Latino/a Identities
The difficulties raised by social identities are many, complex, and confusing. They have at least two sources: first, the very notion that there are overall and general social identities for groups at all; second, the fact that this kind of identity seems to dissolve into many other, more particular, identities. We are Latinos, but some of us are also Puerto Ricans or Mexicans. Can we make sense of this? Can we talk meaningfully about a Latino identity and Latino identities? These questions take on added significance when the social and political implications of the use of social identity labels is considered.

Two difficulties are particularly vexing. The first is a version of the old problem of the one and the many: How is it possible for someone to have an overall, general identity, such as Latino, and at the same time have other, less general ones, such as Mexican and Tarahumara? Does it make sense for the same person to have several social identities, and if so, how is this to be understood?

The second problem has to do with the question of what social identities entail. Does having these identities entail common properties that constitute the ground for the identities and distinguish between those who have the identities and those who do not? At first our intuitions seem to justify this idea, but upon reflection serious difficulties come up. For it is far from clear that the members of a group that signals a social identity of the sort Latino is, share any properties.

In this chapter, I suggest that the issue of identity among Latinos presents us with at least two major dilemmas. One is a choice between what I label generalism and particularism, and the other between essentialism and eliminativism. I argue that there is a third alternative to the second dilemma that favors neither essentialism nor eliminativism, and that there should be no need to
choose between generalism and particularism, for both positions have something valuable to offer in context. In short, I reject the dilemmas and propose a more nuanced solution to the problem of identity among Latinos which should open the way for dealing with the social and political significance of Latino identities. I call this the Familial-Historical View of Latino identities.

The issue I take up here and the solution I offer to the difficulties it poses are closely related to two other topics that have received some attention recently. The first concerns the number and kind of identities that persons can have. The examples I have provided are of ethnic identities because our topic here is Latino identity and this is an ethnic identity. But ethnic identities, although extraordinarily important, both personally and socially, are only one kind of social identity. Other social identities frequently mentioned these days include racial, gender, sexual, religious, and national, to name just a few.

The second topic that is receiving considerable attention today is the way these various identities are related to each other and how they are negotiated by both individual persons and particular groups. What difference does it make personally and socially if a person is both Latina and female, or if she is Angla and female? And what of a man who is Anglo but gay and one who is Anglo but heterosexual? Even a superficial perusal of these cases indicate that there are differences, sometimes significant, because ethnic identities often include behavioral patterns and views about gender orientation and sexuality. And matters become even more complex when we consider national identities, particularly because in some cases the same terms used to refer to them are also used to refer to ethnic ones. ‘Mexican’ is used to talk about Mexican nationals and ethnic Mexicans whether they are also nationals or not. So how do these different identities function within an individual person and within society? This topic is some times discussed under the label ‘intersectionality.’

Obviously, both the question concerning the number and kind of identities persons have, as well as the issue of intersectionality, are related to the questions I raise in this chapter, and whatever one concludes about them will affect the topic of the chapter. However, it would be impossible to give them the kind of treatment they deserve, and so I must put them aside for another time.¹

I. Two Dilemmas

Let me begin by formulating the two dilemmas. Here is the first:

Either there is one general Latino identity or many particular Latino identities. If there is one general identity, then there cannot be many particular ones, and if there are many particular ones, then there cannot be one general identity.

According to this dilemma, we cannot maintain that I am both Latino and Cuban, for example. I am one or the other, and to be one precludes that I am the other. Let me call this conundrum the Generalism vs Particularism Dilemma. The idea is that more general identities preclude more particular ones, and vice versa, because one can have one and only one group identity of the sort we are talking about. In our especial case, the general Latino identity precludes more particular identities, such as Cuban or Mexican, and each of these particular identities precludes a general one. We must, therefore, choose one identity and discard the talk about the others.

The problem is that no matter which horn of the dilemma we choose, we end up dissatisfied. The rejection of an overall Latino identity appears to be as unsatisfactory as the rejection of particular identities, because we both understand and feel right when we are described as, say, Latino and Cuban, Latino and Mexican, or Tarahumara and Mexican. The second dilemma runs as follows:

Either there is an essential set of properties entailed by an ethnic identity or there is not. If there is such a set, all those persons who instantiate the properties in the set also share in the Latino identity. But if there is no such a set of properties, then there is no group of persons who share the identity.

