

# A Companion to Latin American Philosophy

*Edited by*

Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte,  
and Otávio Bueno

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# Latinos on Race and Ethnicity: Alcoff, Corlett, and Gracia

LAWRENCE BLUM

J. Angelo Corlett, J. J. E. Gracia, and Linda Martín Alcoff have each developed distinctive approaches to the nature of race and of ethnicity.

## Corlett

In *Race, Racism, and Reparations* (2003), Corlett rejects race as a coherent and intelligible notion, and provides several arguments against 'primitive race theories,' that is, race as a biologically and genetically significant category. He replaces race with ethnicity, as there can be a coherent account of ethnicity. Corlett does acknowledge that the idea of race might be of some value in understanding racism and therefore in providing justice for groups that have suffered from racism. But ultimately he feels that the appropriate categorization of such groups is better captured by ethnic than racial concepts.

Corlett's conception of ethnicity is quite complex. He makes a distinction between metaphysical and public policy analyses of ethnicity; the latter provide categories that are usable and appropriate in public policy contexts, that is, primarily for reparative justice for groups. Metaphysical analyses are more ambitious and aspire to capture something of the full range of human concerns that attach to ethnicities. Although Corlett sometimes lumps ethnicity together with race as concepts for which he rejects metaphysical analyses, it is appropriate to see him as providing both metaphysical and public policy analyses of ethnicity.

### *Corlett's genealogical conception of ethnicity*

For the public policy analysis (which he also refers to as "ethical"), Corlett says that descent – genealogical ties to an ethnic group – is both necessary and sufficient for ethnic membership. Thus the child of French immigrants to Mexico who grows up speaking Spanish as her native language and embraces Mexican culture does not count as Latino, as she is descended from French persons, not Latin Americans (2003, p. 129); her Mexican ethnoculture does not confer ethnic membership. Corlett sees this genealogical account as useful for public policy in two ways. On a practical level, it is

much easier to know someone's genealogy than to be able to assess whether she possesses cultural knowledge, respect for the culture or language, self-identity as a member of the group, or other purported non-genealogical criteria of ethnic membership. It would be very difficult to administer programs aimed at justice for such groups if they required assessing whether a sufficient degree of these subjective criteria had been attained by a given individual. Second, Corlett suggests that ancestry rather than culture triggers racist mistreatment. It is this mistreatment that public policy should attempt to rectify.

This privileging of ancestry in Corlett's account ironically makes his view of ethnicity closer to that of standard accounts of race (including Gracia's) than do ones that privilege culture or language. It also reflects his focus on the United States that is not shared, or at least to nothing like the same extent, by Gracia. It is in the United States that Latinos are treated as at least a semi-racialized group (a feature analyzed by Alcoff), and this provides a reason for privileging that aspect in the context of justice. However, in the United States, Latinos are also demeaned and discriminated against for speaking Spanish; that is, they are discriminated against as an ethnocultural group (a point that Corlett recognizes in other contexts), not only as a (semi-)racialized one.

Corlett acknowledges a scalar dimension to his ancestry criterion. Someone's ancestry can be ethnic group E to a certain degree and ethnic group F to another degree; and Corlett says at one point that virtually everyone has mixed ethnic ancestry. Corlett does not work through the problem this mixedness presents for the public policy use of the genealogical account; but he does suggest that most people will have one predominant ethnicity, and presumably this can serve the required policy purposes. Gracia (2005, p. 40f.) criticizes Corlett's genealogical view for its apparent circularity. 'Being descended from ethnic group G' works as a criterion for membership in G only if one has some other criterion for identifying ethnic group G, or at least some members of it, from whom the others can be descended and thereby acquire membership in G. Corlett acknowledges the circularity but does not think it vicious; the constructedness of ethnicity makes it impossible to pin down a definite criterion of G (p. 227). This simply sidesteps the problem. Nevertheless, Gracia takes his argument against Corlett to show that descent is not central to ethnicity; yet Corlett is surely right to say that descent is central to ethnicity, even if he is wrong to think it can stand alone as a necessary and sufficient condition.

Corlett refers to the public policy definition of ethnicity as "broad" and the metaphysical one as "narrow." That is, persons who satisfy the genealogical condition in the broad definition might not satisfy the narrower one, which provides other conditions that must be satisfied in order for someone to be classified as a Latino/a. Corlett does not discuss these other conditions in great detail, but he does at one point provide a list of them: speaking an Hispanic language (Spanish or Portuguese), possessing and respecting a Latino name, respecting and engaging in significant elements of Latino culture(s), perceiving oneself as Latino/a, being perceived by Latino/as as Latino/a, and being perceived by non-Latino/as as Latino/a (2003, p. 129). Some and perhaps all of these conditions are scalar, and Corlett says that their possession to different degrees makes one a Latino to that degree (p. 39).

