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NEWSLETTER ON HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

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Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

Eduardo Mendieta, Editor

Fall 2004

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

The Committee on Hispanics has undertaken a number of projects during the academic year 2003-04 with the aim of furthering the Committee's main goals of promoting Latin American philosophy and raising the profile of Hispanics in the profession. As chair of the Committee, I submit here a report of these activities.

First, we have contributed to all three Divisional meetings by organizing sessions in the main program at each meeting. In all of these, we were mindful of the need to focus on topics of interest to Hispanic and Latino philosophers, who, of course, are themselves diverse in both the traditions they endorse and the areas of philosophy they cultivate. At the Eastern Division meeting in Washington, we presented a panel discussion on the epistemic practices of Pre-Colombian cultures; at the Pacific Division meeting in Pasadena an Author Meets Critics session featuring Maria Lugones; and at the Central Division meeting in Chicago a Special Session with some international guests discussing the topic, "Wittgenstein in the Hispanic World." Although all of these topics proved to be of special interest to Hispanics and Latinos, they also attracted a more general audience of philosophers at the meetings. The presentations and discussions were lively and well attended. We had hoped to begin reaching a wider audience at the divisional meetings, and this evidence is encouraging. The Committee does appear to be achieving this important objective. Many participants stayed until the end of the sessions to make inquiries about our committee and to suggest other activities we might undertake at future divisional meetings.

Secondly, to promote the teaching of Latin American philosophy and thought, the Committee has aggressively pursued enlarging its email list, adding numerous addresses of professionals who teach, or are interested in teaching, the subject. Information concerning new teaching materials and events has been posted periodically at the Committee's website. In this connection, we now also have a more comprehensive web page. Among its new items are resources, such as samples of syllabi, audiovisual materials that may be used for teaching and presentations, and a list of philosophers competent in different topics of Latin American thought who are willing to travel to give talks on these subjects.

Thirdly, some important plans for the future of the Committee were made at our annual business meeting at the Eastern Division. We invited APA Executive Director Michael Kelly to speak to us, and he provided useful suggestions on some of our main topics. Among these were the possibility of requesting support from major foundations committed to the advancement of the liberal arts. Grants from institutions such

as the NEH could be of great help in advancing research and teaching of Latin American philosophy. We also discussed matters of internal organization related to the new prize for an essay in Latin American thought, to be offered for the first time at the Eastern Division meeting in Boston in December 2004. We decided to begin campaigning for private funding to underwrite the prize as an annual award after the initial three years of APA funding. A subcommittee was formed to serve as a jury to select the winning essay for the 2004 prize. Michael Kelly provided valuable input on all these issues.

Finally, I would like to announce that Arleen L.F. Salles will assume the editorship of the *APA Newsletter on Hispanics* in the spring of 2005. A native of Argentina, Arleen is assistant professor of philosophy at John Jay College of the City University of New York and also teaches in the Master's Program in Applied Ethics at the University of Buenos Aires. Her research and teaching are focused on ethical theory and applied ethics, but she has extensive experience in editorial work, and I'm sure will continue the tradition of devotion to high standards shown by our current editor, Eduardo Mendieta.

Susana Nuccetelli

Chair, Committee on Hispanics

ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

As you will see from the announcement below, the NEH will offer a Summer Institute on Latin American philosophy next year in Buffalo, between June 6 and 30. This is an important event insofar as this is the first NEH Institute devoted to this topic. It is a sign that Latin American philosophy and thought are finally being taken seriously in this country, and that the academic world is finally recognizing the need for the American college curriculum to take Latin American philosophy into account.

We need to make this Institute a success, but we cannot do it without your help. We hope for your participation in the Institute and for your help in identifying college and university teachers who might be interested in coming to Buffalo for the Institute. This is an unusual opportunity that we should let pass. Who knows when there will be another one like this!

Our thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Cordially yours,

Jorge Gracia and Susana Nuccetelli

ARTICLES

Cultural Diversity and Grammatical Tolerance: Wittgenstein on Seeing Aspects and Latin American Thinking

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I

Let me begin at an unlikely place. Oliver Sacks tells that aphasic patients, due to a lesion to the left temporal lobe, are incapable of understanding words in terms of their conceptual meaning. This deficiency is, however, amply compensated by a hyperdevelopment of their sensitivity to what Frege called the *Klangfarbe*, or tonal coloring of language. Despite their cognitive handicap, therefore, they grasp with almost infallible precision that involuntary, totally spontaneous expression that accompanies words. They evidence in this way a form of understanding that is often more subtle and more exact, but which takes place at a different level than that of intellectual interpretation.¹

I begin with this consideration because it brings to the fore a mode of understanding that, beyond its pathological appearance in the example of aphasics, is present in human beings in general but tends to be repressed or ignored or devalued in our culture. As Sacks points out, it is symptomatic of our collective intellectualist attitude that this expressive hypersensitivity be considered derogatively, “almost an inversion of the usual order of things: an inversion, and perhaps also a reversion, to something more primitive or elemental.”² But this cultural symptom merely echoes an attitude inherent to our tradition since Plato. Even in its empiricist incarnations Western philosophy has persistently dismissed sensible *bodily* experience as impertinent to the kind of knowledge men seek, in what seems like nothing but another acting-out of the ancient human desire to overcome our earthly condition.³ And in the reading of Wittgenstein’s thought that I want to advance, his efforts are directed precisely against that inclination and they aim at a philosophical reorientation that attends to the concreteness of our bodily existence.⁴

As we are told in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein wants to regard man as an animal, “as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state,” and language as *precisely not* the result of “some kind of reasoning.”⁵ And he tells us often enough that he is attempting to overcome our craving for generality and that related prejudice—ingrained in our Western consciousness—against the particular case.⁶ His philosophy, I want to argue, is a battle against the systematic repression of modes of understanding and relation to the world, which are constitutive of human nature. His is an attempt, in other words, to lift our prejudice against the elemental, animal, or primitive dimension of our life in language, and thus to recover for our philosophic tradition what I will call the *expressive* aspect of understanding and linguistic meaning.

Now this fact seems to me decisive in evaluating the pertinence of Wittgenstein’s philosophy to Latin American thinking. This natural duality between an intellectual or theoretical and an expressive or bodily dimension in human nature has an almost constitutional tendency to polarize itself.

Functionally this is evidenced in the dismissive attitude of Western philosophy towards the sensible and, generally, in our tendency to rationalize or theoretically explain our lived experience. But also biologically and geographically, this polarization finds a natural manifestation in the temperamental differences between cultures in the Northern and the Southern hemispheres.

I am aware that this claim may sound *theoretically* objectionable, and even politically incorrect; but *experientially* these differences seem to me undeniable. Just to illustrate what I mean, let me say that supposedly literary style, “magical realism,” articulated by Latin American writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez, was a well-instituted mode of existence in that continent well before it became known in the world-at-large as a literary style. A mode of existence which in its chaotic intensity and raw everydayness is as unimaginable to Northern temperaments as the systematic ordered regularity of North American life is generally unthinkable in Latin America. And although it is true that claims like these can feed the very stereotypes that breed intolerance and often obstruct mutual understanding between cultures, it is the fragile grain of truth that they express which needs to be redeemed. For the temperamental contrasts that they so crassly express determine different ways of seeing and being in the world that cannot be left aside if we are to talk about the ways of thinking that are natural to each.

The fact that we tend to dismiss these considerations as impertinent to our conception of philosophical thinking reveals a familiar prejudice: that philosophy is about essences, about universal knowledge, and that its *sub specie aeterni* vision allows us to overcome or hover over our concrete limitations and attain some kind of *Aufhebung*. But if there is something Wittgenstein has taught us, it is the necessary locatedness of thinking, the irreducible spatio-temporal nature of language, and so the need to consider the constitution of our concepts or categories of reality within a context, as José Medina has rightly put it, “of historicity, agency and normativity.”⁷ Wittgenstein’s rejection of our acontextual, intellectualist, puritanical tradition and its recovery of the expressive dimension of thought makes his philosophy immediately relevant to Latin American culture, insofar as it is directly related to a mode of being that is typical to its own forms of life.