According to this dilemma, I cannot maintain that I am Latino or Cuban, or have the Latino or Cuban identity, unless I can point to a set of necessary properties that I share with other Latinos or Cubans. Let me call this the Essentialism vs Eliminativism Dilemma. The thought here is that an essence is necessary for the concept of a group identity. Latino or Cuban identities require essences, otherwise they do not exist. But this dilemma, just as the first, leaves us dissatisfied because neither of its horns is acceptable. The facts seem to contradict it: we seem not to share an essential set of properties with the other members of the social groups to which we belong, and yet we seem to have these identities.
A. Generalism vs particularism

Let’s consider the Generalism vs Particularism Dilemma first. Latinos have clearly been concerned with both general identities, such as Latino or Hispanic, and particular identities, such as Mexican or Puerto Rican. We tend to be either generalists or particularists. In philosophy, the concern for a general identity reveals itself among Latinos in discussions about whether there is such a thing as a Latino philosophy and the kind of characteristics it has. The first attempt in this direction is found in Juan Bautista Alberdi’s *Ideas para presidir a la confección del curso de filosofía contemporánea en el Colegio de Humanidades* (1842). And the project has continued among thinkers as diverse as Ernesto Mayz Vallenilla, Enrique Dussel, and Francisco Miró Quesada. This effort has also extended beyond philosophy to peoples themselves; authors such as José Vasconcelos, Eduardo Nicol, and I have argued for overarching identities, Latino or Hispanic.

The search for particular identities is evident in discussions of the character of various regional and national philosophies and of peoples from certain regions or nations. Philosophers have repeatedly addressed the identity of Mexican or Peruvian philosophy, or of the Mexican or Peruvian peoples, for example. Among those best known for their efforts in a general direction are Félix Schwartzmann and Leopoldo Zea. And among those who have tried to find what is characteristic of particular peoples, is Samuel Ramos.

It would be interesting to discover a pattern from the more general to the more particular, or vice versa, in these discussions of identity. Say that one


could find that discussions of more general identities occur first, chronologically speaking, and that it is only because of the difficulties associated with this enterprise that the discussion shifts to particular identities. Or alternatively, that discussions of more particular identities precede discussions of more general ones. But there appears to be no such a pattern. The search for more general identities does not always occur first, and it continues while the discussion of more particular identities is under way: Ramos’s emphasis on Mexicanity (mejicanidad) is balanced out by Nicol’s emphasis on Hispanicity (hispanidad). The reverse is also the case: Vasconcelos’s interest in Latin America as a whole precedes the more nationalistic emphases of later thinkers.

In this, the situation in Latin America is somewhat different from the situation we encounter in the discussion of identity in the United States. In this country, discussions of a more general identity, such as American identity, seem to occur first. The founding fathers and others made attempts to pin down an identity for the newly established country. But, more recently, the focus has shifted to other, more particular, identities: Black, African American, Latino, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, gender, gay, and so on. And even within these more particular identities, there has been a narrowing or particularization. In this connection, the case of Latinos is instructive, because the discussion seems to begin with a more general approach, such as Latino or Hispanic identity, but later we find challenges to this general concept and an emphasis instead on more particular identities, such as Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and Mexican American. Yet, this has not stopped the talk about more general identities in America. Indeed, if we look at analyses of Black or African-American identity, we see that it goes back a long way, well into the nineteenth century and the work of Alexander Crummell and W. E. B. Du Bois. And the concern with a general American identity is still in full swing.

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6 Ramos, El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México; Nicol, El problema de la filosofía hispánica.
7 Vasconcelos, Obras completas.
In spite of these differences, the logic of identity displays similarities in the United States and the Latino world. Perhaps the most important is that, no matter how the discussion begins, the tendency is to address issues that are both general and particular, although the authors engaged in these controversies are often polarized and opposed to each other. Concerns for identity in Latin America fall into two quite distinct groups: those that favor more general approaches and those that do not. There are some authors who go so far as to reject identity altogether except at the individual level, a development that mirrors the situation in the United States.\(^\text{10}\)

The arguments proposed by generalists and particularists may be characterized in three ways: some are a priori, some a posteriori, and some pragmatic. The a priori argument is most commonly found in philosophy, the a posteriori argument is particularly evident among historians, and the pragmatic argument is often proposed by political scientists. Curiously, all three kinds of arguments are used by the two factions mentioned. For example, many philosophers who argue against the idea of a general Latin American philosophical identity, such as Risieri Frondizi, do so based on an a priori conception of philosophy.\(^\text{11}\) They claim that philosophy, like physics and other disciplinary enterprises, is interested in truth, and truth has no national or ethnic alliances. It would be preposterous to argue that mathematics can be Latin American or French, in the sense that the mathematics done in Latin America or France are significantly different from the discipline practiced in Spain or Germany. Likewise, for these authors it makes no sense to claim any kind of identity, whether general or particular, for philosophy. This argument is a priori because its conclusion is derived from a presupposed conception of philosophy as a universal discipline which is not adopted on the basis of experience.

Those who oppose this point of view respond also based on an a priori, although different, conception of philosophy. They argue, as Leopoldo Zea does, that philosophy, unlike other disciplines of learning, has to do with particular cultural and historical points of view and, therefore, its conclusions are colored and affected by these points of view.\(^\text{12}\) In this sense, philosophy develops an identity depending on the time and place in which it is practiced.


\(^\text{11}\) Risieri Frondizi, “¿Hay una filosofía latinoamericana?” *Realidad* 3 (1948), 158–70.

