

Rapid #: -13508469

CROSS REF ID: **176874**

LENDER: **FNP :: Carpenter Library**

BORROWER: **ULN :: OLeary Library**

TYPE: Book Chapter

BOOK TITLE: Latin American philosophy for the 21st century : the human condition, values, and the search for identity / edited by Jorge J.E. Gracia and Elizabeth

USER BOOK TITLE: Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century.

CHAPTER TITLE: What Makes Hispanics/Latinos Who We Are? The Key to Our Unity in Diversity

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EDITION:

VOLUME:

PUBLISHER:

YEAR:

PAGES: 287-310

ISBN: 9781573929783

LCCN:

OCLC #:

Processed by RapidX: 7/25/2018 4:10:58 PM



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What Makes Hispanics/Latinos Who We Are? The Key to Our Unity in Diversity

Four different types of objections [are frequently] raised against the use of ethnic names for Hispanics/Latinos, but their general thrust [is] the same: ethnic names are inaccurate and dangerous. One way to answer these objections, then, albeit indirectly, is to show that at least one of these names is neither inaccurate nor dangerous. This seems to be an effective and economical way to proceed, and I have adopted it [here]. The features which make the use of ethnic names inaccurate and dangerous are that they supposedly homogenize what is not homogeneous and imply common characteristics when there are none. The view I present here avoids both homogenization and the false identification of common characteristics. This in turn should help avoid the dangers of oppression, domination, discrimination, marginalization, and the inequitable distribution of resources.

This way of proceeding is quite specific insofar as it deals with particular objections and proposes a way to understand the notion of Hispanic. There are also general considerations which argue in favor of the adoption of ethnic names by those named by them. Insofar as they tell us something about those they name, ethnic names both identify them and have the power to mold attitudes toward them. Epistemologically, they convey information about those they name; ontologically, they help establish their identity. These can be harmful to the degree that ethnic names are used to stereotype, objectify, and disempower. But they can also be beneficial when ethnic names are the source of knowledge and empowerment.

From Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective*, chap. 3, "What Makes Us Who We Are? The Key to Our Unity in Diversity" (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 45-69. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Whether the use of ethnic names is harmful or beneficial depends to a large extent on at least three factors: (1) those who do the naming and set the concomitantly required conditions; (2) the positive or negative character of those conditions; and (3) the breadth and rigidity with which the conditions are understood. Let us look at these in more detail.

The first factor is important because it is one thing to adopt a name to identify ourselves, and quite another to be named and have our identity defined by someone else. Note that I say "define" rather than "establish" or "discover." I do this because, for present purposes, I want to stay away from the controversy between social constructivists and nonconstructivists. The first argue that identities are the result of social construction; the latter, that they are the result of events outside the power of societies and, therefore, discovered rather than constructed. By using "define" I intend to separate myself from either one of these extreme positions. Indeed, my view is that group and ethnic identities are the result of both social construction and factors outside the power of societies. Now, leaving aside this issue, the point that needs to be emphasized is that to adopt a name and define one's identity is both a sign of power and an act of empowerment. It is a sign of power because those without power do not even have the prerogative of doing it; others establish how they are to be called and who they are. In this, those without power are at the mercy of those who establish what is important or pertinent in them. This has serious consequences, for social perceptions change social realities. How one is perceived determines how one is treated, and this in turn eventually affects who one is. Social perception is a factor in social change. Our individual or group identity depends on others.

To adopt a name and define one's identity is, moreover, an act of empowerment because it limits the power of others to name and identify us. It tells others: Look, I am who I am, and not who you think or want me to be. I tell you who I am, and you have to honor this; you have no power to tell me who I am, only I have such power. Indeed, it is not surprising that Yahweh ("I am who I am") is the name God chose for himself in the Bible.

The second important factor in the adoption of ethnic names is the positive or negative character of the name and the conditions associated with the identity it defines. Obviously, a name whose connotations are negative can do much harm, whereas one with positive connotations can do much good. But keep in mind that the adoption or reassertion of names with bad connotations by groups who have suffered discrimination can be a sign of defiance and an act of empowerment when accompanied with an appropriate understanding of the name. This is, for example, what has happened with "Jew." Thirty years ago, this term carried with it all sorts of bad connotations among non-Jews, and for these reasons it was

avoided by those opposed to anti-Semitism, whether Jewish or not. Today, however, the use of the term has become a sign of power and pride.

The third important factor in the adoption of ethnic names is the rigidity and breadth with which the identity conditions they define are understood. Part of the reason that the adoption of an ethnic name is empowering is that it liberates those who adopt it from a relation of dependence with those who do, or may, impose other names on them. Naming ourselves and defining our identity may also imply liberation insofar as it makes explicit prejudices that may hinder us from acting in various ways, opening the way to discard those prejudices and change the way we act. Knowing who we are can change not only the way others think about us, and even how we think about ourselves, but also the course of our actions in the future. But there is also a danger: A name and the identity conditions it implies can function as limiting factors and as sources of conflict if they are conceived too narrowly and restrictively. To be something may be taken as making it impossible to be something else. Recall the ancient Parmenidean conundrum: What is is, and what is not is not. If a group is conceived as having certain abilities and limitations, this may be used to close avenues of development and growth. For this reason, the value of an ethnic name and the conditions of identity it implies will depend on the breadth of those conditions and the rigidity with which they are understood.

In short, then, the use of ethnic names and the definition of the conditions of group identity can in principle be beneficial for the groups in question. It is generally beneficial if three conditions are met: if the naming and defining is done by the group; if the conditions used in the definition are positive; and if the conditions are neither narrow nor rigid. To this extent, the use of ethnic names and the corresponding self-identification are important insofar as they help establish self-meaning and direction. Otherwise, the use of ethnic names and the definition of the conditions of the group's identity can do more harm than good. It is my claim [here] that the name I propose for Hispanics/Latinos and the way I conceive our identity are beneficial if measured by the requirements noted.

