pioneer who made substantial contributions toward making visible Hispanic/Latino and Latin American philosophy in the US.[4] In *Latinos in America* Gracia offers readers a sense of what is at stake so we get a feel for where the question is coming from. As a way of framing the issue, Gracia presents four main reasons why the meta-philosophical question matters: *pedagogical*, *historiographical*, *authenticating* and *ideological*. The first pertains to figuring out what texts and authors to include in courses and the canon of Latinx philosophy. It becomes difficult to create and offer new courses in this marginalized field if the criteria of inclusion are unclear. What should be the standards of inclusion into the canon of Latinx philosophy? Philosophy teachers need a way to show how new courses complement, build upon and diversify the dominant Western European and US offshoot philosophy curriculum. The second, involves a desire to want to know the history of Latinx philosophy so the historian of philosophy can track its shifts over time as people respond to their context and create philosophical concepts, offer problems and solutions, articulate arguments and critically evaluate the philosophical value of all this according to explicit standards of evaluation. It also helps the philosopher historiographer distinguish Latinx philosophy from the more dominant Western European philosophy and world philosophies in general. Without a philosophical identity, it is not clear how folks would get jobs in the field in undergraduate and graduate programs in philosophy departments. It is not clear what the AOS's would look like in the *Jobs for Philosophers* if there were no identifiable canon of Latinx philosophy. What factors should the historian of philosophy use to distinguish different periods within the history of Latinx philosophy as well as identify distinct philosophies? Should place, topics, methods and assumptions, language and style be relevant? The third, involves for Gracia a desire by the philosopher concerned with authenticity to establish

its legitimacy “because they consider themselves to be Latino[x], or perhaps they think it is a good thing for Latinos[x’s] to have a philosophy of our own.”[5] This invites a question. What, if any, should be the standards of an authentic Latinx philosophy? The fourth, concerns an ideological axe to grind. The ideologue is concerned with the meta-philosophical question “not for the love of knowledge in general, or even knowledge about Latino[x] philosophy in particular, but rather because the study of Latino[x] philosophy will help them reach some other aim, be that political, religious or what have you.”[6] For Gracia when non-philosophical aims of the ideologue, whether worthy or not, become the overall aim of the Latinx philosopher the account loses philosophical value.

These pedagogical, historiographical, authenticating and pedagogical concerns correspond to distinct identities for Gracia. Teachers have pedagogical aims that are different from the historiographer’s aims. Philosophers who care about Latinx philosophy being authentic aim at validation. Ideologues in contrast with philosophers and historians, do not seek the truth, they believe they have already found it, or they think it is impossible to find.[7] For Gracia while the ideologue takes an instrumentalist approach to philosophy that can be problematic when interested in personal gain or perpetuating the status quo to preserve their privileged position in society this does not imply all non-philosophical considerations are problematic. Interests in ending instability in Latin America or in producing social change are worthy aims for Gracia.[8] So while he thinks we should conceive of Latinx philosophy as a disinterested activity he does not conceive of the tasks of Latinx philosophy in a way completely abstracted away from all interests—a God’s eye perspective. They can be interested in social change but if this interest is the primary aim, then their philosophizing will suffer because the philosophical aim of seeking truth and understanding will be sacrificed for something else that is not philosophical. This is what I call Gracia’s philosophical disposition of *relative disinterestedness* as opposed to a notion of *complete disinterestedness* that is found for Gracia in non-ethnic universal scientific philosophy as opposed to ethnic philosophies. Latinx philosophers situate themselves and are situated within history and culture. It is within this context, “philosophers aim for understanding and developing a view of the world, or any of its parts, that are accurate, consistent, comprehensive and supported by sound evidence.”[9] Gracia does think Latinx philosopher’s do and should offer a view from somewhere. However, he thinks when considerations other than philosophical understanding take priority this makes it difficult to understand the philosophical value of ideas in the history of Latinx philosophy. As he says, “In fact, it is difficult to see that ideas from the past can be truly understood, when the overall aim of the one who seeks to understand them is something other than understanding.”[10] These pedagogical, historiographical, validation and ideological concerns constitute four aspects of the meta-philosophical problem of Latinx philosophy for Gracia.