Corlett regards this scalar metaphysical account as falling under his category of 'genealogical conception' since the descent condition is still necessary and sufficient

for Latinohood. No matter how fully one satisfies the cultural/identity conditions, one is not Latino unless one also satisfies the descent condition.

Corlett's account provides a rationale for common expressions about ethnicity – "Angela is very Latina," "Joe is Irish but not as much as Liam," and so on. Indeed it seems both coherent and accurate to recognize that we do accept the idea of degrees of ethnicity, even if this does not replace but only complements a binary conception of it. That is, we can ask *whether* someone is Latina, but also *how* Latina she is. Corlett does not discuss scalar (narrow) ethnicity in great detail, and many questions remain unanswered, such as exactly what the scalar criteria are, how to compare the different scalar criteria in some sort of common metric, and how to translate that metric into an appropriate degree of ethnicity.

Corlett's account of ethnicity, then, recognizes two types of scalarity – one of the degree of purity of descent from recognized ethnē, the other a series of ethnocultural and identity features that can be possessed to greater and lesser extents. He treats these two in different ways. Regarding descent, he (implicitly) proposes a threshold above which an individual becomes a member of the ethnic group and below which she does not. But in the case of the cultural/identity features, he treats the scalar possession of them as translating into a scalar form of the ethnicity itself.

## Gracia

Gracia develops his metaphysical accounts of race and ethnicity (that is, accounts of racial and ethnic membership) against a background in which both notions have been challenged on several distinct grounds – conceptual, metaphysical, epistemic, moral, and political. He takes up these challenges systematically, and argues that race and ethnicity are coherent and consistent concepts that apply to the world and reveal features of the world that would be invisible without these concepts. The accounts are meant to "be descriptive in that they reflect the most fundamental principles that underlie the ways in which we think about race, ethnicity, and nationality because these ways are based on a common, collective experience of the way the world is" (2005, p. 37). His book *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: A Challenge for the Twenty-first Century* (2005) is the main locus of this philosophical account, but his earlier work *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (2000) is relevant as well.

Gracia notes that philosophers have only recently come to pay attention to these notions, especially ethnicity, and he suggests that a philosophical approach is superior to that of the disciplines most commonly associated with them (e.g., sociology) in aspiring to "put together as complete a picture of the world as possible" and thus necessarily being interdisciplinary and so lacking "a specific methodology" (2005, p. xvi). But Gracia's philosophical approach to race and ethnicity does draw on his background in metaphysics, philosophy of language, and history of philosophy, as well as involving great care in constructing arguments for the claims he makes and in seriously addressing important challenges to his views.

Gracia is particularly concerned to distinguish between race and ethnicity, and thinks they are often confused with one another, with deleterious conceptual and moral consequences, such as confusing cultural and genetic characteristics and not

recognizing that ethnic groups can change over time. At the same time, once he has clarified the conceptual distinction, he believes that race and ethnicity can overlap, both in the sense that the same group, or portions of the same group, can be both racial and ethnic (as are African Americans), and that race can itself be one marker of ethnicity for particular ethnic groups at particular historical periods.

Gracia also regards certain general but false views of both race and ethnicity as obstructing the possibility of a coherent account of them. One is what he calls "essentialism" – the assumption that all the individual members of a racial or ethnic group possess *individual* properties (such as psychological characteristics of temperament and character, or the sort of characteristic Corlett adverts to in his account, such as speaking a particular language) that are necessary and sufficient for membership in that group. But, Gracia argues, members of a given ethnic group do not share such features with all other co-members. Gracia argues, however, that certain *relational* properties characterize both race and ethnicity (different ones for each), so that he is proposing what he takes to be a non-essentialist account of race and ethnicity.

A second false assumption is that races and ethnicities have clear boundaries so that it is always clear whether a given individual is or is not a member of the race or ethnicity in question. Gracia points out that many of our most important human concepts do not have clear boundaries in that sense; for example, it is often not clear if someone should be thought of as "dead" or "healthy." We should be able to accept the same indeterminacy with respect to both race and ethnicity.

The third assumption is that racial and ethnic groups are internally homogeneous. This assumption leads to inappropriate and harmful stereotyping of such groups, and has led some to reject the possibility of a coherent and socially useful account of race and ethnicity entirely. Gracia's accounts of both concepts explain why neither racial nor ethnic groups are generally internally homogeneous in this sense.