THE ARGUMENT FOR HISPANIC IDENTITY

In order to support my thesis, I need to [bring out into the open] an assumption that [is] behind the discussion of [identity]. According to this assumption, the effective use of a common name requires the identification of an essence, that is, a property or set of properties which characterizes the things called by the name. If there is no essence that can be

identified, the name is meaningless, merely a sound without substance, and therefore must be abandoned lest it should cause confusion.

Joined to this is another assumption frequently made by those who discuss identity. This is that a proper identity corresponding to a name should involve both consistency and purity. To have an identity requires properties which constitute a coherent whole and are themselves unmixed.

The view that the effective use of names requires a property, or a set of properties, that can be identified has been effectively challenged in contemporary philosophy. This does not mean that there are no names whose use is justified by an essence. It means only that not all names are of the same sort and, therefore, their use need not be justified in this way. Some names are such that they can be effectively used even when there is no property, or set of properties, they connote. Wittgenstein gave the example of "game." This term is effectively used in English and yet, when we try to identify even one common property to all games that also distinguishes them from other things, we can never find it. Some games use balls, some do not; some games give pleasure, some do not; some games take a long time, some do not; some games require concentration, some do not; some games involve physical effort, some do not; and so on.

We can grant, then, that there are no common properties to all those people whom we wish to call Hispanics, and yet that does not mean that the use of the term is unjustified or meaningless. In general, my point is that there is a way to understand the concept of Hispanic that allows us to speak meaningfully of, and refer effectively to, Hispanics, even when the people named by it do not share any property in common at all times and places. More particularly, my thesis is that the concept of Hispanic should be understood historically, that is, as a concept that involves historical relations. Hispanics are the group of people comprised by the inhabitants of the countries of the Iberian peninsula after 1492 and what were to become the colonies of those countries after the encounter between Iberia and America took place, and by descendants of these people who live in other countries (e.g., the United States) but preserve some link to those people. It excludes the population of other countries in the world and the inhabitants of Iberia and Latin America before 1492 because, beginning in the year of the encounter, the Iberian countries and their colonies in America developed a web of historical connections which continues to this day and which separates these people from others.

This group of people must be understood as forming a unit which goes beyond political, territorial, linguistic, cultural, racial, or genetic frontiers. It is not even necessary that the members of the group name themselves in any particular way or have a consciousness of their identity. Some of them may in fact consider themselves Hispanic and even have a consciousness of their identity as a group, but it is not necessary that all

of them do. Knowledge does not determine being. What ties them together, and separates them from others, is history and the particular events of that history rather than the consciousness of that history; a unique web of changing historical relations supplies their unity.

Obviously, historical relations tend to generate common properties, but such properties might not go beyond certain periods, regions, or subgroups of people. There can be unity without community. A may follow B, and B may follow C, and C may follow D, implying a connection between A and D even when A has nothing in common with D. Let me explain this further. Consider the case of A, B, C, and D. A has a relation (aRb) with B; B has a relation (bRc) with C; and C has a relation (cRd) with D. But there are no direct relations between A and C or D, or between B and D. (In order to simplify matters I assume that the relation between A and B is the same as the relation between B and A, and so on with the others.) Now, the mentioned relations allow us to group A, B, C, and D even though there is no property common to all of them, not even a relation that unites them directly. There is, however, a relation between A and B, another between B and C, and another between C and D. At the same time, these relations allow us to separate the group ABCD from other groups, say MNOP, because none of the members of ABCD has relations with the members of MNOP, or because the relations between A, B, C, and D are different from the relations between M, N, O, and P. To group implies to unite and separate, and to unite and separate are made easy when it is done in terms of properties common to all the members of a group, but it is not necessary that it be done on the basis of such properties. It can be done on the basis of properties or relations that are not common to all the members of the group as long as there are relations or properties that tie each member of the group with at least one other member of the group.

This is the kind of unity that I submit justifies the notion of Hispanic. We are speaking here of a group of people who have no common elements considered as a whole. Their unity is not a unity of commonality; it is a historical unity founded on relations. King John II of Portugal has nothing in common with me, but both of us are tied by a series of events that relate us and separate us from Queen Elizabeth II and Martin Luther King. There is no need to find properties common to all Hispanics in order to classify them as Hispanics. What ties us is the same kind of thing that ties the members of a family, as Wittgenstein would say. There may not be any common properties to all of us, but nonetheless we belong to the same group because we are historically related, as a father is to a daughter, an aunt to a nephew, and grandparents to grandchildren. Wittgenstein's metaphor of family resemblance is particularly appropriate in this case, for the history of Hispanics is a history of a group of people, a community

united by historical events. But the metaphor of the family must be taken broadly to avoid any understanding of it as requiring genetic ties. One does not need to be tied genetically to the other members of a family to be a member of the family. Indeed, the very foundation of a family, marriage, takes place between people who are added to a family through contract, not genesis. And in-laws become members of families indirectly, again not through genesis. This means that the very notion of resemblance used by Wittgenstein is misleading insofar as it appears to require a genetic connection which in fact is not required at all. It also means that any requirements of coherence and purity do not apply. Families are not coherent wholes composed of pure elements. They include contradictory elements and involve mixing. Indeed, contradiction and mixing seem to be of the essence, for a living unity is impossible without contradiction and heterogeneity. We are related clusters of persons with different, and sometimes incompatible, characteristics, and purity of any kind is not one of our necessary conditions. This is why families are in a constant process of change and adaptation. My claim is that this is how we should understand ourselves as Hispanics.