### **1st Concern: What Is Really at Stake in the Meta-philosophical Question?**

While Gracia provides a sense of the issues, his framing of the meta-philosophical problem of Latino philosophy does not adequately capture what is at stake

because it undertheorizes the impact of Spanish colonialism on the local cultural originality in the regions of Latin America and the US. Gracia does not overlook or cover over Spanish colonialism. He acknowledges the Spanish conquest of 1492 as part of the beginning of the historical formation of the emergence of the metaphysical identity of the ethnic group of Hispanics. He also acknowledges Spanish colonialism when he marks the early period of the history of Latin American philosophy from (1492-1800) as the colonial period of Latin American philosophy in contrast with the later independentist period of (1750-1850). If Spanish colonialism is part of the basis of the metaphysical identity of the Hispanic ethnic group and is marked in the chronology of the philosophical identity of the history of Latin American philosophy, then why does Gracia undertheorize the role that the process of Spanish colonization played on the local cultures and ethnic groups situated within this history? I think his understanding of colonialism explains in part why he undertheorizes the history of Spanish colonialism. For Gracia, "Colonialism is a primarily political relation which has also important social, economic, and cultural implications. It is certainly the kind of relation that Spain had with respect to the territories it conquered in Latin America." [11] He is correct that colonialism involves a process of taking control of the government structures and managing the politics of the colonies from afar. He is also aware of the taking of lands, exploitation of labor, natural resources and the domination of the economy through a process of wealth extraction from colonies to mother country. However, his understanding of the cultural implications of colonialism are thin in the sense that he does not develop the epistemic implications that colonialism has on the local knowledge production and philosophy in those conquered territories.

He does not underscore how the genocides/epistemicides—diminishment of local knowledges via the burning of libraries, codices, people with oral traditions of wisdom who were walking books—were simultaneously overlain with a barrage of colonial discursive narratives, languages, histories, binaries, theories, taxonomies and naming practices that fundamentally transformed the epistemic infrastructure of the colonized terrain. In this process of epistemic colonization, as Henry aptly points out, local cultural elites are replaced by foreign cultural elites. Indigenous texts are replaced by imperial texts. In this battle for space between the layers of Euro-Spanish discourses and Mesoamerican discourses an inversely proportional process of epistemic accumulation and disaccumulation occurs as colonial knowledges acquire increasing authority while the authority of local knowledges decreases. These patterns of communicative inequality produced through Spanish colonialism, "produce major changes in discursive practices, modes of cultural organization, output and canonical standards." [12] When Spanish colonization unfolds in the Caribbean what Columbus brought was an entangled package of global structures of power of which the medieval westernized university was one. As la Universidad de San Tomas Aquino became the first transplanted medieval westernized university in the western hemisphere in Santo Domingo in 1538 the slow dissemination of European epistemologies begins to spatialize in la Universidad de San Marcos founded in 1551 in Peru and elsewhere as extensions of the Catholic scholastic structure of knowledge undergo a process of planeterization. How to reverse these patterns of communicative inequality is part of