### *Gracia's account of ethnicity*

Gracia calls his account of ethnicity the "familial-historical" view. He gives much more attention to the familial than the historical aspect. But by the latter he appears to mean that an ethnic group is a group that exists over time, and that it has a history and a changing membership over time as some members die and others are incorporated through birth and other ways (that will be discussed later). Members of the same ethnic group stand in "historical relationships" to one another.

Hispanic/Latinos, the group to which Gracia devotes most of this attention, began to exist as a result of the encounter of the Iberians and the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and, slightly later, African slaves, beginning in 1492. Prior to this point there were no "Hispanics," only groups that came to be Hispanic subsequent to 1492, such as Castilians and Aztecs (not that they necessarily or typically lost these prior identities).

One meaning of 'historical' that Gracia definitively rejects is that descent or ancestry is a necessary feature of ethnic membership. He rejects descent because, on his view, people who have no descent relationship to other Hispanics can come to be Hispanic; for example, if they are Welsh immigrants to Argentina, and then their offspring migrate to the United States, the latter are Hispanic, though none of their ancestors

are (on his view). He rejects descent as sufficient because someone definitively descended from Hispanics but “who has not lived in a Latino country, has not associated with other Latinos, and does not share with them any perceptible traits” is not Latino (2005, p. 41). This view contrasts with Corlett, who would employ such facts as indicating “degree of Latinoness” but not membership itself.

So Corlett and Gracia’s ethnic groups have different membership, not merely different accounts of the same membership. For Latinos, Corlett accepts anyone descended from certain Latin Americans, but Gracia excludes those of this group who have given up their cultural or identity ties to Latin America. But Gracia includes any Latin American national, or at least her descendants, while Corlett excludes some of these, for example, “pure” descendants of more recent European immigrants (and descendants of Asians as well). As Alcoff points out, Corlett’s criterion has the effect of excluding a fair number of Latin Americans and their descendants, since parts of Latin America are major immigration ports for Europeans and Asians (Alcoff, 2007, p. 235). But Corlett’s account makes sense (at least with respect to Europeans) in terms of his focus on Latinos as a victimized or discriminated-against group in the United States, as it is plausible to think that the people of Latin American origin who are perceived to be ‘European’ are less likely to be discriminated against as Latin Americans than those not so perceived.

### *Gracia on family and ethnicity*

Gracia gives a good deal of attention to the ‘familial’ dimension of ethnicity, which he draws from Du Bois, who predicated it of races, although at that time (1897), Du Bois thought of races as possessing what we would think of as ethnic characteristics (Du Bois, 1897). The idea of ‘family’ is put to several distinct, if related, uses by Gracia, that he does not clearly distinguish. One is to invoke Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘family resemblance’ to say how different persons can be members of the same ethnic group (like the same family) without sharing a common property, but different ones sharing different properties. A second is to illustrate the idea that ethnic membership can come about through more than one relationship. That is, membership in families can come through a diverse set of relationships – marriage, birth, adoption. Similarly, Gracia wants to say, membership in ethnic groups comes about through differing sorts of relationship. There is no one relationship that constitutes ethnicity, as there is no one relationship that constitutes family.

Gracia never attempts to spell out what those ethnicity-making relationships are in a systematic way. Some of them are (some of) the same ones as familial relationships, and this is the third use of ‘family’ in relation to ethnicity. That is, Gracia thinks that birth is one way of acquiring ethnicity, as is adoption. Some would question, however, whether a Vietnamese adoptee of a Russian-American couple becomes ‘ethnically Russian’ by being brought up in a Russian-American cultural environment, as Gracia’s view asserts, although perhaps fewer would deny that she is ‘culturally Russian(-American).’ Gracia believes that he has a principled reason for not spelling out the relationships that constitute ethnicity – namely that they can be spelled out only for particular ethnicities in particular historical contexts. “[P]ractically any feature can count toward uniting an ethnos, including racial and national ones” (2005, p. 55). For example, Gracia says, in a particular region, say of the United States,

Mexican Americans may be the only Catholics and also the only people with a certain skin color, and so could be distinguished by those features (2005, p. 64). But without giving us some idea of the relationships that constitute ethnicity, we have no basis for differentiating empirical *correlates* with ethnicity in a particular context from characteristics that actually *constitute* ethnicity in that context. Suppose, for example, Mexican Americans in a particular city are confined to one particular neighborhood, so that residing in that neighborhood becomes a way to pick out Mexican Americans in that context. This would not make "residing in X neighborhood" a feature of Mexican American ethnicity. Gracia's stated view provides no basis for seeing the Spanish language but not residential patterns as internally related to Mexican ethnicity (as Corlett holds), although neither one is actually *required* for ethnic membership (a Mexican American need not speak Spanish), and both allow us to pick out particular groups in certain particular contexts.