Now, families are formed by marriages. So we are entitled to ask: Is there a point in history where our Hispanic family came to be? Since our community includes not only the inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula, but also those of the parts of America appropriated by Iberian countries, we must find a point in history when we came together, and this, I propose, is the encounter of Iberia and America. It makes no sense to speak of Hispanics before the encounter in 1492. Our family first came into being precisely because of the events which the encounter unleashed.

In spite of all that has been said, one can still question the need or advantage of using the category "Hispanic." If there are no common properties to all Hispanics, what can we get out of an account of Hispanics that is not already present in accounts of the countries and the peoples that are gathered under this category? In short, by using this term can we get to know anything that we do not already know through the study of, say, the Spanish, Catalan, Mexican, Argentinian, and Hispanic American peoples? My answer to this question is that in this way we understand better a historical reality which otherwise would escape us.

The study of people involves the study of their relations, how they influence each other. In particular, a historical account must pay careful attention to the events and figures that played important roles in history, avoiding artificial divisions in the account. Keeping this in mind, I submit that the notion of Hispanic represents, better than any other, the people of the Iberian nations and of Latin American countries that were former Iberian colonies, as well as the descendants of these people who live elsewhere but maintain close ties to them, because it emphasizes the fact that

there is a historical reality that unites us. To divide Hispanics in terms of political, territorial, racial, linguistic, ethnic, genetic, or cultural criteria results in the loss of many dimensions of this historical reality.

The concept of Hispanic allows us to see aspects of our reality that would otherwise be missed. They would be missed to a great extent because the conceptual frameworks used would be either too broad or too narrow to allow us to see them. Earlier I pointed out that concepts are windows to reality. The concept of Hispanic is indeed a window to the history of a chapter in universal human history, our history. In the vast panorama of humankind, it introduces a frame that directs the attention of the observer toward something that, under different conditions, would be given little attention, or missed altogether, because of the vastness of the view. Thanks to it, we see more of less. "Hispanic" opens for us a window to ourselves which yields knowledge we would otherwise not have. At the same time, it allows us to notice things which we would miss if we used narrower concepts such as Mexican, Argentinian, Spanish, and so on. These are also windows, but like any window, they reveal something by excluding something else. By using these narrower categories, we would be losing a larger view. The use of "Hispanics," then, reveals something unique by narrowing and widening our view at the same time.

This does not mean that the use of the term should be exclusionary. To speak and think about Hispanics should not prevent us from speaking and thinking in other ways as well, that is, from using other principles of organization, and therefore from including the consideration of other unities. For these other organizations and unities will surely explain, emphasize, and reveal other facts which, under different arrangements, would go unnoticed. We need not look out only through one window. My point is that the perspective based on the notion I have proposed explains, emphasizes, and reveals aspects of our reality which would otherwise be neglected. I do not mean to exclude other arrangements. Indeed, there are many other enlightening ways of thinking about the reality comprised under the term "Hispanic." We could think in regional terms, such as Latin American, Iberian, Central American, and South American; in linguistic terms, such as Quechua, Castilian, and Basque; in political terms, such as Brazilian or Mexican; and so on. And all these would, if the notions are historically warranted, reveal to us aspects of the Hispanic reality which, under different conceptions, would be overlooked.

In short, my proposal is to adopt "Hispanic" to refer to us: the people of Iberia, Latin America, and some segments of the population in the United States, after 1492, and to the descendants of these peoples anywhere in the world as long as they preserve close ties to them. Moreover, I have argued that the use of this term does not imply that there are any properties common to all of us throughout history. Its use is justified

rather by a web of concrete historical relations that ties us together, and simultaneously separates us from other peoples.

Note, moreover, that the use of "Hispanic" is not intended to reflect just that some persons choose to call themselves Hispanics. Applying a contemporary name theory to ethnic names, it is sometimes argued that self-naming (or self-identification, as it is often put) is both a necessary and sufficient condition of the appropriate use of an ethnic name. If I choose to call myself Hispanic, others should call me so. But, in fact, self-naming is neither necessary nor sufficient in this way. It is not sufficient because the use of a name calls for a rationale of its use. There must be a reason why I choose to call myself Hispanic. And it is not necessary because, even if I do not choose to call myself Hispanic, it may be appropriate to call me so. Indeed, there are names we reject even though we deserve them. Not many criminals, for example, would be willing to call themselves criminals even though the epithet may be appropriate. The theory I have proposed does not face these objections for, although it does not accept that there are common properties to all Hispanics at all times and in all places, it allows for common properties at certain times and places arising from particular historical relations. My view, then, does not suffer from emptiness or circularity.

Now we must go back to the question of identity and see the implications of what has been said concerning the use and understanding of "Hispanic" for this question. . . . [I]dentity and identification [have] to do with sets of necessary and sufficient conditions which could be understood achronically, synchronically, or diachronically. Achronically, the set of conditions in question would make explicit why something is whatever it is irrespective of time; synchronically, the set of conditions would reveal why something is whatever it is at a particular time; and diachronically, the set of conditions would specify what makes something whatever it is at two or more different times. The achronic identity of Hispanics, then, involves the properties which make Hispanics who we are, apart from any consideration of time; synchronic identity involves such properties at a particular time; and diachronic identity has to do with such properties at two (or more) different times.

The question is: Are there such conditions? Does it make sense to talk about an achronic Hispanic identity, a synchronic Hispanic identity, or a diachronic Hispanic identity? It should be clear that, achronically and strictly, it makes no sense to speak of any set of necessary and sufficient conditions which apply to all Hispanics, for as I have argued, Hispanics do not share any properties in common which they must have and which distinguish them from others. Nonetheless, it does make sense to speak of an achronic Hispanic identity in the sense mentioned earlier, based on historical, familial relations, rather than on relations of commonality.

Synchronically, again, the issue is not simple. There is no reason why, in principle, all Hispanics could not have some properties in common which tie them together and distinguish them from others at some particular time. But the reality appears different. For Hispanic ties, even at a particular time, tend to be familial and historical rather than across the board. Every Hispanic group is tied to some other Hispanic group, but no Hispanic group is tied to all other Hispanic groups in the same way.