Latin America, in virtue of its historical location, provides a unique vantage point that gives Latin American philosophy a particular identity different from other philosophies. Again, the argument is a priori in that it is based on a presupposed conception of philosophy not based on experience, but the conception in this case is particular and perspectival.

The a posteriori argument used to support general or particular identities argues from a consideration of observable facts. Interestingly enough, here also the same kind of argument is used to support the two conflicting points of view. For some the facts clearly preclude the notion of any kind of general identity, whereas for others they confirm it. Consider again the case of philosophy. Those who oppose the notion of a more general identity point to the enormous variety of philosophical styles and positions that Latino philosophers have adopted throughout history, asking rhetorically: What do they have in common? And more concretely, for example, what does scholastic philosophy have in common with positivism, or phenomenology with analysis, as these philosophical perspectives are found in Latin America?

At the opposite end we have those who find some unity in Latin American philosophy, for example. Some of them argue that there is a concerted effort in every period of development in Latin American philosophy to search for freedom and liberation, and that this search arises from the marginal and oppressed situation of Latin America. This, they claim, not only gives unity to Latin American philosophy, but distinguishes it from other philosophies, such as French or German, which are philosophies of what Enrique Dussel has called “the Center.” Some also argue that Latin Americans in general display attitudes that distinguish them from, say, Anglo Americans, clearly indicating that there is an identity at play. Vasconcelos figures prominently among those who argue thus, and more recently, liberationists such as Dussel, as well as more traditional authors, such as Juan Rivano and Augusto Salazar Bondy, echo similar claims.

The argument is often made that these factual characteristics

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15 Vasconcelos, Obras completas; Augusto Salazar Bondy, The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Thought, ed. John P. Augelli (Kansas City: Lawrence Center for Latin American Studies of the University of Kansas, 1969); and the works of Dussel and Rivano cited earlier.
Latino/a Identities are the result of a history of colonization and exploitation common to all of Latin America.\footnote{Walter Mignolo, “Latinos (and Latino Studies) in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity,” in Gracia and De Greiff (eds.), Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights, pp. 99–124.}

Finally, the pragmatic approach focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of the use of general notions to describe particular phenomena. Those who oppose such use bring out the counterproductive consequences of general approaches to situations marked by very different conditions at the local level.\footnote{Eduardo Mendieta, “The ‘Second Reconquista,’ or Why Should a ‘Hispanic’ become a Philosopher?” Philosophy and Social Criticism 27, 2 (2001), 11–19.} One thing is to talk about economic development in Argentina, where the population is largely educated and European, and another to do it in Bolivia, where most of the population is uneducated and of pre-Columbian origin. Indeed, this applies even within the same country: one thing is to speak about the economic situation in Mendoza and another to do so about El Chaco, both provinces in Argentina. Differences in geography and natural resources make it difficult to apply the same economic analyses and measures in different locations throughout Latin America – the pampas are different from the Andes, the Amazonian basin from Patagonia. And what is true of economics is also true elsewhere.

On the other hand, those who argue pragmatically in favor of a general Latin American identity point out, for example, that there is a common history to Latin America, as well as many cultural threads in its population. How can we ignore that most of Latin America was conquered and subjugated by Spain and Portugal? Aren’t Spanish and Portuguese the predominant languages in the area? Don’t the overwhelming religious leanings toward Roman Catholicism count for anything? One need only look at the architecture of the region to see common elements. And the history of colonial oppression serves to create a common experience. To ignore these facts, they argue, is to ignore the Latino reality.

Who is right? In thinking about the Latino world, should we take the particular route and discard the general, or should we take the general and discard the particular? This is the dilemma, and one that stirs the passions. Proponents of either side are adamant about how wrong the other side is. Just as happens between proponents of general Latino or Hispanic identities in the United States and those who oppose them in favor of such identities as Dominican or Venezuelan, there seems to be no meeting point, no compromise, acceptable to the opposing sides. Generalists are wrong, according to particularists, and particularists are wrong, according to generalists. And that puts an end to the
discussion. Of course, the real conundrum is that the arguments offered for these positions, whether a priori, a posteriori, or pragmatic, are evenly divided. But do we have to take sides? Is there any way to mediate what appear to be two irreconcilable views?

Before we can answer these questions it is helpful to take a look at the assumptions made by generalism and particularism. Indeed, it is my claim that these assumptions set up the logic of the Generalism vs Particularism Dilemma and are responsible for the apparent irreconcilability of these positions. These assumptions are revealed by the second false dilemma mentioned earlier: Essentialism vs Eliminativism.

B. Essentialism vs eliminativism

Essentialism is the view according to which things have essences and essences consist of sets of properties that characterize the things that have those essences. In common philosophical jargon: sets of necessary and sufficient conditions. Thomas Aquinas was an essentialist with respect to human nature, for example, because according to him, human beings share a set of properties specified in a definition that expresses their essence: humans are rational animals. If one is an essentialist with respect to Latino identity or Mexican identity, one holds that there is a set of such properties that characterizes anyone who is Latino or Mexican.