It is indeed *that* tradition—aversive as it is to the expressive in its separation of style from content in philosophy, and in its attempt to keep itself clean from embodied experience—which leads us to admit, without much resistance, that, as Carlos Pereda has put it,⁸ the philosophical tradition in the Spanish language has been poor, so that it seems reasonable that we seek to attain a proper training outside it. It is the partiality of mind that this prejudice nurtures, under the guise of progress and rationality, that I believe stands behind the three vices that, according to Pereda, burden Latin American philosophy: The “franchise mentality” is nothing other than an expression of our blindness to our own resources and concerns; the “craving for novelty” results from our failure to anchor our interests in our own psyche; and “patriotic fervors,” like all fanaticisms in the world, are an extreme reaction against what is felt as an imposition from outside and a threat to what we also feel, but perhaps can’t even articulate, as most intimately ours. We too are, in other words, party to that prejudice in our cultural and philosophical practices that hacks off our own roots.

In this regard then, Wittgenstein’s project is immensely pertinent to the question I want to ask, about the point and nature of philosophy in Latin America. Insofar as it manages to

break the hold of our tradition's cultural and intellectual imperialism, Wittgenstein's work opens a new access to a realm of philosophical reflection that incorporates, rather than rejects, modes of thinking and experience that have until now been ignored, but to which the Latin American temperament is naturally suited. Already at the beginning of the XXth century Ortega y Gasset reminded us that abstract, theoretical and scientific intelligence is "only a small island floating in an ocean of primordial vitality,"⁹ and he saw the task of our times in the coming to awareness of this fact, and the profound conversion that it would bring to our vision of the world.

I would like to rehearse in what follows and in a couple of very broad brushstrokes, an account of Wittgenstein's discussion on seeing aspects that suggests how it may be read in this light, as part of that task, which I am claiming is immediately relevant to Latin American thinking. So we move now, from what I wanted to say about cultural diversity, on to Wittgenstein's project of grammatical tolerance.

II

Wittgenstein's discussions on seeing aspects are a centerpiece in his battle against the predominance of an intellectualist mode of thought in our tradition.¹⁰ They not only introduce a realm of experience that is not capturable by our conventional philosophical categories, (evidencing the very partiality of thinking that makes us unable to account for our actual experience). They also serve as an occasion for a revised conception of subjectivity that recovers, both in theory and in the actual practice, the primacy of concrete bodily *experience* for philosophy.

In his writings, Wittgenstein literally forces his readers to involve themselves vicariously in fictitious cases, possible situations, and contrasting examples to loosen up the rigidity of our concepts and cultural prejudices that make us insensitive to the radical expressiveness of language. His is, first of all, an appeal for grammatical tolerance:

if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize—then let him *imagine* certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.¹¹

His appeal to the imagination, here as much as in virtually every page of Wittgenstein's later writings, has the purpose of leading us inside living contexts that are different from our own, to propitiate a new type of commitment, more sensual, sensible, and imaginative to experience from which different visions of the world may become available to us. But this means that he is attempting to make us see the world in a different way than we are accustomed,¹² not obviously by suggesting new *logical or intellectual* interpretations or by providing different explanations. As he explains in response to the intellectualist interlocutor of the *Investigations* who insists in understanding what Wittgenstein is saying in the traditional concepts:

Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (...) But our interest does not fall back upon these *possible causes* of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history – since we can also *invent* fictitious natural history for our purposes. I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (*in the sense of an hypothesis*). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the

correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize—then let him *imagine*...¹³

We must be clear, Wittgenstein seems to be saying, that our purpose is very different than the scientist's, who moves in the realm of empirical truths. And, differently from a scientific investigation, ours is not at all an "objective" enterprise, in the sense that natural science claims to be. As philosophers, Wittgenstein explains, we are at most *imagining* natural histories, for we are not interested in confirming hypotheses about the world, but in *seeing* the world—the same empirical world the scientist is explaining—in as many ways as possible. As philosophers we are not interested in "the Truth" (whatever that may mean), but in understanding the grammar of our language—the way in which we can weave the world in our concepts—in order to recognize the diverse ways in which we can come to *see* the truth. The whole discussion on seeing aspects is about precisely what is needed to see the vital world beyond the realm of empirical scientifically examinable phenomena.

Wittgenstein calls to our attention, for example, the strange experience we have when we contemplate a face "and then *suddenly* notice its likeness to another. (We) *see* it has not changed; and yet (we) see it differently."¹⁴ This strange experience involves what he calls "a particular visual experience (*Seherlebnis*)" that he connects explicitly to that other *experience (erleben)* we can have of the meaning of a word, when for example, the word "bank" *feels* differently when it refers to the bank where I keep my money and the river bank that I watch every morning as I walk to school; or when we feel the absurdity or incongruence (the example is obviously Wittgenstein's) that Goethe's signature could have belonged to Kant¹⁵; or even when our familiarity with a word shrinks away after we repeat it many times. Now, the question he explores about the sense of this experience is important not just to understand the phenomenon of "seeing aspects," but to recognize that concern with this phenomenon is an integral part of his effort to recover lived, bodily experience for a tradition that sometimes seems willing to give it up for the sake of certainty and intellectual knowledge and control.

The experience where "we see that nothing has changed, yet everything looks different" reveals a capacity, or a human talent, that goes unremarked from the scientific perspective. By directing our attention to it, Wittgenstein thematizes a realm of human experience, beyond mere perception, where displacements take place that do not correspond necessarily to changes in the empirical world, though they are able to change our perception and totally transform its meaning. But this new way of seeing involves a radical revision of our concept of the subjective, the first step of which is to combat the Cartesian model, which invalidates every reference to the inner by turning it into something mental or private.

Dissociating himself from that tradition, therefore, Wittgenstein insists that when talking about this "experience," we are not talking about an *inner experience*, in the same way that he insists that when we talk of thinking we are *not* talking about the images or psychological processes that accompany our words. Although he rejects the Cartesian interpretation of subjectivity, Wittgenstein does not discard but returns, again and again, to the "experience of the meaning of a word"; furthermore, he insists in *the visual experience* that accompanies the seeing of aspects and asks us to pay attention to what we want to say when we speak about "experience," suggesting that there is something important that we need to recover from our expression. This recovery, it is important to note, depends on the appeal to imaginative reflection that

Wittgenstein's methods make, but also on his obvious trust in the deep significance of our inclination to speak of our experience beyond the literal meaning of our words. It depends, to put it another way, on his trust in the natural spontaneity and expressiveness of our words beyond our intellectual understanding.

Wittgenstein's imaginative exercises are successful in showing that the reason why we are inclined to postulate internal mental contents to explain meaning is our blindness to the gestural or expressive dimension in language, our inability to see aspects. (The scientific way of looking at phenomena, he had already told us in the "Lecture on Ethics," is *not* the way to see a miracle). So he asks us, for example, to imagine explaining the particular thought we may have, for instance, upon hearing a word, in terms *not* of an internal dialogue or mental processes, but of a spontaneous inclination to make a gesture. Upon hearing some word I spontaneously frown at you in a significant way and when you ask me, "Why did you look at me that way when you heard that word?"¹⁶ I explain myself saying that "I thought of so-and-so" or that I suddenly remembered "that night at the Caffè Florián." In this way, Wittgenstein discards the mental content suggested by the "inner words" and brings to light the important fact—which we verify imaginatively—that until the moment that I articulate myself in a verbal explanation, the "experience" is *expressively* full, even if *representationally* as empty as a gesture.¹⁷ This expressive fullness that becomes evident when we pay attention to the gestural goes undetected by the literalist eye which, insensitive to the bodily, seeks only internal states and mental representations.