Finally, diachronically, a similar phenomenon occurs. There are easily discernible resemblances among those we count as Hispanics at different times, but those resemblances tend to be historical and familial, rather than based on common properties. Throughout our history, Hispanics display the kind of unity characteristic of families rather than the unity characteristic of sets or classes based on shared properties.

In this, Hispanics appear to be different from Asians and Asian Americans, Africans and African Americans, and Amerindians and Native Americans. Asians are, like Hispanics, divided into many subgroups—Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Malaysians, and so on—but unlike Hispanics, these groups do not easily form a historical family in the way Hispanics do. Indeed, rather than one family, they appear to be clusters of families only occasionally related to each other. And the same can be said about Africans and Amerindians. Apart from superficial and controversial unifying factors, such as territory and race, Africans and Amerindians seem to constitute clusters of largely independent groups.

The situation of Hispanics is also different from the situation of Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. Asian Americans generally reflect the diversity of their origins and cultures without a strong historical tie to unite them. In this case, then, a common name is particularly artificial. The situation with African Americans is just the reverse. The Africans who were brought into the United States were as diverse as the Asians; they came from different parts of Africa, from different nations, and from different cultures. But here they were forced to homogenize. Culturally, they were beaten into a pulp to such an extent that some of their most idiosyncratic characteristics were obliterated, or nearly obliterated: their language, values, religion, and so on. The case of Native Americans resembles that of Asians, for this group is composed of subgroups which have very little to do with each other except in a remote origin. What do Seminoles, Mohicans, Apaches, and Pueblos have to do with each other? The lumping together of all these under the label "Native Americans" is just as artificial as the lumping of Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans, and other groups who live in the United States, under the label "Asian Americans."

In contrast with Asian Americans and Native Americans, Hispanics have a historical tie that unites them and, in contrast with African Amer-

icans, they lack the homogenization that characterizes them to a large extent. History ties Hispanics together in a way that is missing in the cases of Asians, Asian Americans, Africans, Amerindians, and Native Americans. There is a sense in which Hispanics all over the world belong together that does not apply to Asians, Africans, and Amerindians. There are perhaps stronger physical ties between all Africans, including African Americans, and between all Asians, including Asian Americans, and between all Amerindians, including Native Americans, than between Hispanics, including Hispanic Americans. But there is a historical and familial element which is absent in Asians, Africans, and Amerindians which is strongly evident among all Hispanics.

TWO INITIAL OBJECTIONS

There are at least two serious objections to the view I have proposed that I must take up. The first attacks my view by arguing that it does not do justice to the fact that Hispanics are, indeed, different from other groups, and that this difference cannot be explained merely in terms of historical connections. Hispanics are different from the Chinese, the French, and certainly Anglo-Saxon Americans, so the argument goes. We can tell who is and who is not Hispanic and we are quite aware of the differences that separate us from other groups. A good explanation of these differences must refer to deep ways of thinking and acting. It will not do to argue, as I have done, that there are actually no properties that Hispanics have in common, for if this were the case, then it would not be possible, as it in fact is, to tell us apart from others. Of course, uncovering such common properties might be difficult, or even factually impossible at times, but that does not entail that such properties do not exist. That those which have been suggested thus far do not work does not entail that the task is logically impossible.

The answer to this objection is that I do not claim that there are no common properties to Hispanics and, therefore, that we can never in fact tell Hispanics apart from other groups. Rather, I have argued that there are no properties common to all Hispanics at all times and in all places that are discernible. This view does not prevent one from holding that there are properties common to some Hispanics at all times and in all places, at all times and in some places, or at some times and in all places; or properties common to all Hispanics at all times and in some places, or at some times and in all places. Nor can my position be construed as implying even that there are no common properties to Hispanics at all times and places. My point is only that there are no properties which can be shown to be common to all Hispanics at all times and in all places. Indeed, I believe

there are properties common to Hispanics at some times and in some places and it is precisely such properties that serve to identify us at those times and in those places. At every time and in every period, some Hispanics have properties that tie them among themselves and distinguish them from other groups, but these properties do not necessarily extend beyond those times and places and, indeed, they do not need to extend beyond them to account for our identity and distinction from other groups.

At any particular time and place, there are familial relations that Hispanics share and which both distinguish us from non-Hispanics and are the source of properties which also can be used to distinguish us from non-Hispanics. Particular physical characteristics, cultural traits, language, and so on, can serve to distinguish Hispanics in certain contexts, although they cannot function as criteria of distinction and identification everywhere and at all times. In a place where all and only Hispanics speak Spanish, for example, the language can function as a sufficient criterion of Hispanic identification even if, in other places, it does not. Likewise, in a society or region where all and only Hispanics have a certain skin color, or a certain religion, and so on, these properties can be used to pick out Hispanics, even if elsewhere there are Hispanics who do not share these properties. Even though Hispanics do not constitute a homogeneous group, then, particular properties can be used to determine who counts as Hispanic in particular contexts. Hispanic identity does not entail a set of common properties which constitutes an essence, but this does not stand in the way of identification. We can determine who counts as Hispanic in context. Just as we generally and easily can tell a game from something that is not a game, we can tell a Hispanic from a non-Hispanic in most instances. But there will be, as with games, borderline cases and cases which overlap.

In the case of Hispanics in the United States in particular, there are added reasons that facilitate an answer to the question, Who counts as Hispanic? Two of these may be considered. First, we are treated as a homogeneous group by European Americans and African Americans; and second, even though Hispanics do not constitute a homogeneous group, we are easily contrasted with European and African Americans because we do not share many of the features commonly associated with these groups. Our identification in the United States, then, is not just possible, but relatively unproblematic.