At the opposite end of the spectrum we have the view that there are no essences. Jean-Paul Sartre was an eliminativist with respect to human essence. His position is known as existentialism rather than eliminativism, because he argued that humans exist (whence the term existentialism), but what they are (their essence) is the result of their individual free choice. I prefer to call it eliminativism in this context, rather than existentialism, for two reasons: its negative claim about essence and the fact that this term is used in the recent literature concerned with social identities. According to Sartre, we are free to choose what we want to be, and there is no set of properties that we necessarily share. When this view is applied to our question, the answer is that there is no such a thing as a Latino, or even a Mexican identity, for there is no essence to them. There are only individual identities forged by individual humans.

The kinds of arguments given for essentialism and eliminativism duplicate to a great extent the arguments given earlier for generalism and particularism and so there is no need to repeat them. Some are a priori, some a posteriori, and some pragmatic. It is not difficult to find them in the literature on identity

produced in Latin American countries, and certainly they are frequent in the philosophical literature in this country. A similar situation to the one described earlier ensues: a sharp disagreement which appears unresolvable. On the one hand, some authors favor identity at group level, whether general or particular, and on the other, some object to any identity except at the individual level.

What are we to do, then? The a priori arguments mentioned would take us into the murky waters of the very foundations of philosophy. There is no point in even trying to pursue this line of thinking because philosophers are quite divided about these issues. The a posteriori arguments seem to lead nowhere, in that it is not the facts that are disputed but which facts are considered relevant. Again, this seems to lead us to presuppositions that it would be too difficult to evaluate except by going into areas that are too far from our topic. Finally, the pragmatic arguments do not seem to be convincing insofar as, again, the advantages and disadvantages emphasized by the opposing factions seem to be rather selective and depend on pre-established goals. Are we at an impasse, then?

Here is a suggestion for getting out of the situation, in three parts: first, the dichotomies on which the contrary positions examined are based are misguided; second, the first dichotomy, between generalism and particularism, is based on the second, that is, that between essentialism and eliminativism; and third, the second dichotomy, between essentialism and eliminativism, relies on a misguided notion of identity. In short, I claim that the alternatives from which to choose are not just essentialism and eliminativism, or generalism and particularism, but that there is a third alternative to essentialism and eliminativism, which if adopted also opens a third alternative to generalism and particularism. The notion of identity does not require that one subscribe to essentialism or that identities be exclusive of each other. It is possible for the same person or persons to share a variety of identities, some of which are more general and some less general. One can be Latino, Mexican, and Tarahumara. But how is this possible? By taking into account the relational, contextual, and historical nature of identity.

II. Four Basic Questions about Identity

One way to make this point clear is by asking four questions:

1. How do identities function?
2. How do identities arise?
3. How do identities endure?
4. What does having an identity entail?
The first question is intended to ask for the use we make of identities. Let’s look at a concrete case, say, me. I am Cuban, but I am also considered to be Latin American and Latino. It would be difficult to contradict anyone who says that I am one of these, and in fact I feel quite comfortable when I am described in these ways. I was born in Cuba, of Cuban parents. When I hear Cuban music I have difficulty keeping my feet still. I love hot weather, the beach, the sweet/sour humor from the island, and the easy-going, friendly attitude of Cubans. When I encounter a group of Cubans at a gathering, I tend to gravitate toward them because I feel comfortable in their company, never mind their political allegiance. And a few years ago, when I decided that I was going to collect art, I decided to do it with Cuban-American art. And what kind of pieces do I collect? All sorts, but some of them clearly have a connection to my particular Cuban experience. One example is Alberto Rey’s painting of El Morro, one of the architectural icons of Havana. El Morro is a fortress that guards the port of Havana, and is the first and last thing one sees when arriving or departing by boat from the Havana harbor. Rey’s painting is done mono-chromatically in shades of grey, which is exactly what I saw in 1961 when I was leaving the port at dusk on my way to West Palm Beach. Would I have acquired the painting if I were not Cuban and not had the experience of leaving? Perhaps, because it is a stunning rendition of an impressive structure. But the fact that I am Cuban and the painting arouses certain feelings and memories surely had something to do with it.

But I am also Latino, am I not? I feel that way in particular when I travel to Europe, or when I am in the company of Anglo Americans. I am not part of them in some significant ways – I am from another part of the world. And they agree. For some Spaniards, those with stereotypical ideas and prejudices against Latin Americans, who indiscriminately lump all of us together, I am a Sudaca (even if coming from Cuba), and for Anglo Americans I am a Hispanic. Moreover, I share a strong kinship with the places I have visited in Latin America. I have traveled almost everywhere in Mexico – indeed, I know Mexico better than most Mexicans. I can identify with the food, the music, the courtesy of the Mexicans. I am married to an Argentinian (yes, they are Latinos too, in spite of what many of them think). So I have learned to cook bife a la plancha, and dulce’e leche sends me to Olympus (it is almost as good as dulce’e guayaba).