Returning to the issue of 'family' in his account, Gracia wants family to be more than an analogy to ethnicity. He says that ethnics are themselves a *kind* of family, and this is a different use than the two so far mentioned. But what kind of family? Gracia gives this summary of his position:

An ethnos is a subgroup of individual humans who satisfy the following conditions: (1) they belong to many generations; (2) they are organized as a family and break down into extended families; and (3) they are united through historical relations that produce features that, in context, serve (i) to identify members of the group, and (ii) to distinguish them from members of other groups. (2005, p. 54)

The idea that ethnicities are comprised of extended families is questionable; people who marry a member of an ethnic group are not generally thought of as becoming members themselves, even if they embrace its ethnoculture. Moreover, most ethnic groups are large and range over a wide, often dispersed, geographic area, and are not 'organized' in any overall sense at all, though there may be ethnicity-based organizations. An ethnic group is not really like an actual family, no matter how extended.

### *Ethnicity, nationality, and sub-nationality*

Gracia regards it as arbitrary to confine ethnic membership to national borders. Indians in the UK have historical relationships to Indians in India, so why confine Indian ethnicity to groups that are a minority in a non-Indian nation, and Polish ethnicity to Poles not in Poland? And his account of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity embraces Salvadorans in El Salvador as well as in the United States

Gracia uses the expressions 'Hispanic,' 'Latino,' and, more rarely, 'Hispanic/Latino,' but says in a footnote that he prefers 'Hispanic,' because he regards it, as do many but not all commentators on this terminological issue, as being more inclusive in including residents of the Iberian Peninsula as well as Latin Americans (and their descendants). But it is not clear why inclusiveness is a virtue in this context. Others (e.g., Corlett) favor 'Latino' precisely on the grounds that it captures the European colonial status that unites Latin America and distinguishes it from the colonial powers. The fact that

one term includes more people than another does not clinch the issue as to whether it is preferable to the less inclusive term.

Gracia's open-ended and expansive conception of ethnicity does not comport with one aspect of his rationale for his accounts of ethnicity and race, namely that they are meant to help us to see aspects of reality that we would not see were we not in possession of these concepts. This point is a useful antidote to a profligate 'social constructionism' that Gracia rightly rejects; ethnic groups might be historical accidents and human constructs that might even disappear, but they are nevertheless real features of our social world, real human groups that are meaningful to people in and outside of them, and that affect social well-being in various ways. But in light of this, the usual notion of ethnicity that distinguishes between Mexican Americans and Mexicans, with the latter being a *national* and the former an *ethnic* group, is pointing to precisely this feature of our social world. Being an ethnocultural sub-national group (i.e., what Gracia recognizes is ordinarily meant by an 'ethnic group') is a distinct and significant social location; it is not the same as the national identity from which the original immigrant group arose, even if there are cultural connections between the two. Gracia himself provides a striking example of this very point in *Hispanic/Latino Identity*. A Mexican author is speaking to a group of Mexican Americans and making clear to them the difference between being Mexican and being Mexican American, when the audience was hoping she would connect them more closely. In this sense, ethnicity understood as an ethnocultural minority is something quite different from nationality, even when the latter is understood culturally rather than politically. This familiar (in the United States at least) view of ethnicity, in contrast to Gracia's, seems to satisfy Gracia's overarching criterion of adequacy for a view of ethnicity, that it "reflect the most fundamental principles that underlie the ways in which we think about . . . ethnicity, and nationality" (p. 37).

### *Gracia's genetic common-bundle view of race*

Garcia also sees races as a type of family. He recognizes the scientific challenge to the idea of race that many philosophers, including Corlett, have also accepted as showing that there are no races. Gracia gives special attention to K. A. Appiah's attempt to retain a notion of racial identity while jettisoning the notion of race (Appiah, 1996), and Gracia rightly sees this as a confused and unacceptable view. But Gracia also thinks, in contrast to Corlett, that a coherent and scientifically respectable view of race can be resurrected that abandons the implication of large genetic differences between 'races' implied in the discredited scientific view.