what is at stake in the meta-philosophical question. It is this initial epistemic colonial wound and ensuing European colonization of the globe that in part explains why today not just Latinx philosophy, but other philosophies of the world are part of the long *durée* of exclusion from Western European philosophy and world philosophies canon. Gracia's theory of traditions based on intellectual descent and authority established within families and tied by practices go some way to explain the contemporary exclusion of Latino philosophy in US philosophy departments. But it does not adequately account for the initial exclusion of indigenous knowledge during Spanish colonization nor the historical unfolding of Western European philosophy as it begins to slowly disseminate in the western hemisphere and global south over a five-hundred-year period. It is consciousness of the epistemic colonization of the imagination, memory, languages, local cultures and their philosophies that make thinkers ask a key question that points to why the meta-philosophical question matters. Is it possible to think beyond westernized rationality? I identify this fundamental concern with epistemic colonization as an *epistemological* reason for significance of the meta-philosophical issue that is distinct from yet relates to the pedagogical, historiographical, authenticating and ideological reasons identified by Gracia. This does not imply that the reasons identified by Gracia do not matter but rather the epistemological reason I identify is more a matter of priority. If we take colonial considerations into account when thinking about the pedagogical as identified by Gracia, then we can distinguish Latinx philosophical texts centered around a US spatiality in relation to the Caribbean islands and other regions from its related though distinct Latin American philosophical texts centered around the continent of Latin America surrounding waters, islands and other regions. Both having distinct though overlapping histories of English settler and Spanish processes of colonization, respectively. If we take colonial considerations into account when reflecting on the historiographical as noted by Gracia, then this complicates the way we understand the colonial, independentist and positivist periods in the history of Latin American philosophy. Does colonialism end, in an epistemic sense, during the independentist and positivist periods? This does not seem to be the case if the problem of epistemic colonization endures during the independentist period and continues even after Latin American countries gain political independence from Spain and Portugal. When we take colonial considerations into account when thinking meta-philosophically, we can look back at the cacophony of voices and intellectual currents in the history of Latin American philosophy demarcated by Gracia as various attempts to struggle with and negotiate their philosophical self-understandings in relation to the deep philosophical problem of epistemic colonization, whether they are conscious of this or not. If we take colonial considerations into account when thinking about authenticating Latin American philosophy as identified by Gracia, then it becomes less a matter of aspirations toward an authentic Latin American identity but rather a teleological suspension of this identity that builds bridges with colonized peoples elsewhere who also underwent distinct though related processes of Western European colonization and engage in the ongoing struggle for liberation from epistemic colonization. If we take colonial considerations into account for the ideological reason identified by Gracia then this complicates the assumption of hard and sharp distinctions between the descriptive, evaluative and prescriptive. If Gracia's alleged ideological philosopher prioritizes a political or religious

or other aim he identifies as non-philosophical, I see how this instrumentalist approach to philosophy can compromise truth and philosophical understanding, but this is not necessary. This is because it is misleading to presuppose having a political aim when philosophizing implies one has adopted a non-philosophical consideration. Is a political consideration a non-philosophical consideration? If I am interested in the effects that accounts of Latinx identity have on popular consciousness, both among Latinx and among Anglos, ala Alcoff, then how is this not an analysis of the political effects that the social construction of meanings have on different populations and on our lived experience? It is a political account in the sense that weaves descriptive, evaluative and prescriptive dimensions. For Alcoff, there are at least two reasons why political considerations cannot be in practice disentangled from metaphysical considerations concerned with the most accurate description. First, “the strategic efficacy of political proposals are dependent on correct assessments of metaphysical realities.”[13] Second, the concern for the most apt metaphysical description involves making a judgment about meaning “that will be underdetermined by usage, history, science or phenomenological description of experience.”[14] The point I make later about how the non-ethnic science/ethnic studies and non-ethnic/ethnic philosophy distinctions are misleading is consistent with Alcoff’s point. She also points out that taking responsibility for our actions requires we carefully consider the likely real-world effects that our choice of the most apt description has on various aspects of the world. When these points combine a sketch becomes more visible. The idea that political considerations enter into doing philosophy in different related ways that are not simply at the level of the effects a theory has on the world or how a philosophy may be instrumentalized by others but also, as I will show below, at the level of the object of study.

### **Should We Conceive of Latino Philosophy as an Ethnic Philosophy?**

In addition to Gracia laying out why the meta-philosophical questions matters he proceeds to address the question how we should conceive of Latino philosophy. He lays out the limits of three approaches: universalist, culturalist and the critical view. He argues we should conceive of Latino philosophy as an ethnic philosophy. It is the philosophical work produced by the Latino ethnos that has developed in the circumstances in which the group have found themselves throughout history whether living in the United States or Latin America. This view has at least five theoretical benefits. First, it conceives of philosophy in a historically conscious way that avoids the limits of universalism with its empirically impossible method of complete neutrality, decontextualized philosophizing and aim for universal validity and truth that is absolute. It also avoids the problematic relativism of the culturalist view that sees truth as contingent, perspectival and indexed to culture because the ethnic view is a historical way of philosophizing that is rigorous in the sense that it involves description, interpretation and evaluation of philosophical ideas, problems, solutions and arguments. These tasks involve searching for truth and understanding. It also avoids an instrumentalist limit with the critical view that sees philosophies as ideological tools to reach other non-philosophical ends, which may or may not be worthy. Second, it does not impose universalistic criteria of philosophy on the philosophy developed by a