This clarification of my position serves also to answer the second objection mentioned earlier. This objection argues that the criterion for Hispanic identity I have proposed is too weak because it could describe a situation in which only a single property is shared by any two individuals, and that would not be enough to set the group apart from other groups. Consider two groups of, say, six individuals each which we wish to dis-

tinguish from each other: Group 1 is composed of members A, B, C, D, E, and F. And group 2 is composed of members G, H, I, J, K, and L. Now, according to the view I have proposed, there would be nothing wrong with a situation in which each of the members of each group had only two properties. For the first group the properties would be as follows (in parentheses): A(*a, b*), B(*b, c*), C(*c, d*), D(*d, e*), E(*e, f*), and F(*f, g*). For the second group the properties would be as follows: G(*g, h*), H(*h, i*), I(*i, j*), J(*j, k*), K(*k, l*), and L(*l, m*). Now, the point to note is that the last member of the first group has one property in common with the first member of the second group. The significance of this fact is that this makes the break between the two groups arbitrary. That is, there is no more reason to end the first group with F and to begin the second group with G than to end the first group with B and begin the second group with C. True, the set of properties of the first group (*a, b, c, d, e, f*, and *g*) is different from the set of properties (*g, h, i, j, k*, and *l*) of the second. But the fact that there is at least one common property (*g*) between the first and the second group makes the break into the two groups arbitrary, for we could say that the first group, rather than being composed of A, B, C, D, E, and F, is composed of A, B, C, D, and E; and the second group, rather than being composed of G, H, I, J, K, and L, is composed of F, G, H, I, J, K, and L. And, of course, other combinations and breakdowns would also be possible.

The situation is even more serious when one considers that in reality the members of any group, and certainly the members of a group such as Hispanics, share not one, but more than one property with members of other groups that presumably we want to distinguish, as groups, from the group of Hispanics. In short, the view I have presented, so the objection goes, is too weak.

One way to answer this second objection is to modify the view I have proposed as follows. Instead of speaking of members of a group, each of which shares at least one property with at least one other member of the group, propose a set of properties several of which are shared by each member of the group. We could call this position the Common-Bundle View. Say that we identify a group with six members: A, B, C, D, E, and F. And let us propose a set of six properties also: *a, b, c, d, e*, and *f*. According to this view each member of the group would have several of these properties as, for instance: A (*a, b*), B(*a, b, e, f*), C(*c, d, f*), D(*b, c, d, e, f*), E(*a, e*), and F(*b, e, f*). The advantages of this answer should be obvious. Here we have a stronger position and one that can solve the weaknesses pointed out earlier. Clearly, now we have a tighter bond between the members of the group we want to distinguish, and we can also easily set the group apart from other groups by simply showing how individuals who are not members of the group do not have any, or a sufficient number, of the set of properties used to define the group.

Now let us apply the Common-Bundle View to Hispanics and say that there is a set of twelve properties several of which all Hispanics have (the selection presented here is purely arbitrary and should be given no significance): speaker of Iberian language, Iberian descent, born in Iberia, born in Latin America, Amerindian descent, African descent, citizen of Iberian country, citizen of Latin American country, resident in Iberian country, resident in Latin American country, Iberian surname, lover of Latin American music. Using this criterion, Juan de los Palostes qualifies as Hispanic because he is of Iberian descent, was born in Latin America, and speaks Spanish. His daughters also qualify because they speak Spanish, are of Iberian descent, have Spanish surnames, and love Latin music, although they were not born and do not reside in an Iberian or a Latin American country. And some children from Anglo-American fathers and Latin American mothers who do not speak Spanish and were born in the United States can also be considered Hispanic because of their partial Latin American descent and their love of Latin American music. At the same time we can distinguish this group from those who might have one of these properties, say that they speak an Iberian language or were born in Latin America, but do not have any other. Moreover, it would exclude, for example, children of Anglo-Saxon missionaries in Latin America and African Americans who have learned Portuguese in school.

Clearly, adopting the Common-Bundle View is a promising way of answering the objection against my original position, the Historical-Family View. And there is in fact no reason why it cannot be integrated into my view, except that, upon further reflection, there are problems with it. I see three difficulties in particular that make me hesitate. First, there is the problem of determining the particular set of properties we should identify as pertinent. How and on what bases do we decide on the set of properties which Hispanics share? Indeed, even in the rather innocuous list I provided as an illustration, there are some properties that are bound to create difficulties. For example, why should the child of Anglo-Saxon American missionaries who was born in Colombia, holds Colombian citizenship, and speaks some Spanish, not be considered Hispanic? And we might keep in mind the problems raised earlier concerning political, territorial, cultural, racial, and other such properties.

A second problem with this way of answering the objection that should also be obvious from the example is that, even if we were able to settle on a satisfactory list of properties some of which all Hispanics share, we have no easy way of determining the number of these properties required for someone to qualify as Hispanic. Two? Three? Four? Twenty? And does it make a difference which properties are involved? In the earlier example, does it make a difference whether we include love of Latin American music and Amerindian descent or not? Indeed, are two of some

kinds of properties sufficient (e.g., lover of Latin American music and Amerindian descent), whereas of other kinds three or four are needed? Obviously, this complicates matters tremendously, and it is not clear on what basis a decision can be reached.

The third problem is still more vexing. It has to do with the fact that, even if we were able to settle on a set of properties and on the number that need to be shared, this could turn out to be of use only for the past and the present and not the future. We do not know what properties will be pertinent for Hispanic identity in the future. The set of properties which Hispanics share could change, and so could the proportion of properties necessary for qualification. After all, we are speaking of a historical reality, and historical realities are in a constant process of change. Our identity is flexible and subject to evolution and transformation. We can easily illustrate this point with a reference to language. Suffice it to say that the English spoken in the Middle Ages would be unintelligible to an American today, and yet we still consider it to be English. So, whatever we think pertinent for Hispanic identity in the past and present could in time change. If tigers can be bred to lose their stripes, there is no reason why Hispanics could not become quite different than they are today or were in the past.

