

Jorge J.E. Gracia. *Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008. 252 pp.

Social analysts have long predicted the demographic shift in the United States that will result in 1 in 5 Americans being of Latino/a descent by 2030. This transformation has reawakened nativism among pundits and ordinary citizens who worry that these new immigrants will erode the civic and political bonds of American society. While these suspicions are not new, large Latina/o immigration in an era of economic uncertainty gives rise to many questions.

Jorge Gracia's new book enters into this discussion—a path usually traversed by social scientists and journalists—with the analytic tools of a philosopher. He hopes to address the reservations surrounding the Latino population explosion by engaging in a rational examination of the idea of ethnicity. In some ways, this book reiterates the core argument about Latino ethnicity that Gracia made previously in *Hispanic/Latino Identity* (2000). It is edifying to see how he has engaged his interlocutors in this new work and strengthened his arguments.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first, and perhaps most original part of his work, Gracia investigates the false dilemmas that plague discussions of identity today and lead us into thinking that there must be some essential component to any ethnic identity. Ultimately, Gracia argues in favor of what he calls the “Familial Historical View” of Latino/a ethnicity. Latinos/as constitute an extended family that came into existence after 1492. The *mestizaje* of European, African, and indigenous peoples generated this group whose history we tell today as the story of Latinos/as. Like the members of a family posing in a portrait, Latinas/os resemble one another and, as a family, have some features that distinguish them from other ethnic groups. But there are no single characteristics that all Latinos/as hold in common in the same way that, in a family portrait, not everyone has the same eyes or nose. Not all Latinos/as speak Spanish or have brown faces, but that does not mean that there are not distinct cultural traits among a certain section of humanity such that we can say they share a general Latina/o identity. These traits are not fixed for all time, either, in the same way that a family can grow, add new members, and reconfigure the fluid features that bond them.

The next section examines the position of Latinos/as in U.S. society, using the community of academic philosophers as an example. Gracia details the ways in which the marketplace of this discipline continues to pose significant barriers to the survival and flourishing of Latino/a academics. Given these institutional obstacles, Gracia

advocates for affirmative action and language rights for Latinas/os, not on the basis of rectifying past injustices (as is perhaps justified for African Americans), but to enable them to now participate as full members of American society. The final section presents the concept of Latino/a philosophy, as opposed to literature, history, or cultural studies, and advocates a place for it in the canon of Western philosophy.

Latinos in America demonstrates Gracia's mastery of the literature in an area he helped to define. Philosophers will appreciate his rigorous thinking and the general reader will also be pleased with how he writes humorously and with personal commitment toward the inclusion of Latinos/as in the decision-making processes of American life and culture. He has shown that Latinas/os are a unique people in the history of the world, and, contrary to the nativists, that they have an important social and intellectual contribution to make toward the well-being of humanity.

José-Antonio Orosco
Oregon State University