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Fall 2000

Review of *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* by Jorge J. E. Gracia

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Lopez Pulido, Alberta, "Review of *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* by Jorge J. E. Gracia" (2000). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 522.
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BOOK REVIEWS

Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective. Jorge J. E. Gracia. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. xviii+235 pp. Bibliography, indexes. \$62.95 cloth (ISBN 0-6312-1763-0), \$26.95 paper (ISBN 0-6312-1764-9).

As a result of major demographic changes in the Hispanic community of the United States and throughout the world, Jorge Gracia argues that the time has come for Hispanics to begin a philosophical process of reflection about who they are as individuals and as members of the larger global population. In his estimation, the outcomes of this reflection will affect us all and determine the future of humanity.

At the core of his philosophical perspective is Gracia's "theory of historical relevance," which perceives and interprets Hispanic/Latino identity as a family tied by changing historical relations that in turn generate particular properties distinguishing this ethnic group from others in particular contexts. These unique meshes of changing historical relations are assumed to clothe the salient elements of Hispanic/Latino identity. Borrowing Wittgenstein's family metaphor, Gracia believes that like a family, the history of Hispanics is that of a group of people, a community, united by historical events originating in the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. Gracia rejects any essentialist view of Hispanic/Latino identity that seeks to embrace a homogenous grouping of Hispanics/ Latinos or to underscore common properties to distinguish them from other ethnic groups. The unfolding chapters include an examination of the origins and character of Hispanic philosophy, a Latin American philosophical identity, and the historical origins of mestizo identity and its significance to Hispanic/Latino identity.

The book's final chapter, an immensely valuable one, offers a candid critique of the role of Hispanics in the American philosophical community. Through an analysis of philosophy faculty, curricula, and professional organizations, Gracia puts forth the thesis that Hispanic philosophers are perceived as foreigners by the American philosophical establishment, with the consequence that their philosophical work is regarded as belonging to a different, non-American, culture. For all its insight, the chapter also engenders this reviewer's strongest critique of the book.

Whereas Gracia is asking us to reject an essentialist argument of ethnic identity when analyzing Hispanic/Latino culture, one can't help but note that it is precisely this essentialist perspective that Gracia puts forth in framing his argument against his philosophy colleagues who perceive Hispanic philosophy as foreign and non-American. What is notably absent

from this discussion is his paradigm of historical relevance to explain the bias towards Hispanic philosophy by the American philosophical establishment. In all fairness, Gracia does claim that his mainstream colleagues are biased against Hispanic philosophy because of hasty generalizations based on limited observations, yet a more systematic interpretation of this issue incorporating a philosophical perspective of historical relevance would have reinforced the author's main thesis. Hence, as a non-philosopher, my strongest critique of the work is its lack of empirical evidence—and the implications to be drawn from such evidence—in relation to Gracia's historical relevance perspective. The absence of a detailed discussion and analysis of “historical events” that bind the “Hispanic family” is for this reviewer a major problem, though I do believe that the philosophical foundation and insights laid out by Gracia can serve future interdisciplinary scholars of Hispanic/Latino identity for years to come. **Alberto López Pulido**, *Department of American Studies and Ethnic Studies Program, Arizona State University West.*