Gracia's account of race has two necessary conditions for membership. The first is descent: each member of a race is linked by descent to another member of the group, who is in turn also linked by descent to at least some third member of the group. The second is phenotype: each member of the group has one or more physical features that are (i) genetically transmittable, (ii) generally associated with the group, and (iii) manifest to the senses (what Gracia calls 'perspicuous').

Gracia's phenotypic condition is characterized as 'the common bundle view,' that there exists a bundle of phenotypic characteristics, the possession of some of which



render someone a member of the race in question. For blacks, for example, it involves a certain skin shade, hair texture, facial features, and so on.

The descent condition for race is meant to contrast with Gracia's rejection of that condition for ethnicity. It may seem that Gracia is not vulnerable to the circularity problem regarding race of which he accuses Corlett regarding ethnicity, since the phenotypic criterion can provide a non-descent condition to save descent from circularity or infinite regress. But this will not work, since, for example, some Australian aborigines have the same phenotypic characteristics as 'blacks' but are not generally regarded as being of the same race as they. Gracia may ultimately have to rely on a continental origin criterion to replace or at least supplement the phenotype one – Africa for 'blacks,' Australia for (Australian) aborigines, Europe for 'whites' – to allow the descent dimension to do the work he wants it to do.

Gracia treats his phenotypic and descent criteria as equally operative, thus explicitly rejecting the prioritizing of ancestry over phenotype that characterizes the U.S. view of race, captured in the notion of the 'one-drop rule' – that is, that any degree of African ancestry renders someone 'black,' independent of phenotype. Gracia rejects this rule because he sees it as inconsistent; it cannot be applied equally to all races. It is inherently asymmetrical; black ancestry trumps white, but not vice versa. On Gracia's view, no ancestry is privileged over any other; the degree of ancestry generates a comparable degree of membership in the given race, independently of the phenotype condition. But if a person with half African and half European ancestry looks like what most people take to be "white," on Gracia's view he is white, because of the phenotypic criterion.

Gracia describes a view of race, or at least of phenotype and ancestry, common in Latin America, that contrasts with that in the United States; in the former, there are many terms describing varying combinations and degrees of mixture (of both phenotype and ancestry), such as *mestizo* and *mulato*. All parts of the phenotypic and ancestral heritage are recognized in this terminology. This Latin American view is much closer to Gracia's own conception of race than is the U.S. view, for it jettisons the one-drop rule and is symmetrical across races. However, it is not quite the same as Gracia's, since his still retains a small number of racial group terms; racially mixed persons are not seen as falling in a classificatory group of those with that particular racial mixture (as in the Latin American conception) but rather as falling within multiple but a small number of standard racial groups corresponding to the distinct elements of their mixture.

There is an inconsistency between Gracia's account of race and what we saw that he wants his accounts of race and ethnicity to do, namely track the socio-historical, experiential reality of race. He imposes a purely intellectual requirement of symmetry across races, which is independent of the shared historical and experience of race. But in the United States 'race' was, historically and experientially, never a symmetrical concept. Its purpose was to validate the superiority of whites and the inferiority of all other races. This asymmetry is part of the meaning of race in the United States. The one-drop rule reflects how U.S. Americans understood both the concept and the social reality of race. The rule had an intelligible, if complex, rationale, viewed historically. First, by declaring the offspring of slave masters and slave women 'black,' these offspring were deprived of a claim to the superior status of 'whites,' or at least non-blacks. The rule increased the number of slaves, and facilitated slave masters' not acknowledging their

liaisons with slave women. The rule also helped to preserve, in the eyes of whites, a social correlate for the view of race that Gracia recognizes as under attack by recent scientific developments, that of a permanent and unalterable biological subdivision of the human species. And after Emancipation in 1865, the one-drop rule also had certain advantages for 'blacks,' and was explicitly discussed and contested within the black community. It prevented divisiveness between 'mixed' and 'unmixed' blacks (that there could not in reality be a clear phenotypic distinction between these two groups only supports this point); made it more difficult for whites to use 'mixed' blacks as a middle group to discipline blacks; and forged ties of solidarity based on the experience of discrimination shared (even if to different extents) by mixed and unmixed blacks. Abandoning the one-drop feature of the U.S. idea of race means abandoning something Gracia says he seeks – to reveal aspects of reality that would be hidden were we to lose or abandon those concepts, and to capture the principles underlying the way (non-Latino/a) U.S. Americans think about race.