In short, the view we have been discussing as an answer to the second objection is simply too unhistorical and inflexible. There cannot be a fixed list of properties in which Hispanics share. There can be, of course, a list at any time, but the list must always remain open-ended. This is why it is still better to think in terms of history and family ties rather than in terms of a list of properties. Hispanics are part of a historical reality and, therefore, the criteria to identify them must take cognizance of that fact. Note that I began by allowing the possibility that in principle there could be such a list of properties even if we cannot identify it. Now, however, it should be clear that I am not willing to allow the possibility of such a list even in principle. This does not mean, however, that Hispanics cannot be identified as such in particular contexts. Even though there are no essential properties, there can be criteria in context. Consider, for example, that knowing how to swim is not an indication of being human. But in a place where only humans know how to swim and all humans know how to swim, knowing how to swim can function effectively as a criterion of being human.

ANSWERS TO [OTHER] OBJECTIONS

The view I have presented here takes care, I believe, of [many commonly voiced] objections against the use of "Hispanic" . . . but it does not

answer all the objections [that have been] raised. Indeed, it does not deal with [one of] the most serious objections that [has been] presented against it: "Hispanic" is repugnant because of what Iberians, and particularly Spaniards, did to Amerindian populations, and it is particularly repugnant to Hispanic Americans from the southwest of the United States because it is the term used by an ethnocentric and racist group to distinguish itself from *mestizos* and Mexican Americans; "Hispanic" unfairly privileges Spanish, Iberian, and European elements to the detriment of Amerindian and African ones; "Hispanic" perpetuates or tends to perpetuate the submission of America to Europe, and particularly of Latin America to Spain; and, finally, "Hispanic" is a deprecatory term whose use serves only to degrade us in the eyes of others and to put obstacles in the way of our social acceptance and development.

These objections, although appearing very powerful *prima facie*, when examined more carefully reveal that they are based in part on misinformation, prejudice, and ignorance. Moreover, they result in the same sort of bias and discrimination they are aimed to prevent, although those who suffer such bias and discrimination are not the same people. Indeed, these objections presuppose the same totalizing and exclusionary principles against which they are formulated.

Consider, for example, that these objections reject "Hispanic" because they identify everything that is Hispanic with racial purity, Eurocentrism, exploitation, and oppression. But Hispania has been from the very beginning a place where Europe and other parts of the world meet. The Iberian peninsula is eminently *mestiza*, both racially and culturally. From its earliest history this piece of European land has been the place where Africa, Europe, and the Middle East have met and mingled in every possible way. Indeed, some have gone so far as to say that Spain is a part of Africa rather than Europe. It is a misconception to think of anything Hispanic as exclusively European or exclusively Caucasian, even if "Hispanic" is restricted to what is Iberian. A short trip through certain parts of Spain and Portugal should quickly disabuse anyone, who has eyes to see, from this prejudice. So much then for the connotation of racial purity or Eurocentrism. After 1492, it makes little sense to speak of Iberian purity, a culture separate and distinct from that of Latin America.

As far as the identification of "Hispanic" with oppression and exploitation, again this charge is partly based on both ignorance and prejudice. Mind you, I do not agree with the fallacious argument that we should not blame the conquistadors for the atrocities they committed because others did it too. This kind of reasoning is not only fallacious, but pernicious, even though it seems to carry quite a bit of weight in some quarters. My argument is rather that to blame all Iberians for the crimes of a few is as unjustified as saying that all Mexicans are lazy because a

few are, that all Colombians are drug traffickers because a few are, or that no Cuban is serious because there are some who are not. These generalizations are false, and not only that, they are malicious and nefarious. But just as malicious and nefarious is the one that lumps all Iberians together into one group of monsters. Atrocities were committed in the encounter, but many of these atrocities were denounced from the very beginning by Iberians themselves. Indeed, the great names of Bartolomé de Las Casas, Juan de Zumárraga, and Vasco de Quiroga should be sufficient to show that not all Iberians were monsters and that many prominent ones took up the cause of the natives and the oppressed. Nor can it be said with impunity that even the Iberian governments were completely biased and generally silenced dissenters. The famous disputation between Las Casas and Sepúlveda shows that there was concern among some members of the Spanish government to do the right thing, or at least to provide a forum for dissenters. Indeed, at a time when the world in general had little awareness of the rights of conquered and oppressed peoples, some laws were enacted in Spain and Portugal for the protection of Amerindians and of African slaves, indicating that at least some Iberians were concerned about their welfare. Moreover, philosophers like Vitoria and Suárez openly and unambiguously tried to think through all the issues that the encounter with America brought up without considerations of profit or power.

So, no, not all Iberians are to be blamed and regarded as evil. Therefore, "Hispanics" need not denote only bad guys and connote only what was evil about some Iberians. Indeed, the selfless sacrifices of many who tried to mitigate the effects of what was, without a doubt, a tragic catastrophe of epic proportions, cannot, because of that, be ignored or disregarded. Most identities have been forged in blood, but it is not the blood alone that counts. Besides, there are countless cases, both in Latin America and the United States, where Iberians have been key players in the advancement of non-Iberian Hispanics. It makes no sense to demonize all Iberians because of the sins of some of them.