It is necessary to insist that Wittgenstein is deliberately *not denying that there is* an "inner activity" to which our mention of "experience" gives voice. But this inner activity has no content, even if it is indeed an experience. The words with which we express ourselves in these cases are signaling an animic directionality, a natural potentiality about which we become gradually aware insofar as it acquires concreteness in the diverse and diffuse consequences of our words, in the ponderable and imponderable evidence that is wholly open to others.¹⁸ As Wittgenstein says, the words or expressions (*Äußerungen*) in which we express our experience are like seeds (*Keim*)¹⁹ or like "acorns from which oak trees can grow."²⁰

III

The phenomenon of aspect-seeing embodies a mode of experience common to all, that is, however, not captured in our usual perceptual categories. It crosses all traditional conceptual borders—between thought and perception, between reason and imagination, between intellect and feeling—and so requires no less than a total revision of our conventional psychological grammar. The task of finding a place for this experience demands the assumption of our words in their complete expressiveness, "with attachment" as Wittgenstein puts it, in the inexhaustible spontaneity of a human being, in what I am wont to call our innate power of transcendence, meaning by this not anything mystical but simply our capacity to move beyond the literal and create and share new meanings through a free act of the imagination, but most of all in a sort of faith in the open potentiality of language. Merleau-Ponty seems to point to the change in orientation that it requires when he writes that words are "not (...)" so many arbitrary conventions for the expression of one and the same idea, but several ways for the human body to sing the world's praises and in the last resort to live it.²¹

I believe that it is from this stance that Latin American thinking can find its proper place. We may start to feel no

longer—as we have traditionally—that its own resources are too poor to contribute to serious world philosophy. And we may start to see its own training beyond its tradition, not as an alternative away from its own assumed poverty but as a step towards the deliberate integration of precisely those rich aspects—a natural relation to contingency and chaos, an immediate relation to the emotions and the aesthetic, etc.—in its own forms of life, that are naturally compensatory to the partiality that Wittgenstein is attempting to overcome in our tradition. Wittgenstein's is an ethical demand for grammatical tolerance that begins with the reevaluation of the imagination as a tool for philosophical reflection, and hence the acknowledgement of various modes of awareness other than the intellectual as constitutive of the kind of knowledge that interests us.²²

Endnotes

1. As Sacks recounts: "A roar of laughter from the aphasia ward, just as the President's speech was coming on (...) There he was, the Old Charmer, the Actor, with his practiced rhetoric, his histrionisms, his emotional appeal—and all the patients were convulsed with laughter (...) Were they failing to understand him? Or did they, perhaps, understand him all too well? (...) (The aphasic) cannot grasp your words, and so cannot be deceived by them; but what he grasps he grasps with infallible precision, namely the expression that goes with the words, that total, spontaneous, involuntary expressiveness which can never be simulated or faked, as words alone can, all too easily... (...) In this, then lies their power of understanding—understanding, without words, what is authentic and inauthentic. This is what the grimaces, the histrionisms, the false gestures and, above all, the false tones and cadences of the voice, which rang false for these wordless but immensely sensitive patients. It was to these (for them) most glaring, even grotesque, incongruities and improprieties that my aphasic patients responded, undecieved and undecivable by words. This is why they laughed at the President's speech." "The President's Speech," in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998, 80-83).
2. *Ibid.*, 81.
3. For a further development of this idea, see A. Anderson, S. Hicks., & L. Witowski (eds.) "Descending into Primeval Chaos': Philosophy, the Body, and the Pygmalionic Impulse," *Mythos and Logos: How to Regain the Love of Wisdom* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi Editions, 2004).
4. I offer a first approach to this reading in "The Subtle Body of Language and the Lost Sense of Philosophy," *Philosophical Investigations*, 23:2 (2000).
5. *On Certainty* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969, §475).
6. *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960, 17-18).
7. José Medina, "Wittgenstein and the Hispanic Family."
8. Carlos Pereda, "Wittgenstein in Latin America."
9. José Ortega y Gasset, *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987), 112.
10. For various aspects of this reading, see: "Ver aspectos, imaginación y sentimiento en el pensamiento de Wittgenstein," *Apuntes filosóficos*, No. 18, Caracas (2001);

“El problema de la subjetividad y la importancia de ver aspectos en Wittgenstein,” *Del espejo a las herramientas: Ensayos sobre el pensamiento de Wittgenstein*, Alfonso Flórez, Magdalena Holguín & Raúl Meléndez, (eds.), Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2003; “Thinking Philosophically Beneath our Feet’: Subjective Experience, Seeing Aspects, and the Body,” *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew: New Essays on Aspect-Seeing*, William Day & Victor J. Krebs (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming: 2004).

11. *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), II, xii, 230b.
12. It is helpful to draw a line of convergence and affinity with Pascal’s distinction between the geometrical spirit (which would correspond to the literalist cravings of the modern philosopher, Wittgenstein’s interlocutor) and the spirit of subtleness, which names the attitude exemplified in Wittgenstein’s appeals to the imponderables of language or the vision of aspects: Cf., “En el espíritu de sutileza los principios son de uso común y se presentan ante los ojos de todo el mundo. No hay que volver la cabeza sin hacerse violencia, Sólo se trata de tener buena vista. Pero eso sí que es bien necesario, tenerla buena, ya que los principios están tan desleídos y son en tan gran número, que es casi imposible que no se escapen algunos. Y la omisión de un principio conduce al error; así es necesario tener la vista clara para ver todos los principios, y luego el espíritu recto para no razonar falsamente sobre los principios conocidos. (los sutiles) penetran viva y profundamente las consecuencias de los principios”(*Pensées*, XV).
13. PI, II, xii, 230b.
14. PI, 193c (my italics. Cf., *Last Writings in the Philosophy of Psychology* (LW1), Vol, 1, §719, §682, §692; PI, 205, 210).
15. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol I (RPP1) (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), §336.
16. PI, 217g.
17. It also shows that the explanation I am inclined to give (“I thought of,” or “I suddenly remembered”) arises as spontaneously and groundlessly as the gesture did. We could also say: what contains those words is the same as what contains the gesture. They both arise from a silence that precedes language, and it is to this prelinguistic silence, this potential directionality or objectless intention that the experience refers. (We could see what Wittgenstein is doing here as an attempt to recover the sense of the radical spontaneity of language, the difference between institutionalized language and what Merleau-Ponty calls “authentic language.” Cf. Merleau-Ponty: “Nous vivons dans un monde où la parole est instituée. Pour toutes ces paroles banales, nous possédons en nous-mêmes des significations déjà formées. Elles ne suscitent en nous que des pensées secondes; celles-ci à leur tour se traduisent en d’autres paroles qui n’exigent de nous aucun véritable effort d’expression et ne demanderont à nos auditeurs aucun effort de compréhension. (...) Nous perdons conscience de ce qu’il y a de contingent dans l’expression et dans la communication, soit chez l’enfant qui apprend à parler, soit chez l’écrivain qui dit et pense pour la première fois quelque chose, enfin chez tous ceux qui transforment en parole un certain silence (...) Notre vue sur l’homme

restera superficielle tant que nous ne remonterons pas à cette origine, tant que nous ne retrouverons pas, sous le bruit des paroles, le silence primordial, tant que nous ne décrirons pas le geste qui rompt ce silence” (*Phénoménologie de la perception*, 214).)

18. Cf. PI, 218i. The experience is not directly related to what I say; it is not the same as the meaning of the words, but it is related indirectly to those meanings through what those words evoke in me, by what Wittgenstein calls their “field (of force)” (Feld, PI, 219c) [cf. Davidson’s “first meaning” in his discussion of malapropisms in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”).
19. PI, 217e.
20. PI, 220d-e.
21. *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1999, 187).
22. Thanks are due to Michael Hodges and Lorena Rojas Parma for their helpful comments on a previous version of this paper.

Wittgenstein and the Hispanic family

José Medina

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Here I will use Wittgenstein’s later philosophy to develop a contextualist account of Hispanic identity. I argue that from Wittgenstein’s notion of *family resemblance* we can derive a non-essentialist and pluralist view of ethnic identity as something that is historically situated, action-based, and value-laden. So the three crucial features of the contextualist familial view of ethnic identity that I derive from Wittgenstein’s philosophy are *historicity*, *agency*, and *normativity*. On my view, an ethnic identity is shaped by history, that is, produced and maintained by historical practices. Secondly, it is crucially dependent on the agency of its members and also on the agency of those with whom they interact. Finally, an ethnic identity has a normative dimension, that is, membership in the group is informed by normative attitudes (although these may be different and even in tension, and although they may remain implicit and go unacknowledged). I will develop my Wittgensteinian familial view of Hispanic identity in two stages. In the first stage I offer a critical examination of Jorge Gracia’s familial account. There I argue that, although drawing on the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance, Gracia’s account is not Wittgensteinian enough, and I criticize its metaphysical presuppositions from a Wittgensteinian perspective. In the second, more positive stage of my argument I articulate my own interpretation of the notion of family resemblance and apply it to Hispanic identity. Finally, I draw some conclusions concerning what the philosophical debate about Hispanic identity can learn from the historical, practical, and normative contextualism that informs Wittgenstein’s later philosophy.