And I feel Latino. I have strong ties to other Latinos in the United States and elsewhere, and with them I feel something different from what I feel when I am with Latinos who live in Latin America. And I also act Latino. Indeed, I was the founding member and first chair of the American Philosophical Association Committee for Hispanics in Philosophy, so I have been committed to a certain course of action, promoting the interests of Latinos for some time.
Whenever possible I try to help Latino graduate students and young philosophers in their careers, and often I encourage them to learn something about their intellectual heritage.

These examples illustrate both feelings of solidarity and certain actions I take. I feel Cuban, Latin American, and Latino, but I also act in certain ways, gravitating toward Cubans at parties, collecting Cuban-American art, visiting Latin American countries, eating certain foods, and promoting the interests of other Latinos and of Latino cultures. Let me summarize the point by saying that I both feel and act in accordance with my Cuban, Latin American, and Latino identities. These are two major functions of identities: they generate feelings of solidarity with certain people and they give rise to certain actions that otherwise would probably not take place.¹⁹

Now for the second question: How do identities arise? Well, how did I become Cuban and Latino? Surely the factors involved are many and variegated. The tendency these days is to focus on one factor to the exclusion of others. I constantly hear the mantra that the United States government created Hispanic identity – this in spite of the fact that the term ‘Hispanic’ was in use long before United States bureaucrats adopted it to refer to people like me and that it was picked by United States bureaucrats precisely because it was available. I also hear that United States international policies created Hispanic identity – and this in spite of the fact that Latinos were talking about themselves as a group long before there was a United States at all. The first distancing and contrast developed in Latin America was not between Latin America and the United States, but between criollos (descendants of Iberians born in Latin America) and peninsulares (born in Iberia), although the membership of these divisions fluctuates from place to place. I have not yet heard that Cuban identity was created by anybody, but perhaps some will argue that it is the United States again that is responsible for it. If this were true, then I really would be a rather curious artifact, created by the United States. Am I? Just tell the father of the Cuban nation, José Martí, that he was a United States created artifact! He talked about Hispanics and “our America” long before United States bureaucrats thought of putting all of us together under a label.

Do I want to deny that there is some truth to the claims concerning the influence of the United States on Latino identities? Of course not. American foreign policy, American bureaucrats, and the United States government have had to do with the creation of much that I am. But, contrary to what many believe, the United States is not as powerful as it thinks. Indeed, it has proven to be very ineffective insofar as it often fails to accomplish much that it tries to do in the world. And although it is true that the United States may have

been responsible to some extent for the creation of some Latino countries and United States bureaucrats have helped consolidate a Hispanic identity in this country, it is just not the case that this extends to all countries of Latin America or makes the United States government and its bureaucrats solely responsible for Latino identities in the United States or elsewhere.

My identities are not the result of an act or acts of political or economic fiat, whether American or otherwise. There is more to their origin than this. Any one-sided attempt to analyze the origin of my identities, and for that matter of any other identities, is simply inaccurate. Identities are the result of complex historical processes that shape us individually and as groups. Isolation contributes to them, provided that there is also some other identity with which they can be contrasted. Being on an island is certainly a major factor in the development of a Cuban identity. Particular events tie people in certain ways and separate them in others. A war, a dispute, a treaty, a natural disaster, topography, an invasion, government actions, migrations, economic forces, the publication of a book, all these are important factors in the construction of identities. Some of these factors do not consist in conscious efforts to create identities, and indeed most of them do not. The formation of identities involves both conscious and unconscious factors. In the contemporary philosophical jargon, identities, including social ones, are the result of both “internal” (what we think) and “external” (causes other than our thought) factors. This is the answer to the second question concerning how identities arise.

And what are we to say to the third question: How do identities endure? Well, how is it that I personally endure as Jorge Gracia? We must acknowledge that the key to the answer is that I change and yet remain the same. Certainly I am not the baby that wet its diapers in the early forties. I might get to the stage of wetting diapers again, if I live long enough, but somehow that situation will not be the same as it was in the early forties. I remain the same while I also change. Change is of the essence when it comes to endurance, and this applies to social identities. Cuban identity has changed and has been affected by events during the past one hundred years, and the same could be said about Latino identity. This very discussion might affect Latino identity insofar as it might modify how some of us think about it and promote events – publications, discussions, and so on – that will influence not only our feelings, but also our actions.

Change is of the essence for certain identities; survival requires adaptation, and adaptation involves change. Consider the need for change in organisms. Evolution has demonstrated that change is necessary for the survival of species, and the same could be said when it comes to organic individuals. We survive because we adapt to new circumstances. How is it that some species have endured whereas others have been annihilated? How is it that I am still alive while many of my friends from high school are dead? Without change, most
species and individuals would die out in time as a result of the challenges they have to face in their environment.