### Alcoff

Alcoff's approach to race and ethnicity occupies a different conceptual terrain than Corlett's and, even more so, than Gracia's. She is not interested in their shared concern to examine whether race or ethnicity can be given coherent meanings, and, if so, what are the criteria for membership in racial and ethnic groups. Rather she is interested in race and ethnicity as lived realities in society and history. That is, she is interested in race and ethnicity as *kinds of experience*, and as *historical and social processes*. Corlett is also interested (more so than Gracia) in historical racism, primarily as a basis for judgments about justice and injustice that can drive public policy (the "Reparations" in the title of his book). But he does not frame this concern as something internal to the idea of race itself, as Alcoff does.

Even if the concept of race cannot stand up to scrutiny as the intellectually viable notion it has pretended to be, nevertheless race as an historical process has had a profound effect on human social life, and it is this effect with which Alcoff is concerned. Although she nowhere lays out a systematic account of race, or ethnicity, she does provide accounts of both along the way, and sees them as distinct social processes, doing different kinds of social, political, and ideological work.

In her book, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (2006), which collects, updates, and connects various previously published and in some cases already influential articles, Alcoff is more centrally interested in race than ethnicity. Along with gender, she sees race as having a necessary relationship to the body. This gives race a particular salience and inescapability. "[R]ace operates differently from ethnic or cultural identities, which can be transcended, with enough effort. Inherent to the concept of race is the idea that it exists there on the body itself, not simply on its ornaments or in its behavior" (p. 196). But race, Alcoff says, is not only about bodily features; it is also about attributing inherent and inescapable psychological or behavioral characteristics to a group, and seeing the bodily features as signs of the possession of such characteristics. Alcoff also includes a third feature, not quite as definitively, that the attributed traits are taken to mark the group in question as superior or inferior to other

such groups. Thus, for Alcoff, race marks characteristics that *are attributed to* groups; she does not see those characteristics as actually belonging to those groups. By contrast, Gracia looks for characteristics actually possessed by (racial and ethnic) groups to ground an account of them, and Corlett rejects the possibility of an account precisely on the basis that no such attributes can be found.

### *Alcoff on Latino/as*

Like Corlett and Gracia, Alcoff is particularly concerned with Latinos as an ethnic group; but unlike them, her discussion of Latinos is not part of an attempt to come up with a general account of ethnicity in general. On the contrary, she sees 'Latino' as being an importantly distinct kind of ethnicity in the United States, differing in important ways from other ethnic groups. Although she sees 'Latino' as having a basic ethnic meaning, she thinks that the group to which this term refers has been seen and treated, at least in part, in a *racial* manner as well. Latinos thus have a complex relationship to both race and ethnicity, and Alcoff is concerned to understand this relationship. But she is also concerned with the political and ethical question how Latinos *should* position themselves within U.S. society in relation to both race and ethnicity, and she sees the answer to this question (only) partly constrained by the current and historical ways that Latinos have been both ethnicized and racialized.

Alcoff very clearly recognizes that 'Latino' is not an ethnic identity in the way that nationally based ethnicities – such as Mexican American, Dominican American or Salvadoran American – are. Rather it is a *pan*-ethnicity, an umbrella of many distinct ethnocultural groups into one super ethnicity. She shows how Latino pan-ethnicity is created in the United States by several different factors – the pluralizing of Latin American ethnic populations, especially in cities that had been formerly dominated by one ethnonational group (Mexicans in Los Angeles, Puerto Ricans in New York, Cubans in Miami); the creation of a pan-Latino marketing niche; the increasing of mixed ethnic coupling and families; the political value of strength in numbers; the model of African Americans as a 'minority group' agitating for its interests; and the administrative convenience of the 'Hispanic/Latino' category. For these reasons, Alcoff says, Latino pan-ethnicity can feel artificial and 'constructed' in a way that ethnic, that is, ethnocultural, identities do not. Nevertheless, although pan-ethnicities lack the cultural substance that ethnicities like Mexican American possess, Latino pan-ethnicity has come to be a genuine social identity in the United States, one that is personally meaningful to many Latinos. The language of "ethnicity" can be used for both ethnocultural and pan-ethnocultural groups, and the distinction between them does tend to get lost in Gracia's account, while Alcoff's highlighting of pan-ethnicity is salutary in this respect.