1. Gracia’s Familial View: History without Agency and Normativity

In *Hispanic/Latino Identity*¹ Gracia argues that Hispanic identity should be understood as the identity of a *historical family* formed by “a unique web of changing historical relations.”² On this familial-historical view, the unity of Hispanics is not a unity of commonality, but a unity of community, “a historical unity founded on relations.”³ According to Gracia, the origin of the complex chain of historical events that unites “our Hispanic

family” is “the encounter” of Iberia and America in 1492: “Our family first came into being precisely because of the events which the encounter unleashed.”⁴ Gracia argues that the term “Hispanic” is the only appropriate name for our historical family because it is the only label that can bring together all those Iberians and Americans who have come to share an ethnic identity as a result of historical events. Rather than discussing the validity of these specific contentious claims, I want to discuss instead the general strengths and weaknesses of Gracia’s familial view.

The main strength of Gracia’s familial-historical view is its capacity to account for *change* and *diversity* as fundamental aspects of Hispanic identity. On Gracia’s view, the cultural identity of an ethnic group is neither static nor homogeneous. On the one hand, Gracia’s diachronic view depicts Hispanic identity as something dynamic that is always in the making and can never be fixed once and for all. This picture brings to the fore the contingencies of the past that have contributed to the formation of our Hispanic identity; and it underscores that the future of our Hispanic family remains open: “The future is always open and can be different. We are not trapped in our identity.”⁵ On the other hand, Gracia’s familial-historical view emphasizes the nonhomogeneous character of Hispanic identity. On this view, Hispanics share only “family resemblances” and their identity “is bound up with difference.”⁶ Gracia’s analysis of ethnic groups as historical families shows that the homogeneity of group identity is a myth, for families are not homogeneous wholes composed of pure elements: “They include contradictory elements and involve mixing. Indeed, contradiction and mixing seems to be of the essence, for a living unity is impossible without contradiction and heterogeneity.”⁷ This is particularly true of our Hispanic family that has been constituted through mixing or *mestizaje* at all levels.

Despite its unquestionable virtues, Gracia’s familial-historical view has also some weaknesses. A critical look at the externalist and realist view of history that animates Gracia’s account of Hispanic identity can help to uncover some of its problematic assumptions. In the first place, it is highly questionable that what gives unity to our Hispanic family is history *per se* and not the appropriation of that history in and through *our practices*. However, Gracia’s externalist view of history forces him to this implausible conclusion: “What ties (a group of people) together, and separates them from others, is history and the particular events of that history rather than the consciousness of that history.”⁸ But it is far from clear that having a distinctive history is a sufficient condition for the ethnic identity of a group. This externalist claim belies the fundamental practical dimension of ethnic identity, which involves *agency* and is not something that simply *happens* to us as a result of history. The explicit recognition of this practical aspect of Hispanic identity is essential for the self-empowerment of the group. In the second place, Gracia’s familial-historical view shares with essentialist views the ambition of finding a metaphysical grounding for Hispanic identity that is independent of political viewpoints. However, it seems implausible that history can provide such *value-free* grounding. Gracia insists that our philosophical justifications of claims about Hispanic identity “should not be based on politics, but on historical fact.”⁹ But unless a strong fact/value distinction is invoked, it is not at all clear that history and politics can be kept separate. Gracia seems to be reacting against accounts that have explicitly tied Hispanic/Latino identity to particular social and political agendas such as *liberation*.¹⁰ Although Gracia acknowledges the crucial importance of the project of liberation in Latin America, he does not think that liberation should be considered as a constitutive element of Hispanicity

and Hispanic thought in general; for the idea of liberation has not played the same key role everywhere in the Hispanic world, and it is not clear that it will be in the future. This is indeed true, but it should not be a problem for a philosophical account of Hispanic identity that is developed for our here and now rather than for all times and all places. And this brings us to the unWittgensteinian aspect of Gracia’s view. Just as the traditional essentialist views, Gracia’s familial-historical view purports to be a universal theory of Hispanic identity that is independent of specific contexts. By contrast, Wittgenstein encouraged us to look at specific cases for specific purposes. On Wittgenstein’s view, the job of the philosopher is to arrange descriptions or “perspicuous representations,”¹¹ that is, to provide elucidations by situating things in their historical, practical, and normative contexts. And it is of the utmost importance that, as Wittgenstein himself emphasizes, these descriptions or elucidations are produced for “particular practical purposes.”¹² However, the philosophical standpoint adopted and encouraged by Gracia’s view is not the situated perspective of an engaged critic, but the detached perspective of an observer who looks at the history of our Hispanic family *sub specie aeternitatis*. This lack of sensitivity to practical and normative contexts is damaging, for it undermines the critical and transformative potential that a philosophical elucidation of Hispanic identity should have.

In my opinion, Gracia’s familial-historical view of Hispanic identity is an important step in the right direction, but a step that could have taken us much further if it had acknowledged agency and normative contextuality as constitutive aspects of identity. An adequate familial account of identity needs to pay closer attention to the role of agency and values in the formation of identity. Gracia’s view gets right one of the three crucial features of ethnic identity: historicity, but not agency and normativity. But these features cannot be separated without distortion. As I will argue in the next section, following Wittgenstein, the historical contextuality of ethnic groups is essentially practical and normative.

2. Heterogeneous Families: Families with History, Practices, and Norms

One of the lessons we can learn from Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is that most of the concepts we use to describe ourselves and the world around us are not applied according to fixed criteria of strict identity. When we use a concept such as “game” or “chair,” we treat all kinds of different things as *the same* although they are not strictly identical in any respect; that is, in our categorizations different things are treated as instances of the *same* category even though there is no feature (or set of features) that they all have in common: many different kinds of activities are called games, and many different kinds of artifacts are called chairs; and we can always add new items to the list of things that fall under these concepts (we can always invent new kinds of games and produce new kinds of chairs). Wittgenstein suggested that these concepts are like *families*, whose members resemble one another in many different ways: some may have similar hair, others a similar nose, others may share a particular way of talking, or a similar laughter, etc. Families are composed of heterogeneous elements; there is nothing in particular that all their members must have: they simply exhibit some similarities, they share certain “family resemblances,”¹³ but there is no fixed set of necessary and sufficient conditions that determine membership. As Wittgenstein puts it, what brings together and keeps together the members of those categories that function like families is “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing.”¹⁴ Wittgenstein’s analogy between the strength of a concept and the strength of a thread

illustrates this point: “we extend our concept (...) as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.”¹⁵

As I have argued elsewhere,¹⁶ the network of similarities in which the familial identity of the members of a concept consists must be accompanied by *two distinct networks of overlapping and criss-crossing differences*: one network of differences that sets apart the members of the family from the members of other families; and another network composed of those differences among the members of the family themselves that lurk in the background and are disregarded for the sake of familial identity. It is important to note that the relationship that holds between these networks is a *dynamic* one: differences that today set apart one family from another may become inconsequential tomorrow; and, on the other hand, internal differences that are considered negligible today may grow to be important differences tomorrow, even to the point of excluding individuals from membership in the family. At the same time, these dynamic fluctuations between the networks of differences correspond to transformations in the network of similarities that sustain familial identity, for all these networks are mutually dependent and they are shaped simultaneously. Thus the analogy between families and concepts underscores change: a family is a living unit whose members come and go; and, similarly, what is covered by a concept is subject to change and must be left open. Moreover, even when the extension of the concept does not change, even when the membership in the family remains the same, the relations among the members of the family (as well as their relations with other families) change as differences become visible and family ties are relaxed. It is important to note that these networks of similarities and differences that become indicative of familial identity have a history: they result from the continued use of certain associations, that is, from treating things in a particular way in our shared linguistic practices. Therefore, these networks of similarities and differences should *not* be thought of as *unexplained explainers*; they acquire diagnostic value simply because of the (criterial) significance they have been given in our practices, because they have come to be seen as symptoms of membership in a group. On my view, the networks of similarities and differences that sustain familial identity call for a *genealogical* account, that is, a genealogy of their formation through the shared ways of speaking and acting enforced by our practices.