Now let me turn to the fourth and crucial question: What does having an identity entail? We know that an identity is a source of feelings and actions, it originates through conscious and unconscious historical processes, and it is subject to change. If this is so, then it would seem that the two dichotomies we considered earlier fail to explain what Latino identity, or for that matter any other group identity, is. Essentialism appears misguided insofar as it does not allow for change. If an identity entails a fixed number of unchanging properties, then endurance is doubtful. Yet, the fact that an identity is a source of feelings and actions points to its existence, so eliminativism cannot be right either. Indeed, the discussion of the various identities that have a claim on me, some more general (Latino) and some more particular (Cuban), indicate that the generalism vs particularism dichotomy also does not work. But, then, in what does an identity consist, and what does it entail?

Clearly, it cannot consist in a set of unchanging, essential properties. Identities need to be conceived as flexible, contextual, historical, and relational. The position I propose, the Familial-Historical View, satisfies these conditions. I have discussed it in greater detail elsewhere in the context of Hispanics in particular and ethnic groups in general, and therefore here I limit the presentation to its fundamental tenets in order to avoid duplication. Let me apply it to the case of Latinos.

III. The Familial-Historical View of Latino Identities

Alexander Crummell and W. E. B. Du Bois were the first to make use of the notion of a historical family to explain the unity of social groups, but they did it in the context of race. The former gives only a sketchy idea of what he has in mind, and therefore is of no help to us here. Du Bois is more specific. After rejecting the nineteenth-century biological view of race, he presents his sociological position in an often quoted passage:

the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races. . . . What then is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally common blood and language, always common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.\footnote{Du Bois, The Conservation of Races, p. 74. My emphasis.}

\footnote{Du Bois, The Conservation of Races, p. 74. My emphasis.}
A race is a family that always has a common history, traditions, and impulses, although other things, such as language and blood, also enter into the mix. Elsewhere Du Bois returns to the kinship provided by history:

[O]ne thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group vary with the ancestors that they have in common with many others. . . . But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas.21

This is still not enough for our purposes, because Du Bois does not sufficiently dwell on what he takes a racial family to be, or specify what he means by history and the pertinent aspects of it for his view. The vagueness of this position has led to a number of criticisms and interpretations. Is he an essentialist or a non-essentialist? He seems to waver.22 If his view is essentialistic, then it would be of no help to us insofar as we need an alternative to essentialism. And if it is not essentialistic, then we need more than he has given us in order to apply the view to Latinos.

I propose, instead, to use the version of the Familial-Historical View I have defended elsewhere and apply it to Latinos.23 It is more developed, containing some of the specific elements missing in Du Bois, and can effectively answer the objections based on the difficulties posed by the individuation of races and ethne to be discussed in chapter 2. Here is the formula:

Latino identities are identities of Latino ethne, and Latino ethne are sub-groups of individual humans that satisfy the following conditions: (1) they belong to many generations; (2) they are organized as families and break down into extended families; and (3) they are united through historical relations that produce features which, in context, serve (i) to identify the members of the groups and (ii) to distinguish them from members of other groups.

22 See Appiah’s discussion in In My Father’s House, ch. 2.
The fundamental tenet of this formulation is that ethnic groups, such as Latinos, Mexicans, or Dominicans, are best conceived as constituting extended historical families whose members have no identifiable properties, or set of properties, that are shared by all the members throughout the existence of the familial groups, but that the historical connections that tie them give rise to properties which are common to some members of the groups and, in context, serve to distinguish them from other social groups. The lack of common properties accounts for the lack of agreement concerning any particular conditions, or even kinds of conditions, that are necessary and sufficient for Latino identity in general, or any Latino identities in particular. Even the most superficial consideration of available research points to difficulties in the identification of any such conditions. According to the Familial-Historical View of Latino identities, then, we must abandon the project of trying to develop essentialistic conceptions of those identities. And the relations that tie Latinos as well as the properties some of us share account for both our individuation and identification.

The common properties that this view rejects are significant first-order properties. I am not speaking about trivial properties such as the property of belonging to the group, or second-order properties such as identity. I mean primarily phenotypical or genotypical properties, such as skin color and capacities, or cultural properties, such as tastes and values, frequently associated with ethne. This means, in turn, that in order to be Latino or Puerto Rican it is not necessary that one share a first-order property (or set of properties) with other members of the group. Latinos may lack Spanish fluency and be Latinos, just as Jews may be atheists and be Jews. Indeed, contrary to what some philosophers and sociologists think, it is not even necessary that Latinos name themselves in particular ways or have a conscious sense of belonging to the group of Latinos. Some of them may in fact consider themselves so and even have a consciousness, or sense, of themselves as a group, but it is not necessary that all of them do. After all, Latino children and people suffering from Alzheimer’s disease cannot be expected to have a sense of Latino identity and yet their identity is not questioned for that reason, and the same applies to Latino groups, such as Puerto Ricans or Dominicans. I return to this point in chapter 2.