particular ethnos. It also does not apply the criteria of one ethnic philosophy and claim another ethnic philosophy is not legitimate because it does not satisfy its standards. It evaluates itself according to its own standards established within its context. Third, it explains the historical continuity of Latino philosophy. Fourth, it explains that it may include texts that are not in the history of philosophy. Fifth, it enables us to distinguish distinct ethnic philosophies. Gracia distinguishes ethnic philosophies and non-ethnic philosophies. The latter he identifies as scientific philosophy in the sense that while it cannot in fact proceed completely independent of its context it nonetheless understands itself as transcending its context and sometimes succeeds in doing so to some extent. For Gracia “science can never be considered ethnic, at least in its purpose, and that what counts as science cannot be tied necessarily to an ethnos.”[15] This is because the aim to find truths independent of context satisfies the standards for inclusion in good philosophy (i.e., involve methods and standards of truth that are not ethnically bound). For these reasons there are non-ethnic philosophies for Gracia.

## **2nd Concern: The Distinction Between Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Philosophies Is Misleading**

Is the distinction between ethnic and scientific non-ethnic philosophies plausible? It seems more accurate to conceive of the latter, to borrow a term from Renato Rosaldo, as a “post-cultural” philosophy.[16] Post-cultural refers to people who belong to dominant cultures are often unable to see themselves as cultural beings. Because how and what they do seems to be the normal way of doing things, and because they are unable to imagine themselves as objects of an anthropological gaze, they appear to themselves people without a culture. On this view, immigrants have culture while those who assimilate have moved beyond culture. Dashikis, kimonos and ponchos are ethnic garb while suits and ties are professional in a non-ethnic sense. When I was a graduate student, I was wearing a dashiki from Oaxaca and as I was walking in the hallway of the philosophy department, I crossed paths with a white male faculty member who was dressed in a suit and tie. He said, “Hi, you gone native.” To which I said in a lighthearted tone, “Suit and ties were created in Liverpool England. You are wearing English clothing. So you and other faculty who wear suit ties and who expect all faculty to dress like that have all gone native.” It is not that I do not like English clothing or that Latinos should not wear that style of dress. I like wearing a blazer occasionally. The point is suit and ties pass as universal professional non-ethnic dress but in reality, are culturally particular. It seems the aim of transcending completely one’s context is an aim linked to a specific cultural formation. It presupposes an ontology of the individual abstracted away from their fleshy cultural-historical situation. Feminist philosophers of science have shown what passes as universal scientific method is in reality a masculine method of knowledge production. Think of the subjects complete detached telescopic distance from the object of study, the ontological commitments to a man/nature binary, the relation of mastery over nature, mind over body, the subordination of emotion and elevation of technical rationality that abstracts away from ethical considerations. Not only are the aims, methods and subject of knowledge production of what Gracia is



identifying as non-ethnic scientific philosophy culturally particular, but the object of study is as well.

In what sense is a geologist doing westernized studies? *Prima facie*, it seems that if the object of study is a natural object, then the geologist is not doing ethnic studies but is doing work within the intellectual division of labor subsumed within the natural sciences. If a geologist engages in the study of the chemical composition of what she identifies as a piece of feldspar that is in her hand, then it is conventional wisdom to think she is engaging in the study of nature. Is she really? The geologist could claim they do not study history or politics or culture or power or ethnic phenomena but simply nature. Furthermore, the geologist could claim their work is not political or if it is then it is only in the instrumental sense of how their theories maybe used by others for other purposes independently of their work. In what sense might the object of study of the geologist's work (i.e., the study of feldspar) be political in a robust sense? I want to try to develop the claim that the geologist is actually engaging in a kind of entangled socio-economic, ethno-racial, gendered Western European studies that is distinct from the ethnic studies that emerged as the result of a comprise between the Third World Liberation Front and the administrators at Berkeley and the University of San Francisco in 1969. In the process, I wish to show the geologist is doing work that simultaneously invokes and conceals political considerations and that this does not imply a priori a loss of truth or objectivity. What it does imply is that the natural sciences should not pass as post-cultural areas of study. We should conceive of them as garden varieties of Western European studies. In what sense is the geologist doing a complex kind of westernized studies?