This familial view of identity based on Wittgenstein’s account of categorization suggests two points, namely: that identity can be thought of as something *heterogeneous*, based on diversity, and as something *unstable*, subject to fluctuation. These points alone show that the quest for ethnic purity is conceptually misguided. For this quest presupposes the homogeneity and fixity of ethnicity; but when ethnic groups are conceptualized as families, it becomes clear that the homogeneity and fixity of ethnic identities are nothing but myths. Given this heterogeneous character, it is not surprising that all attempts to reduce the shared identity of Hispanics to common properties fail. These failures have led many to conclude that we should give up Hispanic identity and retreat to national identities (Mexican, Cuban, Argentinean, etc.)—but, as it turns out, these collective identities pose the same problems. This reaction is based on the essentialist assumption that there is no shared identity when there are no common features. But this assumption is a misconception. The unity of Hispanics as an ethnic group cannot be established at the expense of diversity, but on the basis of it. As Gracia puts it, the unity of Hispanics is “a unity in diversity.”¹⁷; that is, it is not a

unity of commonality, but a *unity of community*: the unity of a *family*.¹⁸

The familial-historical view I have sketched here calls our attention to the contingencies of the past that have contributed to the formation of our Hispanic identity; and it underscores that the future of our identity remains open and therefore presents us with a task for which we have to take responsibility. According to this view, identifying oneself as Hispanic (or as a member of any other ethnic group) is the expression of a *commitment*: a commitment to one’s history, to a set of ongoing practices, and to a common future. What is most distinctive about ethnicity is that it involves normative attitudes that inform one’s interests, values, and practices. What characterizes membership in an ethnic group is a relation of *normative identification*, which is precisely what the metaphor of the family captures so well. Being part of an ethnic group involves being committed to it, that is, it involves seeing oneself as being part of that community or family, no matter how different its members are and how heterogeneous their practices and values can be.

In conclusion, like Jorge Gracia’s familial view, my Wittgensteinian view underscores that contingency, diversity, and instability are fundamental aspects of any cultural identity and of Hispanic identity in particular. But unlike Gracia’s view, my Wittgensteinian approach puts the emphasis on agency and normativity and, far from being merely descriptive, it has a critical and transformative potential. The critical payoff of an action-based and value-laden approach to identity is, I contend, the central contribution that Wittgenstein’s philosophy can make to the philosophical discussion of Hispanic identity.

Endnotes

1. J. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
2. *Ibid.*, 49.
3. *Ibid.*, 50.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 190.
6. *Ibid.*, 33.
7. *Ibid.*, 50.
8. *Ibid.*, 49.
9. *Ibid.*, 67.
10. See Ofelia Schutte, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993).
11. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), §122.
12. *Ibid.*, §132.
13. This famous Wittgensteinian notion has often been read very narrowly as referring to purely physical similarities. It is unlikely that this is what Wittgenstein had in mind since he introduces the notion to clarify the meaning of terms, such as “game” and “number,” whose application does not seem to rely on a set of physical characteristics. See PI §66-67. Contrary to this narrow interpretation, I will use the notion of “family resemblance” interchangeably with the notion of *similarity* to cover all kinds of commonalities that can be indicative of group membership.
14. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), §66.
15. *Ibid.*, §67.

16. See my article “Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the Problem of Difference,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 29 (6) (2003): 655-680.
17. J. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 49.
18. To properly understand my familial account of ethnic identity, two caveats are in order. First, as used in my Wittgensteinian view, the notion of a family should not be understood as a purely biological concept, but rather, as a hybrid notion that contains *social and political* elements as well as biological ones. Families are not just biological groups, but social structures and legal institutions. It would be a mistake to think that only biological features constitute adequate criteria for familial membership. (Indeed, people can gain and lose parental rights on the basis of nonbiological considerations.) Secondly, we have to keep in mind that there are all kinds of families and, therefore, only a *pluralistic* notion of “family” can be useful for the analysis of collective identities. My Wittgensteinian approach does not rest on any specific conception of the family, in particular; it is not dependent upon the patriarchal familial model that has been dominant in the West. Far from being complacent with the patriarchal model of family relations, the genealogical approach and the comparative perspective behind my familial view are intended to subvert this model and to be critical of oppressive familial structures in general. In this sense, my familial view connects with ongoing efforts in the literature on identity (especially in feminist theory and queer studies) to rearticulate the very notion of a family and to subvert what is typically understood by “family values.” See note 5.

“language games,” or how the idea of a private language is dissolved; or how *On Certainty* contributes to get rid of a traditional Cartesian concept of certainty by means of an anti-foundationalist reasoning.

On the contrary, the formal lesson of a thinker is not so much a matter of assimilating his or her views for the treatment of one or another problem or pseudo-problem, but of learning some of the thinker’s more general ways of reasoning. However, a formal lesson does not only capture a “know how”; it also points to what might be called a form of wisdom. For instance, Wittgenstein makes use of several metaphors to indicate wrong paths in our thinking. These metaphors do not only pinpoint isolated errors—e.g., wrong ways of posing or treating a certain problem; rather, they show radically distorted orientations of making philosophy. For these are:

Like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off. (PI, 103).

Wittgenstein is not suggesting here that we change a certain pair of glasses for another one (like the pair he is supposedly prescribing us). He is urging us to take off the glasses to pay attention to the huge variety of facts both surrounding us and produced by us, and, above all, to try to pay attention fairly, avoiding the temptations of immobility posed by our preconceptions. Remember that particular errors are often the product of deeply entrenched habits of observation and reasoning. And just like any bad habit, these are not easy to get rid of. These remarks obviously lead to the question “Which are some of the vices that distort Latin American thought and how can Wittgenstein help us to fight them?” I will try to sketch an answer to this broad question in two parts. First, I reconstruct very briefly three recurrent vices in Latin American thought; and second, I pick up two or three of Wittgenstein’s proposals, which can be useful in order to attack them.

I

One of those vices might be described as an enthusiasm for opening local branches of the foreign schools of thought (*feveror sucursalero* is the term I use in Spanish). To be sure, philosophical tradition in the Spanish language has been poor. Hence the need to appeal to other modern traditions—especially in the English, French, and German languages—to attain a proper training. But his does not go without serious consequences. Many times a school of thought from some distant land dazzles our young students to the point of making them abandon serious research efforts and spend the rest of their academic lives repeating increasingly empty formulae. Since the Headquarters of Thought are to be found elsewhere—so this position goes—intellectual activity cannot be much more than managing—with ever-decreasing energy—the branch of our chosen school in the peripheral town we happen to live in. As a consequence, after a time we might quit all efforts at thinking; and instead of pursuing reflection, we will arrogantly embrace an enthusiastic “practice of adherence”: one just chooses one’s little area of philosophy and remains faithfully a disciplined phenomenologist, utilitarianist, logical-positivist, analytical or postanalytical philosopher, postmodernist, post-postmodernist, neomarxist, neoscholastic, neofrankfurtian, neofunctionalist, etc.

The second vice is a “thirst for novelties,” and can be seen as a reaction against the first vice mentioned above. Instead of building walls around himself, now the individual remains very open—but to whatever comes across his mind. Of course, open-mindedness and curiosity are precious virtues. Knowledge cannot exist without them. But difficulties arise

Wittgenstein in Latin America

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The expression “Wittgenstein in Latin America” invites one to adopt at least two completely divergent perspectives. The first one leads us to trace the reception of Wittgenstein’s thought in Latin American philosophy, or perhaps, in a moral general view, in Latin American culture. This standpoint calls for a chapter on the history of ideas, selecting, and maybe evaluating, the different forms of presence of Wittgenstein’s thought in this particular geographical area. In the following lines I shall begin to explore a second perspective. It is a more normative and speculative rather than descriptive or historical point of view, and can be boiled down to the question: “What can Wittgenstein teach to those of us who do philosophy in Latin America?”

Firstly, I would like to draw a distinction between the material lesson and the formal lesson one might learn from any thinker. By “material lesson,” I mean what we learn from how a thinker approaches, treats, solves or dissolves a certain number of problems or pseudo-problems. In Wittgenstein’s case, his material lesson emerges when we study, for example, how in the *Tractatus* the concept of the world as the whole of facts and not of things, or the difference between saying and showing, are discussed; or how in the *Philosophical Investigations* there is an attack on the traditional representationalist view of language and a proposal to rethink meaning from the perspective of the uses of words in

when open-mindedness degenerates into a loss of a sense of direction, into a lack of any more or less long-term project. Curiosity becomes, in this case, an unhealthy habit, an all-consuming passion. We are no longer interested in understanding the world and our responsibilities in it, but are weighed down by an arrogant obsession with keeping up to date, a leaning toward adopting all the trendy ideas.