Latinos and Latino groups are tied by the same kind of thing that ties the members of a family. We are related, as a mother is to a daughter, and grand-
parents to grandchildren. The notion of family does not require genetic ties. One does not need to be tied by descent to other members of a family to be a member of the family. Indeed, perhaps the most important foundation of a family, namely marriage, takes place between persons who are not related by descent but by contract. In-laws become members of families indirectly, again not through genesis. And the same applies to Latinos: it is not necessary that one share a property or set of properties with others who also have Latino identity. Are all Latinos conscious of a Latino identity? Do all Mexicans have a sense of themselves as Mexican? How about the campesino lost in the ravines of the Copper Canyon? How about the descendants of the Maya living in isolation, somewhere in Yucatan? This extends to knowledge of the group’s history. Being Latino or ethnically Mexican does not entail knowing anything about Latino or Mexican history, and even less having an accurate knowledge of those histories.

History generates relations that in turn generate properties among Latinos and serve to unite us among ourselves and to distinguish us from others in particular contexts. The use of the Spanish language is one of the properties that unites many Latinos and can serve to distinguish us from other ethnic groups in certain contexts. Some Latinos in the southwest are united by their knowledge of Spanish and this serves also to distinguish them from most Anglos who live in that part of the country. They speak Spanish as a result of certain historical events, such as the invasion and colonization of the southwest by Spaniards in the sixteenth century. Had these events not occurred, these Latinos would not know any Spanish, but they would still be Latinos if the southwest had been invaded and colonized by the Portuguese.

The same could be said about a Mexican identity. Do all Mexicans have to share something that characterizes them? Do they have to share values, a biological feature, a physical mark, or even a cultural trait? There seems to be nothing like that which ties all Mexicans, and this in spite of the strong efforts of the Mexican government at ethnic homogenization for the purpose of nation building. Mexicans share a history, a past, and certain relations that tie them in various ways. Factors such as territory, religion, political organization, and values need not be common to everyone who shares in the Mexican identity. But everyone who shares in this identity must be tied in some ways to other people who share in it. The ties, however, can be different, and they can also change throughout time and location. Identities are messy, just like reality.

Some have argued for necessary genetic ties among members of ethnic groups, particularly Latinos. See J. Angelo Corlett, Race, Racism and Reparations (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), chs. 2 and 3. For a criticism of this position, see Gracia, Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality, ch. 3.
There are no Euclidean triangles in the world, the Euclidean triangle is an idealization. Yet, the notion of a triangle is of much use to us. Likewise, it is not necessary that there be neat, clear, and fixed boundaries between Latinos and non-Latinos, or between Cubans and Mexicans, just as there are no such boundaries between families.

Although historical events and relations tend to generate common properties in ethne, such properties are usually restricted to certain periods, regions, or subgroups within an ethnos. Latino identity entails both unity and distinction in a world of multiplicity such as ours, and unity and distinction are easily understandable when there are properties common to all the members of a group, but such properties are not necessary. The unity and distinction of Latinos can be explained as long as there are relations or properties that tie each member of the group with at least one other member without assuming that there are common properties to all members. Of course, in most cases the tie will not be with just one member, but with several, as happens with families. Indeed, the number of members involved is not as important as the various ties and whether these ties are significant for the ethnic group. Elsewhere I have argued that it is not possible to establish what these ties are for all ethnic groups, but that the particular group and its historical reality determine what they are in each case, and so they may vary substantially. The single most important factor for Jews to be Jewish is that their mothers be Jewish. But other ethnic groups emphasize the relationship with the father, and many do not have this kind of genetic requirement, but are more concerned with other human relations and with culture.26

The unity of Latinos, Cubans, Argentinians, Brazilians, and Tarahumara does not involve commonality; it is a familial-historical unity founded on historical relations and the properties they generate in context among members of the group. This is one reason why membership in the groups that share identities is neither permanent nor closed. Latino identities, like all identities, are fluid, open, and changing; those who share in them come and go, enter and leave, as they forge new relations, among themselves and with others, which depend on particular and contingent circumstances.27 If we use the

26 Gracia, Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality, ch. 3.
Identities: General and Particular

Familial-Historical View of Latino identities, we can understand how these identities do not require that we subscribe to essentialism. There is no essential core of properties required for an identity of the sort Latinos share. But the lack of an essence does not entail the lack of an identity; it does not entail eliminativism.

The view I propose recognizes that when the classification of particular persons comes up, there will be some cases in which classification is clear and some in which it is not. A Cuban American who came from Cuba last year, does not know English, and lives immersed in a Cuban-American environment is surely Cuban American. And I think I have shown above that I am obviously Latino: I act Latino, I feel Latino, both Latinos and Anglos think of me as Latino, and I was born in a country that is part of Latin America. On the other hand, Bill Clinton is not Latino. He does not think of himself as Latino, he does not act Latino, others do not think of him as Latino, and he was born in the United States and from non-Latino ancestry. So it seems that the cases of the Cuban American mentioned, of Bill Clinton, and of myself are clear and decidable. But not every case is like this. What do we make of my granddaughter Clarisa. Her mother is my daughter, but her father has pure English ancestry and was born in Canada, and she takes after her father’s family in looks and temperament. Is she Latina? And what will we make of her children if she turns out to marry another Anglo, and they never have any contact with Latinos? These are cases in which Latino identity is up for negotiation, but this should not militate against the idea of a Latino identity. That the case of my great grandchild is difficult to decide, or perhaps even impossible, or that the decision needs to be made contextually and in terms of negotiation, does not alter the fact that I am Latino and Bill Clinton is not.