The geologist's identification of the rock as a piece of feldspar presupposes ontological commitments between man and nature. Man is an abstract human being at one pole and the geologist takes nature as an object that is on another pole that is separate from human beings. This is an ontology of separation. She conceives nature as a natural resource. It is a relation of mastery and domination over nature. The philosophical anthropology and conception of nature presupposed in the geologist's banal identification of the rock is part of the cultural background the geologist brings to bear on the object. Furthermore, part of this framework contains a hard and sharp distinction between truth and political considerations. If an indigenous geologist, from the Aymara region of the Bolivian mountains were to identify the rock as *caca*—the Quechua word for "rock"—then this too would presuppose ontological commitments. The *caca* is a sacred earth element of *pachamama*—the Quechua word translated in English as "mother earth." The relationship between the Aymara geologist and mother earth is in part one of embeddedness, a relational ontology. From the indigenous geologist's perspective, we coexist alongside other forms of life within mother earth, which is also alive. That our westernized geologist names the object "feldspar" and a Mexican geologist calls it *feldespato* in Spanish is not what makes the rock a cultural particular. The rock is a cultural object in part because the geologist is presupposing a specific westernized horizon with ontological commitments and brings that significance to bear on the object. This is one sense in which the geologist is studying a

multidimensional cultural object as opposed to a non-ethnic object that is outside of culture. Note the different ways we can understand the geologist. The geologist and conventional wisdom conceive of the geologist, the knower as one that transcends culture. I am showing that empirically the westernized geologist and the indigenous geologist are each culturally situated knowers, and each are operating within distinct political ontologies. Because all these cultural considerations interject into the geologist's theory/choice when identifying their object of study political considerations are empirically impossible to bracket. In this sense, a political consideration in theory-choice making supervenes on the cultural. It refers to the intertwined cultural dimensions (i.e., categorial scheme, descriptive, evaluative, prescriptive claims, etc.) that situate the culturally particular geologist or philosopher in a context. Just because the geologist and scientific philosopher see themselves as doing science or philosophy simpliciter, does not imply their modes of knowledge production are so in fact. Their cultural particularity is objective. This is one reason why the non-ethnic science/ethnic studies and non-ethnic philosophy (i.e., Western European philosophy)/ethnic philosophy (i.e., Latina/x/o philosophy, African American philosophy, Native American philosophy, etc.) distinctions are misleading. Does this imply all philosophies of the world are ethnic in the sense that all of them are culturally situated in a way that presuppose ontological commitments? Are all ontologies really political ontologies in the sense that they presuppose a cultural situatedness with ontological commitments? I explain below why the answer to these questions are no. It is too quick to infer from the cultural situatedness of philosophies that all are ethnic philosophies.

### **3rd Concern: Why we Should Not Think of Latinx Philosophy as an Ethnic Philosophy**

One reason why we should not conceive of Latino philosophy as ethnic is because it falsely presupposes a notion of the Latino ethnos as a non-colonized people. While Latinos in the US and Latin Americans south of the US border were imbricated in distinct yet overlapping processes of Anglo, Spanish and Portuguese colonization respectively, the peoples from these regions are colonized peoples. If this is so, then it is problematic to assume there is no relation between philosophy and colonialism. If Latinos and Latin Americans operate and philosophize within realities of colonized US and Latin American cultures then the philosophies produced from these entangled political, economic, cultural and epistemic processes should, to avoid bad faith, consider the colonial. This does not imply a logic of extermination that all other intellectual currents with the history of Latin American philosophy that do not take colonial considerations into account in their philosophizing should be excluded from Latin American philosophy. All the various stands identified in the history of Latin American philosophy could and should be analyzed as distinct currents attempting to navigate a colonial context, whether they are conscious of these realities or not. This also does not imply decolonial thought is merely one intellectual current among many others. It is a critical living thought that engages in liberation praxis and challenges the fundamentally Eurocentric methods, narratives of the history of philosophy, standards of rigor, tasks of philosophy, concepts, points of departure, theoretical dispositions and all the other

intertwined aspects that go into doing philosophy. This is one reason why we should not think of Latinx philosophy as an ethnic philosophy. It is more accurate to say pace Grant Silva with a Leonard Harris colonial twist that it is a philosophy born of colonial struggle. What implications does this criticism of the ethnic view of philosophy have on how we should approach the history of Latin American philosophy? To identify some of the implications let us first consider Gracia's answer to this historiographical question. This way we can put his perspective in conversation with some of the critical and suggested constructive points.