We are usually urged in Latin America to liberate ourselves of these two tendencies by recovering characteristics peculiar to us and to stop looking so much abroad to really appreciate what we are and what we have been, and what are and have been the circumstances surrounding us. We are exhorted to decolonize ourselves, to recuperate the historical memory of our many catastrophes, and to act accordingly. It is a pity that these appeals quickly develop into a new vice, namely the arrogance of collective identities, the driving force behind “nationalist enthusiasms” and their—quite more ridiculous than harming in the academic world—consequences: “national philosophies” (“Mexican philosophy,” “Bolivian philosophy,” “Ecuadorian philosophy,” “Argentinean philosophy”) with all their appeal to authenticity, to our true colors.

How can Wittgenstein’s sophisticated reflections contribute to undermine these gross vices of Latin American arrogant reason?

II

Let us remember that, according to Wittgenstein, our wrong ways of examining the world are usually not just superficial mistakes. They rest on deeply entrenched inclinations. That is why only a radical reorientation of our life forms can liberate us from those excruciating tendencies and fixations and let us radically redirect our attention. But, one might ask, “Just how can this be done?” Here’s a possible answer:

(One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need) (PI, 108).

According to this, everyone must explore his or her real needs. However, as Wittgenstein warns us, we should try doing this without employing one-sided criteria, without preconceptions or stifling loyalties. Our goal should be recuperating our real needs of *all kinds*: moral, social, material, political, philosophical, scientific, aesthetic, and so on. Once these needs have been identified, our next step should be getting rid of, for example, our unthinking loyalties, the obsession with keeping up-to-date, or the appeal to our true colors. All these tendencies only confuse and distort our beliefs, desires, and emotions. This is why Wittgenstein often recommends us a therapy for approaching a philosophical matter:

The philosopher’s treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness (PI, 255).

However, one should be very careful not to give in to the tendency of generalizing. There is no such thing as “the illness.” There are many different diseases, each with its own characteristics. Similarly, there is no thing as “the vice” or “the pseudo-logic.” There are rather many and very different vices and kinds of pseudo-logic, of which we have only pointed to the more recurrent cases.

It’s better then if we get rid of that most dangerous fantasy, to wit, the idea that when we solve a problem or eliminate a vice, we solve *all* the problems and eliminate *all* the vices. For the struggle against those vices never comes to an end:

Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. (PI,133).

This is so, among other reasons, because there is no such thing as “the Method” dreamed by Descartes and by many others after him in the Western tradition. But let’s be very careful not to try to mend one mistake with another: methodolatry is not to be counteracted with methodophobia:

There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies. (PI, 133).

Given the persistence in Latin American forms of life of vices, such as the unthinking adherence to foreign trends, the obsession with keeping up-to-date, and nationalist enthusiasms, eliminating them is, of course, not an easy task. And as soon as we free ourselves from any one of them, we automatically tend to adopt either of the other two. However, once we have left these vices behind, we suddenly come to realize, almost as a paradox, that what we have lost was, in spite of all our efforts to a large extent, comfortable excuses, potentially harmful inclinations, but without much consistence. Perhaps this can be considered a more or less general meta-lesson: starting to learn always involves starting to drop useless fantasies that we—wrongly—deem extremely important and can restrict and even ruin our lives. Because:

What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards (PI, 118).

But Wittgenstein’s aid is not only negative in character; it cannot be simply reduced to showing how some therapies work. Against the usual view, one can also find a positive approach to philosophy in Wittgenstein’s writings. It is a conception of philosophy as offering a qualitatively special kind of understanding, the kind that emerges when our reflection does not focus exclusively on the details of a single question but, by taking a wider view, places the question and places us in the more inclusive horizon of relationships with other questions, including many other questions that do not seem at first to be connected with the one we are dealing with:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. Our grammar is lacking in perspicuity...The concept of perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things (PI, 122).

To do this, to “command a clear view” of the diverse problems, pseudo-problems, solutions, and dissolutions, it will help in building many structures, picturing things differently, and arranging many orders for our difficulties and our processes of giving and asking for reasons. But all this should be attempted making sure we do not succumb to the kind of simplification that leads us to the dangerous fantasies of abstract singularities which blind us and prevent us from seeing things correctly: the obsession with “the Method”, “the Order,” “the Vice,” and so on. We need then, not “the Map,” but a lot of different maps; not “the Order,” but a sensitive and variable plurality of ways of ordering reality:

We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; one out of many possible orders—not the order. (PI, 132).

If I had to put very briefly the attitude Wittgenstein invites us to adopt in order to start fighting all these colonial vices and—no less colonial—kinds of pseudo-logic afflicting our philosophy, and, generally speaking, our lives, perhaps I should say that we are urged to exercise our minds to direct our attention freshly, making use of various techniques and testing,

according to the circumstances and our purposes, different ways of ordering the world and to see what happens. And this must be done with an onward movement, trying to avoid the paralyzing effects of authorities, prefabricated criteria, or the weariness of years. Or, perhaps more simply, making sure we do not wander aimlessly, it is a matter of always being open to, and letting ourselves be questioned by, the problems themselves.

The Material and the Formal Elements of Rationality in Dussel's Ética de la liberación

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Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* is a remarkable achievement in critical social theory, ethics, and political philosophy. It develops, as the title suggests, a materialist ethical architechtonic. From the standpoint of the ethics of liberation, Dussel attempts a grand synthesis of other ethical theories that range from formalist to materialist thought. Dussel's long-standing debate with Apel's discourse ethics holds special place in the text, as do critiques of Kant, Rawls, and Habermas, and communitarian ethics. These are also subsumed, together with Lévinas, Luxemburg, Menchú, and neurobiological theories about our evolutionarily deep-seated tendency to produce and reproduce our lives.

Dussel effects his synthesis from the standpoint of the "other," defined this time not as the "poor," but instead as the "victim" of a system of globalization of capital from which most of the world is excluded.¹

According to Dussel, this new ethics of liberation has the following fundamental characteristics in terms of its structure:

1. It "develops a discourse that is ethico-material (i.e., of contents)";
2. and "formal (intersubjective and valid)";
3. that "takes into account empirical feasibility";
4. and is "always (developed) from the victims at all possible intersubjective levels."²

In one sense, it marks one more chapter in Dussel's integration of a Latin American philosophy of liberation built upon a critique and transcendence of Heideggerian "care of Being" to an ethics of liberation of planetary scope with a pulsion towards the Other who lives and dies in exteriority to the Being of the system and of a lifeworld. There is continuity between the earliest texts and this latest offering in ethics by Dussel. It retakes, for instance, an early contrast Dussel had made between life-denying and life-affirming philosophical traditions.³

The point of this contrast is, I believe, to show the connection between cultural traditions and philosophical positions, specifically, how the affirmation of the materiality of human life has been suppressed in a philosophical discourse in which reason is grounded upon the negation of corporeality and the "cunning of life."

It seems to me, however, and I will try to elaborate on this point in this review, that reason, in all its facets, is for Dussel, ultimately, an *instrumentality* for life, particularly, for human life in community. Whatever is denying of human life in community, specifically, the life of the excluded or oppressed other, is irrational. Since it is an instrumentality for life, it is unlike Kant's conception of reason because, first, it is neither autonomous (i.e., it does not give to itself its own law) nor

detachable from life; and second, it is not a faculty for producing concepts of phenomenal objects or of Ideas beyond possible experience in Kant's sense. It is not, however, *instrumentalist*, first, because ends may be determined to be rational in Dussel's conception of ends (i.e., the good), and, second, because an embodied reason is capable of motivating action by setting up objectives, specifically, the transformation, whether through reform or revolution of social systems, so that the excluded other is included and the oppressed is allowed to exercise his or her subjectivity in freedom.

For this, however, it is necessary to develop a philosophical discourse that gathers examples from many literatures and cultures. Today, such philosophical development is counter-discursive in the sense that it must arise as an alternative to hegemonic social systems:

The *Philosophy of Liberation* is a counterdiscourse, a critical philosophy that is born in the periphery (and from the victims, the excluded), with a claim to globality [*mundialidad*]. It has *definite* [*expresa*] consciousness of its peripherality and exclusion, but at the same time it makes a claim to global scope.⁴

Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation* is, in one important respect, a significant elaboration of the epistemological and ontological relationship between, on the one hand, a consensus theory of truth developed on the basis of an ideal speech situation and principles implicit in speech itself independent of their content, and, on the other hand, a materialist critique of the interests concealed in any form of argumentation. Dussel appropriates the most significant elements of critical theory (from its critique of ideology to a reconstructed critique of political economy based upon a rereading of Marx and on dependency theory), while subsuming the universalizing intentions of both that critique and its remnants in formal-pragmatic theories.