But this is not all, for what are we going to do with the many residents of the Iberian peninsula who had nothing to do with the conquest of America? What about the farmers, the members of the small bourgeoisie, the maids and servants? What about the Catalans, who, because of an agreement between Isabella and Ferdinand, were largely kept out of America? And what about the descendants of those people who now live in Spain or Portugal and never had anything to do with the conquest and colonization of America? Are they also to be rejected, repelled, and blamed? They are as Hispanic as the conquistadors and yet they have nothing to do with the atrocities committed by them. So why should "Hispanic" be rejected simply because of what some Iberians did between 1500 and 1900? We certainly do not change our last name every time a

member of our family does something reprehensible. And few, if any, Americans today would reject the term "American" merely because some Americans committed atrocities against some segments of the American population at some point in the history of the United States. There is something drastically wrong with judgments based on faulty logic, and the faulty logic in this case is the understanding of the connotation of a term based on properties which apply only to some of the members of the set the term names.

Moreover, why should "Hispanic" be associated only with Iberia, or even more narrowly, Spain or Castile? That Castilians appropriated the name for themselves because of their aggressive and imperialistic behavior should not force others to surrender their rights to bear the name. I refuse to give up what is mine by right, even if others can be easily convinced to do so. I am Hispanic, but not Castilian or Spanish. I speak Castilian, not Spanish, but with a Cuban accent. And in being Hispanic I share with Catalans, Basques, Galicians, Portuguese, Andalucians, Mayans, Aztecs, Argentinians, Brazilians, and some Africans, among many others, a history which ties us together in a plurality of ways.

That certain ethnocentric and racist groups in the southwest of the United States appropriated the term "Hispanics" and used it to distance themselves from *mestizos* and Mexican Americans, out of racist concerns, and that other groups elsewhere also do so for similar reasons, should not be sufficient reason for us to acquiesce. First of all, ethnic and racial purity is a myth when it comes to Hispanics of any kind. We are not pure in any meaningful sense of the word. So it makes very little sense to use "Hispanic," or any other term for that matter, to indicate the purity of any of our groups. Second, if not absolute purity, but merely Spanish purity is involved, namely, pure unmixed Spanish ancestry, then "Hispanic" is the wrong term to use. The right term is "Spanish" or "of Spanish descent." "Hispanic" connotes mixture and derivation, as we saw in one of the other objections voiced earlier. "Hispanic" in this sense is like "Hellenistic," not like "Greek." Third, although there is considerable racism among Latin Americans, Iberians, and Hispanic Americans, this has never reached the levels it reached among Anglo-Saxons in the United States. After all, it was after and because of the annexation of the Mexican southwest by the United States, and the immigration of Anglo Americans into the newly acquired territories, that an attempt was made by certain groups to distinguish themselves from *mestizos* and Mexicans, precisely because Anglo Americans made Mexican Americans feel inferior.

As I said, there is considerable racism in Latin America. Generally, the darker one is, the worse one is. But there is not a great deal of favoritism toward Iberians either. Spaniards in particular are often regarded as uncouth, ignorant, provincial, and inflexible by Latin Americans. To be

Spanish or Iberian is not a status symbol, but quite the contrary. Whiteness that comes from English, German, and French origins is more coveted, however. So we find the common custom of tacking some English, German, or French name from a distant ancestor to the Spanish last name in order to emphasize the non-Iberian, European connection. To have English, German, or French blood really counts.

Even more significant is that there is no distinction between Hispanics and *mestizos* in Latin America. Latin Americans have made distinctions between whites, blacks, Indians, *mestizos*, *castizos*, mulattos, *criollos*, and various other labels at various times in history, but some of these terms are more cultural than racial, and to my knowledge the term *hispano* has never been used to distinguish upper-class pure descendants of Spaniards from *mestizos*, Indians, blacks, or mulattos. This phenomenon is American, and a result of Anglo-American racism.

My thesis can also be used to answer the third objection, namely, that the use of "Hispanic" should help perpetuate a sense of cultural subservience in America toward Europe in general and Spain in particular. If the notion of Hispanic does not connote a particular set of properties, it cannot be argued that it necessarily connotes anything European or Spanish. True, some may understand it so, but this is inaccurate, and should not deter us from using a name which can otherwise be useful and whose justification is rooted in history. African Americans should not cease to call themselves so because some, or even many, think "African" means racially or culturally inferior; Jews should not cease to call themselves so because some, or even many, associate that term with negative qualities; and we should not surrender "Hispanic" because some, or even many, mistakenly think it means Spanish.

This leads me to the last objection, that the use of "Hispanics" is counterproductive because it is associated with negative traits. Again, that some people put the wrong spin on certain terms should not make us avoid them if those terms reflect something historically important about us. Indeed, I am not sure that name changes are a good thing. Are we going to change our name every time someone decides to use it negatively? And is not something important lost every time a name is changed? Doesn't a name change often create unnecessary division and dissension in the community whose name is being changed? Should we not rather concentrate on defending the historical bases of the term? A term like "Hispanics," which makes historical sense, should be kept even if some people choose to interpret it negatively. Rather than dropping it, we should wear it with a certain defiance and assertion; this will eventually do more for our image than a change of name. We need to change people's attitudes toward us rather than acquiesce to the rules of a game they impose on us; and a name can be an effective tool in this task.

This does not mean that the community to which I refer as Hispanics is here to stay forever, or that it is a closed community which allows no one to leave or enter it. We cannot deny the past. If we have been part of that community, we will always have been part of it—this should not need to be stated—but to be part of it, or to have been part of it, does not entail continuing being part of it in the future. And not to have been part of it in the past does not preclude the possibility of joining it in the future. Communities are fluid, open, forever changing; members come and go, enter and leave, as they forge new relations with others. I am no historicist. We are not trapped in our history, albeit history cannot be denied. Nor am I proposing a kind of neo-essentialism. There is no essence here; there is only a complex historical reality. Only a misguided sense of identity, based on notions of coherence and purity, leads to essentialistic conceptions of ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the category "Hispanic" is useful to describe and understand ourselves. It also serves to describe much of what we produce and do, for this product and these actions are precisely the results of who we are, and we are in turn the result of our history. "Hispanic" is a term that serves a purpose today, and will continue to serve a purpose in the study of our past. It is possible, however, that at some future time it could cease to be useful for the description of a reality current at the time. The term is justified now because of a historical reality, that is, the relations among us; if those relations should diminish considerably or cease altogether, then the term could become obsolete. The extension of the term should not be understood to be hard and fast, for human relations are anything but that. There is constant regrouping, and our understanding of these relations requires the constant realignment of our conceptual framework. For the moment, however, there is use for "Hispanic."