### **Should We Approach the History of Philosophy Through the Framework Approach?**

How should Latinx philosophers approach the history of Latin American philosophy? In chapter nine of *Latinos in America: Social Identity and Philosophy* Jorge J.E. Gracia argues for what he identifies as a framework approach to the history of Latin American philosophy. This approach involves laying down a conceptual map of the issues in the history of Latin American philosophy. The descriptive work the philosopher undertakes is unfurled from the perspective that the historian proposes to investigate. The philosopher operating under this historical mode is not evaluating the philosophical value of ideas but reporting and making judgements about certain aspects of the past that allow people to understand the context within which the philosophical ideas are embedded. Here historical truth matters in part because philosophical ideas do not emerge independently of their contexts. They emerge out of a historical context. Historical considerations are not the only factors that enter the philosopher's purview when approaching the history of Latin American philosophy. The philosopher is also attempting to grasp the philosophical value embedded in the history they are attempting to understand and ultimately critically evaluate according to the standards of evaluation explicitly identified by the philosopher historian. These various philosophical considerations inform the philosopher historian's approach to the history of philosophy. Philosophical truth matters. The framework approach involves making as visible as humanly possible, although never perfectly, the descriptive, interpretative and evaluative aspects of the frame. The philosopher's articulation of the philosophical significance of a specific historical context or in other words the frame finds its expression in the conceptual map the historian philosopher develops. According to Gracia, the conceptual map the framework approach produces is comprised of at least six elements. As he says,

In short, the framework is a set of carefully defined concepts, formulated problems, stated solutions, articulated arguments and objections, and adopted principles of evaluation, all of which are related to the issues the historian proposes to explore in the history of philosophy.”[17]

Gracia offers two main reasons in support of the framework approach. First, it serves as a proper tool to teach the history of philosophy. It avoids the limits with other approaches to the history of philosophy that are obstacles to philosophy such as

culturalism.[18] This approach blocks the development of a philosophical analysis of the ideas, problems, solutions and arguments because it aims to describe connections of philosophical ideas and relate them to other general expressions of a particular cultural form such as literature, art, science, religion, etc. Culturalism does not explain the arguments offered for specific ideas nor does it evaluate the philosophical ideas in history. It gives an account of the how philosophical ideas emerge as human responses to their historical context and through this articulation shows the philosophical foundations of a specific culture in history. It offers a description of the values, attitudes and customs of a particular culture but does not evaluate them. It offers a cultural analysis not a philosophical analysis. For instance, it may explain Latin American philosophers move away from positivism as due to deep values within Latin American culture as opposed to the philosophical reasons offered by Latin American philosopher's critiques of the arguments of positivist theories. Philosophy on the culturalism approach is an expression of a specific culture as it is located in history. The history of Latin American philosophy on the culturalism approach is the history of this kind of expression of philosophy as the most general discourses of a culture. The framework approach avoids the main limit of culturalism, namely, culturalism is a non-philosophical approach to the history of philosophy. The framework approach on the other hand gives an account of the philosophical value of the ideas in history through its critical evaluation of the ideas, the arguments for and against various positions but also the problems and solutions offered in particular context. The conceptual map accords with standards of evaluation offered by the historian philosopher as regulative ideas that are not *a priori* givens, but contestable criteria made explicit in specific contexts. Ideology is another approach that is an obstacle to approaching the history of Latin American philosophy because it does not aim for truth but just analyzes philosophical ideas to achieve some non-philosophical end that may be worthy (i.e., to end instability in Latin America) or problematic (i.e., to preserve one's privilege or the status quo). The framework approach also avoids the limits of an encyclopedic doxography approach that just records and describes the philosophical ideas of a certain period as an abstract set of propositions. Because the culturalism, ideology and doxography approaches to the history of philosophy are non-philosophical in different ways, the framework approach avoids these deficiencies.