The relationship between formal-discursive principles and ethico-material principles frames the meaning of ethics for Dussel, within the context of the social systems that humans produce through their collective action.⁵

It is at the level of the unfolding of conflict between formal systems and ethical-material principles ("i.e, the reproduction and development of the life of each ethical subject in said formal system and his or her discursive symmetrical participation"⁶) that critical theory and praxis become necessary—a theory and a praxis geared toward transformation of the system to widen participation and broaden equality. Formal systems are bound, with their use, to produce non-intentional effects of marginalization and exclusion.

According to Dussel, critique reveals the utopian horizon in which universal ethical-material and formal-discursive principles are glimpsed. But these are denied by the existing system, which marginalizes people from participation in the community of communication. This would be a contradiction at the level of formal-discursive principles of communication, so that the conclusions arrived at in those communities are invalid). This system also denies them by excluding people from the reproduction or development of their human life in community; this would be a contradiction at the level of material principles of labor and consumption, so that the economic system is revealed as practically false or irrational. Finally, people's lives are made impossible; this would be a contradiction at the level of feasibility principles, so that the system is, from the standpoint of the reproduction of life and its development, impossible to maintain.

This is significantly different from an ethical position that stakes its rationality on elucidating and criticizing the inroads of "self-regulated social systems" into the life-world, which is

the position developed by Habermas and Apel. The ethical and political task has become for them “to prevent the colonization of the life-world by systems, so that we have to maintain alienation under control from the side of communication.”⁷ For, as Apel claims, “the capitalist market system, as other social systems, and in a certain sense, as all human institutions, constitutes an inevitable and necessary exteriorization and alienation of human interaction and communication; the quasi-naturalist automation of this system makes possible socio-cultural forms of life.”⁸ This naturalization of human “strategic” activity, specifically of the activity that takes place in the market place amounts in terms of consequences to quite an explosion in the number of issues Apel’s Part B of discourse ethics will have to deal with. (In effect, Dussel’s liberation ethics would become *in toto* a resident of part B of discourse ethics.)

Apel’s and Habermas’s positions regarding the relationship between systems and lifeworld takes us back, in my opinion, to the theories of the early and mid-twentieth century. José Ortega y Gasset, for instance, argued for a distinction and division of labor between the reason of the sciences and technology, on the one hand, and culture, on the other. But this *strategic* attempt to limit (through regulation and the like) the power of market capitalism does not touch upon the, in effect, consequent quasi-naturalization of human “instrumental” activity, if we are forced to limit ourselves to this narrow definition of human activity at the level of production. I am referring here to the activity of the global majority in the factories, the maquilas, the plantations for the world market, and the unemployed “street.”

We have indeed witnessed a transformation of what were the anthropologically deep-seated interests of the early Habermas, into an acceptance by the theory of communicative action and by discourse ethics of the capitalist market “within limits” because, according to Apel in reference to Marx in an essay critical of Dussel, “almost all anthropologists” agree that there is an “anthropological *equiprimordiality of the complementary functions of labor and interaction qua exchange*.”⁹ However, this narrows unnecessarily the scope of reason to what has not been “naturalized” yet of human activity. It also misunderstands Marx’s theory on this specific instance. I will refer to this in what follows, since what Apel criticizes in Marx is, after an original reconstruction of Marx’s theory, one of the pillars on which Dussel builds his alternative rendering of the relation between discursive and materialist aspects of reason.

It has been held by some theorists that Marx’s theory of alienation grounds a theory regarding a human essence that has been existentially distorted by class society. Unfortunately, this very vague theory has been carried over into analyses of Marx’s political economy giving expression to what Louis Gill has criticized as the naturalist definition of value. This definition interprets abstract labor—the exclusive source of value, for Marx—as “the material content of a physiological expenditure of human power.”¹⁰ It fails to realize, argues Gill, that, first, Marx’s labor theory of value is “the study of value as a form of social labor” and, second, that, as a consequence, Marx bases and limits his analysis of the value created by human labor to a commodity-producing society; that is, Marx starts “from the commodity and value, ... from commodity producing society as a historical form. Commodity-producing society is the basic datum; it underlies the whole analysis.”¹¹

Therefore, when Marx speaks of abstract labor, he has in mind, not abstract labor for any society or for society in general, but for a society in which the principal form of production is commodity production. This is an issue, incidentally, that

should be analyzed in relation to Dussel’s own analysis of the “economic” Marx in his texts on the subject.

The paradox in the reduction by Habermas and Apel of Marx’s conception of human labor to instrumental action is that they, in fact, naturalize what Marx never intended to naturalize. In fact, Marx takes seriously into account the strategic action of independent producers of commodities as fundamental to the capitalist market. But the question for him is, what the source of value in commodity-producing societies is, not how is a human essence externalized, alienated, and brought back to its metahistorical bosom. The latter is a left-Hegelian question; the former is the question he asks in his economic works. More to the point, he asks, how does the content, human labor, become manifested in the form of value, a question that political economy, Marx claims, was unable to answer.¹² For Marx, this question is answered in terms of the nature of commodity-producing society in which the “strategic” action of one *buyer* of commodities, the capitalist, confronts with the extraordinary power of force and right, the strategic action of another *seller* of commodities, the worker, who must sell his or her hide to survive.¹³

It must be acknowledged that our labourer comes out of the process of production other than he entered. In the market he stood as owner of the commodity ‘labour-power’ face to face with other owners of commodities, dealer against dealer. The contract by which he sold to the capitalist his labour-power proved, so to say, in black and white that he disposed of himself freely. The bargain concluded, it is discovered that he was no ‘free agent’, that the time for which he is free to sell his labour-power is the time for which he is forced to sell it...¹⁴

Given the conditions of that society, the transformation of the content of goods into values, whether in the form of labor-power, or the values created by the labor-power in use, expresses an equal exchange only at the level of “strategic” action, not at the level of “instrumental” action where workers have no control over the production process, nor at the level of “communicative” action when workers are excluded from the institutionalized communication communities (unless they are able to become journalists, lawyers, or philosophers) by virtue of the control exercised by the bourgeoisie over the dissemination of knowledge and information.

Hence, a model of rationality that better fits this situation is needed. I think that Dussel offers, in this sense, a significant advance in this area, as he tries to integrate ethical-material and formal-discursive principles into a comprehensive theory of rationality for his ethics of liberation. This model of rationality cannot simply take formal systems as given and quasi-natural.

The relationship of formal-discursive and ethical-material principles is connected to the question of the relationship between, on the one hand, formal automated or self-regulated subsystems, and, on the other hand, the way they shape or mis-shape human life and life choices. For, the marginalization and oppression of peoples is more often than not the effect of those subsystems, whether because they colonize communication or condition the exclusion of people from those communities, but certainly because they may fail to provide sustenance for the majority of people. For Dussel, ultimately, any subsystem or communication structure must, if it is to be rational, produce and enhance human life in community.

James Marsh contends in a critical essay on Dussel’s ethics that the ethical-material and formal-discursive principles should be co-determining and that Dussel sometimes, but not always,

treats them as such. At other times, argues Marsh, Dussel sees the formal-discursive principle as an application of the material principle. Marsh would prefer an ethics of liberation in which the material principle and the discursive principle are co-determining. I will focus on two related points.