### *The racializing of Latinos*

Latinos in the United States, especially immigrants, are often racialized in a way that is unfamiliar in their home countries. In this context, Alcoff means two distinct things by 'racialize.' One is that Latinos are treated as non-white and are stigmatized or seen as inferior in that respect. The other is that Latinos are pressed to claim a racial identity, which can include "white," in terms of standard US racial categories – white, black,

Asian, and so on. There is some evidence that this latter push to claim a racial identity has led some Latinos to claim "Latino" itself as a kind of racial identity, distinct from and alternative to standard U.S. racial categories (Haney Lopez, 2005). The second form of racialization does not necessarily inferiorize, since some (indeed many) Latinos can choose to be 'white.' But doing so can still be alienating and unwanted since it implies a demoting of their ethnocultural or panethnic identity in favor of a racial one to which they may well not feel a genuine affinity. The two forms of racialization operate at different levels, and so can coexist. For example, as a *group* Puerto Ricans might be racialized as (some type of) 'non-white,' but an *individual* light-skinned Puerto Rican might be seen as 'white.'

Regarding the 'non-whitening' form of racialization, Alcoff says that different Latino ethnonational groups are treated differently, a difference also sensitive to geographical location (2006, p. 241). So Mexican Americans are more likely to be seen racially by others, especially whites, than are, say, Argentine Americans; and this is also more likely to be so when the Latino population of a certain area (say the Southwest) is predominantly Mexican American. Alcoff credits Gracia with recognizing that the category 'Latino/Hispanic' carries ethnically distinct associations in different parts of the United States ("tacos in California, *arroz con gandules* in New York" [p. 241]); she adds to his point that it is differently racialized as well.

Alcoff asks how Latinos should respond to the forms of racialization she has described. That is, she assumes that while Latinos cannot necessarily stop either the non-whitening or the 'choosing a race' processes from taking place, they can assert some agency in the face of these forces. She mentions three different options. One is to embrace the non-whitening racialization but attempt to reverse its valuation – for example, by accepting or adopting a 'brown' racial identity but revaluing it as positive rather than negative, on the model of what U.S. blacks have attempted to do. A second option is to attempt as much as possible to take on a 'white' racial identity and thereby avoid racial stigma; or, to put it another way, to assimilate into white society, the way that the early twentieth-century waves of Southern and Eastern Europeans managed to do by the 1950s or so (see Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2005).

The third option, to which Alcoff devotes the most attention, is the 'ethnic option,' which she sees as attractive yet ultimately misguided. This option involves resisting both modes of racialization by asserting that 'Latino' is a (pan)ethnic rather than a racial identity and that Latinos wish to privilege that (pan)ethnic identity (and perhaps their particular ethnocultural identities as well). Alcoff associates this option with Corlett's rejection of race in favor of ethnicity, but this is somewhat misleading as Corlett favors ethnicity over race because he does not see race as intellectually coherent, not (as Alcoff does) as politically problematic.

### *How should Latinos respond to racialization?*

In favor of the ethnic option, Alcoff notes that racial terminology tends to carry historically sedimented associations of inherent natures and group hierarchies of worth, even if many users of that terminology believe themselves to be using racial language in a neutral, merely classificatory way. Ethnic terminology does not generally carry these deleterious associations. Alcoff also sees the ethnic option as an advantage because

ethnicity highlights a group's agency – creating its own ethnoculture – while race is an identity imposed from outside the group, and, with the implication of an essential and inherent nature, invokes passivity and determinism (2006, p. 236). Indeed, Alcoff suggests that U.S. blacks have attempted to self-ethnicize by affirming 'African American' as a label of choice over the more distinctly racial 'black,' thereby adding an ethnic association to the group's raciality. Finally, Alcoff points to Latinos being comprised of all of the conventional racial groups (Europeans, Africans, indigenous people, and a smaller number of Asians), and generally a mixture of the first three. So how can they be a 'race' in the U.S. sense?

Alcoff agrees with these positive arguments in favor of the ethnic option; but she nevertheless rejects it as a path for Latinos. First, there is a self-deceptive aspect to it. Just because one embraces an ethnic label does not mean that others will thereby stop seeing one racially. She contrasts Latinos (and Asian Americans) with white ethnics (Polish Americans, Italian Americans) in this respect. The latter groups, she says, managed through ethnic assertion eventually to avoid (group) racialization; but Latinos' ethnic assertiveness tends to evoke guilt and resistance in the white population "because [it] invoke[s] the history of colonialism, annexation, of lands, slavery, and genocide" (2006, p. 243). These associations pull toward a racializing (non-whitening) of *these populations and thus prevent Latinos' and Asian Americans' ethnic (or pan-ethnic) assertion from having a deracializing effect.*

Both Alcoff's arguments here are problematic. It is true that white ethnics were deracialized in the sense that they stopped being seen by other whites as inferiorized populations with inferior inherent characteristics – a process documented in recent scholarship (Roediger, 2005; Jacobson, 1998). But they accomplished this precisely by coming to be seen definitively and unproblematically as *white*; so they were not deracialized in the sense of not being seen racially, as the 'ethnic option' tries to do. Although current white ethnics often attempt to distance themselves from a white identity by foregrounding their ethnicity, they are still very much thought of as, and recognize themselves to be, white (see Waters, 1990). Alcoff's claim about the historical associations white Americans have with Latinos and Asians and their ethnic assertion is also questionable. Most whites are too unaware of, or deluded about, that history to make those associations of colonization, land-grabbing, and genocide.