### **My Worries About Gracia's Framework Approach to the History of Philosophy**

My concern with the framework approach is the historian philosopher does not seem to acknowledge that the contemporary standards of evaluation that are chosen in a particular context for the purposes of determining the philosophical value of the philosophical ideas, arguments and objections, problems and solutions in the history of philosophy are colonial constructions. Simply put, if Euro-modern colonization of the 15th century fundamentally involved a process of epistemological colonization then it is inadequate to cover over the establishment of a colonial framework that informs the periods in the history of Latin American philosophy identified by Gracia (i.e., the colonial period, the independence period, the positivist period, the contemporary period).[19] Given the connection between philosophy and colonialism, does it make sense to think

of a framework in the 19th century positivist period in Latin America in a way that is independent of the earlier colonial framework established after Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492? If the historian philosopher is conscious of the criteria used in the history of philosophy, then the framework approach can make explicit the history of criteria of evaluation used in the past as opposed to the contemporary criteria of evaluation used in the present. While it is plausible for Gracia to conceive of the criteria of evaluation as historical, contestable regulatory ideals and not as eternal, self-evident, foundations, the framework approach does not consider the criteria in light of the history of Latin American philosophy's formation in colonial history. A history of a philosophical concept might not be the same as identifying how a philosophical concept emerges out of colonial power relations and colonial history. Furthermore, Gracia does not conceive of the Hispanic and/or Latino ethnos as a colonized people because his familial-historical view of Hispanic and/or Latino identity does not take colonial considerations as fundamental. For these reasons we should not conceive of Latinx philosophy in the US and Latin American philosophy as ethnic philosophies. Instead, we should conceive of them as colonial philosophical formations struggling to liberate themselves from their Eurocentric, Occidental, Hellenocentric, Orientalist, sexist and heterosexist tendencies inherited over a five-hundred-year process since the sixteenth century expansions of Christendom into the Ottoman empire of Al-Andalus in Spain and Columbus's voyages across the ocean blue. We also should not conceive of Hispanic and/or Latino identity as an ethnos. It is more accurate to conceive of Latinx and Latin American folks as colonized peoples.

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## Notes

[1] I remember Grant Silva mentioning this phrase "Philosophy Born of Colonial Struggle." He mentioned this colonial twist on Leonard Harris's book when we were at the Caribbean Philosophical Association meeting in Puerto Rico in 2013.

[2] Jorge J.E. Gracia, *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity* (Blackwell, 2015).



[3] For a chronology of his contributions to these fields that span over four decades see the footnotes in Ernesto Rosen Velasquez “Jorge J.E. Gracia’s Contributions to Latina/X/o philosophy and His Engagement with Philosophy of Liberation” in Robert Delfino, William Irwin and J.J. Sanford eds. *The Philosophical Legacy of Jorge J.E. Gracia* (Lexington Press, 2022).

[4] For Gracia Hispanic philosophy is a broad category that refers to the philosophical work produced by the Hispanic ethnic group that emerges in 1492 as a result of the interactions between the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America and the US. Latino philosophy is a narrower notion that refers to the philosophical work produced by the Latino ethnic group in the US and Latin America. Latin American philosophy is narrower than Latino philosophy in that it involves the philosophical work produced by the Latin American ethnic group thinking from the region of Latin America.

[5] Gracia, *Latinos in America* (Blackwell, 2015): 130.

[6] Ibid., 130.

[7] Ibid., 194.

[8] Ibid., 194.

[9] Ibid., 188.

[10] Ibid., 195.

[11] Jorge J.E. Gracia, “A Political Argument in Favor of Ethnic Names: Alcoff’s Defense of ‘Latino’” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 31(4), (2005): 409-417.

[12] Paget Henry, *Caliban’s Reason: An Introduction to Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (Routledge, 2000): 10.

[13] Linda Alcoff, “Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?” In *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race and Rights* eds. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Pablo DeGrieff (Routledge, 2000): 23.

[14] Ibid., 24.

[15] Ibid., 143.

[16] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Beacon Press, 1989).

[17] Gracia, *Latinos in America* (Blackwell, 2015): 202.

[18] Gracia distinguishes three main historiographical wrong approaches to the history of philosophy: culturalism, ideology and doxography. Ibid., 190-200.

[19] *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values, and the Search for Identity* ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Prometheus, 2004): 13.