First, says Marsh, Dussel “underestimates the role communicative action plays in the justification of the material principle itself.” In the example Dussel uses in his *Ética*, which begins with the assertoric premise, “Juan is eating,” and concludes ethically with the normative statement, “Juan should continue to eat,” there is, says Marsh, a “ratiocinative and communicative” process involved, which “uses communicative action to establish and justify, and not simply to apply the material principle.”¹⁵

Second, Dussel “conflates ... epistemic priority with an ethical one”¹⁶ when he gives ethical priority to the face of the victimized Other. Marsh puts Dussel’s Levinasian position as follows: “I must see the Other in a prediscursive way as an equal and a victim before I begin to dialogue”¹⁷ However, says Marsh,

... I can only see the Other as equal and as illegitimately marginalized in the context of a hermeneutics and an ethics that is already operative at least prethematologically in my encounters with the Other. Indeed Dussel himself talks this way when he talks about the Other’s interpellative speech act calling into question those within the Apelian-Habermasian community of communication, claiming to be inclusive but not really being so. Without the prior validity of the communicative ethic of the community, the interpellative speech act loses its cogency. Indeed, there is a movement from formal to material here.¹⁸

Marsh thus thinks that the Levinasian strand is in irresolvable tension with the Marxist and Habermasian strands of Dussel’s thought, and he thinks that Dussel does not succeed in meeting the challenge of the naturalistic fallacy. This is a significant challenge, since throughout the *Ethics of Liberation*, the passage from a “judgment of fact” to a “normative judgment” is stressed and carried out, not only in the “positive” cases discussed by Marsh (from the facticity of the corporeality of human life to the ethical imperative to affirm such life in community), but also in the passage from the criterion of negative critical feasibility (i.e., it is possible to transform a system that is victimizing the life of an ethical subject) to the liberation-principle that one ought to transform said system for the sake of the life of that subject.¹⁹

Marsh sees promise instead in the other claim made by Dussel that the material and formal principles are co-determining.²⁰ Marsh uses as an example of the co-determination of discursive and material-ethical rationality the indifference towards a homeless person in a NYC subway: the recognition of that person as Other is “mediated hermeneutically and ethically.”²¹ This is a case, he thinks, where the movement is, therefore, from the formal to the material, thus assuming a “prior validity of the communicative act of the community.”²²

The difficulties regarding the relationship between truth and validity are significant. Indeed, what is valid is always about something,²³ and references to the truth of something are mediated by language, although there can be truth without consensually grounded validity: The disclosure of something may indeed be through the instrument of intersubjective communication, but even if the medium shapes the cognition, it does not follow that the two are codetermining at an

epistemological level. Politically, however, the satisfaction of the two, through the achievement of consensus and the material development of life, is ultimately necessary for the attainment of rational legitimacy in civil society.²⁴

From Dussel’s viewpoint, there is an anadialecical moment of affirmation of the life that is negated by the system. This moment is wedged between the negation of life and the negation of the negation, and it makes the latter possible. I believe, however, that this wedge is driven in the struggle. It is not later discovered as rational by philosophical analysis. Rather, if I am to take seriously Dussel’s statement in his *Ética* that “reason is the cunning of life,” the reason is produced by life itself. By way of analogy, it is this anadialecical moment that is pointed to by Sartre in his “The Republic of Silence” where the prisoner of the Nazi occupier feels in his or her loneliness the presence of comrades in arms in the resistance. I suspect that a similar sentiment may be shared by resistance fighters against today’s occupations by North American “neocon” forces.²⁵ The resistance does not need for its validation the consensus of the international community, not even an ideal international community; a community of marginals, brought together ideally by the simultaneous negation of their life and resistance to that negation is all that is required.

Discourse ethics and the theory of communicative action become irrational when they are blind to the Other as Other, for instance, the victims of an occupation and those who resist it by the means available to them. As Other, we exclude from the community of communication. The ideological fetishization of discourse (and it must be stressed that discourse becomes a fetish when it becomes the life and the reason for being of the members of a communication community, and not only when it is commercialized by the “non-intentional” subsystem of market capitalism) is revealed by a materialist critical theory.

Dussel’s critical theory incorporates a critique of the negation of the life of the Other (that is, a critical material reason), and of his or her exclusion from the community (that is, a critical or ethico-pre-originary reason). It also includes a discursive critique of the system (through the critical discursive reason of the critical social sciences and the “conscientized” and politically-organized victims of the system²⁶). Finally, this materialist critique develops a critique, with a view to the formulation of alternatives, of the unfeasibility for a growing number of victims to live under the current system of domination and exclusion.²⁷ However, this critique is unthinkable without (a) the recognition of the Other as Other; (b) the struggle for recognition by the Other on behalf of his or her Otherness; and (c) the *reality* of being in exteriority in a system of domination. This recognition and the project of liberation it implies must ground the ethical principles in the ethics of liberation.²⁸

In reference to the so-called naturalistic fallacy, Dussel’s solution to the naturalistic fallacy cannot rely on the co-determinacy of material and formal principles, as Marsh strongly suggests. Such co-determinacy should lead, says Marsh, to an abandonment of the attempt to ground an “ought” on an “is.” Instead, Dussel’s solution relies mainly on the foundation of ethics, on the critical pulsion towards those who are oppressed in, and excluded, from a system. This pulsion carries with it the affirmation of the humanity of the oppressed and excluded, that is, their life in community and a recognition of their capacity to participate in community. This analectical or anadialecical pulsion moves us outside and beyond the community of communication. The movement is both positive and negative. It is an affirmation of human life in community

and a critique of domination, oppression, and exclusion. But the affirmation is not an affirmation of the system, but rather of the life of the Other as Other. The affirmation of the life of the Other is also, therefore, a negation of the system: “a taking-leave,” if you will, of the system’s encompassing of the Other within a formal-analytic discourse and, therefore, an attempt to arrest his or her transcendence. This recalls, despite its subtitle, Sartre’s famous analysis of the phenomenology of domination in *Being and Nothingness*:

There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.²⁹

Similarly, the affirmation of human life in community is, *vis-à-vis* the system, transcendent of it.

In conclusion, by grounding formal-discursive rationality on a *critical* material reason in which the grounding facticity is not an ontological, but rather, a “metaphysical” (i.e., anadialecical) recognition of the Other as Other, can Dussel bypass the naturalistic fallacy’s reductionism, as well as reveal the deficiencies of the minimalism that accepts the capitalist mode of production and only tries to limit its effects on a *dematerialized* lifeworld.

Endnotes

1. Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 17.
2. Ibid., 14.
3. Ibid., 102-103, paragraph 70.
4. Ibid., 71, par. 51.
5. Ibid., 530-531, par. 367.
6. Ibid., 529, par. 366.
7. Karl-Otto Apel, “La pragmática trascendental y los problemas éticos Norte-Sur,” in Enrique Dussel, ed., *Debate en torno a la ética del discurso de Apel: Diálogo filosófico Norte-Sur desde América Latina* (Mexico: Siglo XXI and UAM-Iztapala, 1994), 41.
8. Ibid., 39-40.
9. Karl-Otto Apel, “Can ‘Liberation Ethics’ Be Assimilated under ‘Discourse Ethics?’” in Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 90.
10. Louis Gill, *Fundamentos y límites del capitalismo*, Xabier Arrizabalo, trans. (Madrid: Trotta, 2002 [1996]), 103.
11. Ibid., 103.
12. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I: *The Process of Capitalist Production*, Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, trans. (New York: International Publishers, 1977 [1867]), 80. Cited in Gill, *Fundamentos y límites del capitalismo*, 103.
13. Ibid., 176.
14. Ibid., 302.
15. James L. Marsh, “The Material Principle and the Formal Principle in Dussel’s Ethics,” in Martín Alcoff and Mendieta, eds., *Thinking From the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation*, 62.
16. Ibid., 63.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación*, 559, pars. 392-393.
20. Marsh, “The Material Principle and the Formal Principle in Dussel’s Ethics,” 64.
21. Ibid., 63.
22. Ibid.
23. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación*, 202-203, par. 149; and, 205, par. 205.
24. Ibid., 540, par. 375.
25. The term “neocon” is becoming generalized as a term of reference for neo-conservative ideology, usually associated with the Republican Party in the United States. Given the ultraconservatism that has become mainstream in both the Republican and Democratic establishment and, more importantly, the generalized imperialist prejudices in the United States, which disguise the common thievery involved in the impulse to invade another people’s lands for its natural resources, its labor, and its markets, this term adequately characterizes the international projection of the ideology of U.S. imperialism: the globalization of the theory and practice of “empire with imperialism.” See James Petras’ very critical review of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); James Petras, “Empire with Imperialism”(October 21, 2001), <http://www.rebellion.org/petras/english/negri010102.htm> (accessed on December 24, 2003).
26. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación*, 461-462, par. 325.
27. Ibid., 471-472, pars. 333-334; and, 554-555, par. 388.
28. Ibid., 505-506, par. 346.
29. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, Hazel E. Barnes, trans. (New York: Pocket Books, 1966), 100.