But Alcoff's primary argument against the ethnic option is that it is more fruitful for Latinos not to resist North American racialization, since it is essentially impossible to do so, but rather to change the terms of that racialization by attaching more positive meanings to race. She is not naïve about this daunting task; the negative meanings of race are deeply culturally embedded and cannot be willed away. But she takes heart from the work of Paul Gilroy, Robert Gooding-Williams, Lewis Gordon, bell hooks, Patricia Williams, and others, who have looked to an expansive, diasporic notion of blackness that is more cultural and less biologicistic and geneticist in character, often rooted in cultural expression, interchange, and historical memory in "the Black Atlantic" (Africa, the United States, the UK, and the Caribbean, as in the concept developed by Gilroy, 1993). (Literature on "the Black Atlantic" has tended, until fairly recently, to omit the black presence in Latin America.) "[T]he meanings of race are subject to some movement. Only a semantic essentialist could argue that race can only mean biological essentialism; in reality, this is not the way meaning works" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 244).

While this solution to the problem of what Latinos should attempt to do about racialization is realistic in recognizing the power of race in U.S. life, Alcoff makes the search for a positive racialization harder for herself because of the way she thinks about racial 'blackness.' She looks to a *cultural* blackness provided by the diasporic perspective to supply a sense of agency and avoid the implication associated with racial(ized) blackness of inherent psychological qualities constituting an inferior nature. What Alcoff largely misses here is that the process of racialization itself, independent of its diasporic development, has always included a component of agentic resistance by 'blacks' to the inferiorizing and essentializing aspects of racialization. That is, a continual theme in African American thought, and in pan-African thought more generally, has been to challenge the inferiority in humanity, dignity, capability, and intellect that has been attributed to them. So the agentic challenge to racialized inferiority can arise from within, and be a product of, racialization itself, arising from within a racialized ethnos; it does not have to be sought, as Alcoff does, solely in ethnicity or culture (although it can be found there as well, though perhaps in a less politically focused form).

Another way to put this point is to say that Alcoff's account of race fails to see a politically progressive racial solidarity as standardly arising from racialized groups, racialized ethne. While the point of Alcoff's book is to defend the importance of racial identities as a source of politics, she locates that importance primarily in social and historical power relationships, epistemic perspectives, expressivist concerns, and the need for identity-based representation. Surprisingly absent is that, in the United States and elsewhere, black racial identity has in addition given rise to a sense of politicized (racialized) peoplehood and solidarity – a solidarity that has itself challenged the negative attributes and the inferiorized social position associated with blackness. Exploring the possibility of a similar racialized agency for Latinos in challenging the inferiorization and racial essentializing to which that group is and has been subject might facilitate Alcoff's search for an agentic and political identity that accepts the inescapable fact of racialization.

Alcoff also discusses *mestizaje* – an idea common to the national self-images of several Latin American countries. *Mestizaje* means 'mixedness,' and generally connotes both 'racial' and cultural mixing among the founding populations of Latin America – indigenous peoples, Europeans, Africans. This idea has been used, especially in Brazil where it is called 'racial democracy,' to deny or downplay continuing inequality between a disadvantaged population of people of predominant indigenous or African origin, and a privileged one of predominant European ancestry. Alcoff decries this masking of inequality and of the continuing stigmatizing of African and indigenous peoples in Latin America. She calls attention to this racism, although she does see the idea of *mestizaje* as having some liberatory and cosmopolitan potential. Nevertheless, Alcoff shares with Gracia a denial of anything positive in the U.S. system of racial classification, which denies or downplays mixedness in favor of grouping all people of African ancestry into the 'black' group. But the expanded black solidarity enabled by the one-drop rule is precisely a way to avoid the mystifications of *mestizaje* and to foreground racial injustice.

*Related chapters:* 7 Darwinism; 17 Ethnic-Group Terms; 18 Identity and Philosophy; 20 *Mestizaje* and Hispanic Identity.

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