The strength of the position I have presented here lies precisely in that it allows us to speak of a common identity to all Hispanic/Latinos without imposing a homogeneous conception of who or what we are. It is an open-ended, historically based conception of our identity which permits multiplicity and development. It recognizes our diversity; it respects our differences; it acknowledges our past; and it prevents totalizing, homogenizing attitudes that could be used to oppress and dominate all or some of us. It is meant to provide understanding in the recognition of both the strength and weakness of our ties.

Part of my task has been to do a bit of conceptual analysis to clear the way for a more precise understanding of a notion that I think can be used

to refer to all of us. Moreover, I have tried to show how there are historical grounds for accepting my conclusions. My argument has been in fact, contrary to what some believe, that the use of "Hispanic," as I have understood it here, does not strip us of our historical identity, reduce us to imputed common traits, or imply our false homogenization. Indeed, I have argued just the reverse, for it is my position that the use of "Hispanic," rightly understood, helps us respect diversity, is faithful to our historical reality, and leaves the doors open to development in many directions. Moreover, the lack of a homogeneous conception should be sufficient to preclude oppressive and discriminatory uses of "Hispanic." My most powerful answer to the objection against the use of "Hispanic," or any other ethnic name, to refer to us, is that "Hispanic" works by helping us understand the bases for the identity of our ethnic family.

Note also that I have stayed away from the political argument some use in support of a single name for all Hispanics in the American context. According to this argument, Hispanic Americans need a common name to strengthen our political clout. A large group has more muscle than a small one. The overarching notion of Hispanic (or Latino, for that matter) should make the rest of the United States take us seriously.

This is, indeed, a strong argument that has been routinely voiced by those who favor a single name for Hispanic Americans. The problem with it is that it does not properly take into account the diverse character and needs of the various groups which are covered by the name. Politically, the name does not produce the right results and may in fact be counterproductive. Puerto Ricans do not have the same needs as Chicanos, or Argentinians as Venezuelans, for example. Whether we speak of international or national politics, the use of one name need not be a good thing if the proper emphasis on the diversity among Hispanic groups is not maintained. The justification for one name should not be based on politics, but on historical fact, and should recognize that a common name for all Hispanics does not arise from common properties or political needs, but from a historical reality which is founded on diversity and *mestizaje*. This leads us directly to the consideration of the origins of our identity. . . .

Note that the objections [often] raised against the use of "Hispanic" work also against some labels proposed by those who oppose it. Terms such as "Latin American" and "Latin America" are very problematic, and if this is the case, so is "Latino/a." Indeed, even more restrictive terms based on national origins, favored by some groups opposed to "Hispanic," are questionable. For the countries of Latin America, like other countries of the world, are to a large extent artificially created. Even a brief trip through the territories of various Latin American countries should convince anyone who is not ideologically blind that in terms of identity other than political identity, these nations do not have much to do with many

of the peoples who are considered part of them. This means that the use of terms based on national origins for Hispanic groups in the United States is even more artificial, for most of these Americans are not politically related to these countries today. The case of recent immigrants is different, of course, but that does not change the situation for others. Keep in mind also that, historically, the territorial integrity of many of these countries has more to do with how Spain and Portugal divided and governed their empires in America than with the identity of the current or past inhabitants of those countries. This makes the use of terms of national origin for Hispanic Americans, by those who want to avoid anything Spanish or Iberian, particularly paradoxical.

Of course, the reason why some Hispanic Americans want to emphasize their ties to particular countries of Latin America is quite understandable. After all, repeated attempts have been made to strip them of their values, dignity, culture, language, political power, and social status. Naturally, they need to fight these attempts, and the idea of a country of origin, with a great past and potential for the future, appears to be just the right tool to counteract ethnic discrimination and racism. Just as African Americans find a source of strength in Africa, so Hispanics find it in Mexico, Brazil, or Peru. All this is very well, as long as it is based on a realistic understanding of the situation and is not used to encourage misguided nationalism, ethnic strife, and unrealistic expectations. . . .

Finally, let me point out two major positive advantages of the use of "Hispanic" and the conception of Hispanic identity I have proposed. First, they allow us to participate fully in the cultural diversity of Hispanics without losing our more particular identities. The diversity, variety, and mixture which characterize Hispanics are enormous. It is probably not an overstatement to say that Hispanics are more diverse and varied than any other group in the world. Think of African Hispanics, Catalans, Tarahumaras, and so many others who are part of our historical family. Indeed, think of Sephardic Jews, who, after centuries living outside Hispanic territories, are still closely tied in many ways to the rest of us. Conceiving our identity in the terms I have outlined helps us understand this phenomenon, and allows us to share in each other's cultural riches: Paraca cloth, Maya architecture, African rhythms, Spanish literature, and Portuguese pottery, to name a few examples.

The second major advantage of the conception of Hispanic identity I have proposed is that it is not hegemonic; it does not rule out other identities, for it does not conceive Hispanics as sharing a set of properties which actually conflict, or can potentially conflict, with other properties shared by members of Hispanic subgroups. This conception of who we are is open and pluralistic, allowing the coexistence of other, multiple, and variegated identities. Its social and political implications are substantial

then, for this way of conceiving Hispanic identity undermines intolerance and any totalizing and hegemonic attempts at imposing on others narrow conceptions of who we are.