Elsewhere I made this point clear by noting that many of our concepts have members that clearly belong, some that clearly do not belong, and others that are unclear. 28 A mistaken assumption about ethnic categories is that they must have clear and strict boundaries so that their membership is never in doubt. This is quite out of step with the conditions under which we accept many of our most valued categories and concepts, so there is no reason why we should impose on ethnicity, conditions without which we are willing to do in other cases.

Consider, for example, as common a concept as “most of the X’s,” as we use it when we say “Most of the students who are taking my course in ethnicity this semester will pass it.” Everyone understands what this means, but when one looks at the situation more closely, it is clear that the membership of the category is clear in some instances but not in others. Say that the course

28 Gracia, Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality, pp. 59-60.
has 20 students enrolled. In this case, it is clear that “most of the students”
does not refer to 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10 students, for these would not be
most of the students. Nor is it 20, for that would be all of the students. It is
also clear that most of the students would cover 19, 18, and 17. But once we
get below 17 questions arise. Can one consider 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 to
constitute most of the students? Interestingly enough, the total number of
students affects also the numbers in doubt. If the course has an overall enroll-
ment of 10, then clearly 1 through 6 and 10 are not most of the students; 9
and 8 do constitute most of the students; but what do we make of 7? Here it
is only one number that seems to be in doubt, rather than the six numbers in
the case of 20. Now, if we increase the number of students to 50, then we will
find that the number in doubt is even larger than in the case of 20.

Two things are clear from this example. First, the category “most of the X’s”
has members that are in doubt and members that are not. Second, the exact
number of members that are in doubt depends very much on the particular
number that constitutes the totality, which means that it results from context-
tual factors particular to the situation. None of this, however, stands in the
way of our using the concept “most of the X’s,” and certainly we do not think
any less of the category to which this concept refers because of it. There is no
reason, then, to assume that, because a particular category has an undeter-
dined membership, it is useless or must be abandoned. And this applies obvi-
ously to the category of Latinos.

The Familial-Historical conception of Latinos serves to explain in particu-
lar how the same person can share in different identities, for the conditions of
one identity need not preclude another. I can be Latino and Cuban. If there is
no fixed necessary set of properties that I have to have for membership in each
of these groups, the grounds for incompatibility between these identities
diminishes considerably. There is always the possibility of accommodation and
negotiation, particularly when change is essential for identity preservation.

Finally, the adoption of this position makes clear that the use of more
general labels to describe more general identities does not entail rigid param-
eters of homogenization, nor does it exclude the use of less general labels to
indicate more particular identities. This is important insofar as a great objec-
tion against all talk about general identities is precisely that they homogenize
and preclude the use of more particular ones. If I have to choose between being
Latino and being Mexican, someone says, I prefer being Mexican, for that is
closer to me. But if we adopt the Familial-Historical View of Latino identities,
this kind of conflict and choice is not inevitable. For each of these labels indi-
cates something about me that is important, and this is not a set of properties
that defines and confines me.

A Latino identity is a historical marker. It tells me that I am here and I am
now a part of a group within which I fit in many ways. It does not tell me that
I am like everyone else in the group and different from everyone else who does not belong to the group, or that I have been and will continue to be what I am. Rather, it tells me that I am part of the group because I am related in various ways to other members of the group and that I have properties that these relations generate in context with some members of the group, and that all these relations and properties set me and other members of the group apart from other groups. I am not part of those other groups because either I have no relations with their members or because the relations I share with them do not justify membership and thus identity, or even because I do not share with them certain properties that in context identify the groups that have them. Clearly I am not Jewish – I share no history with the Jews and there are no properties resulting from that history that I also have. And the citizenship relation I share with other Americans does not warrant Latino identity, because citizenship is not an ethnic marker for Latinos. This reference to nationality and its close relation to ethnicity requires that I say something about it in passing.29

IV. Ethnicity and Nationality

In the discussion of ethnic identities I have frequently used terms that can also refer to national identities and I have used examples of national identities to make a point about the relationship between different identities. But nationality and ethnicity should not be confused. A nation is a voluntary political organization of people based on a system of laws devised for the regulation of the relations and governance of the members of the group of people who accept it in a certain territory with the aim of ensuring justice and the good of all members. Belonging to a nation is ultimately a matter of political will, laws, territory, justice, and the well-being of its members, whereas this is not the case with ethnicity. Ethnicity has to do with historical relations of various sorts that contingently tie people.

The identification of nationality and ethnicity, however, is widespread.30 Its origin goes back at least to the eighteenth century.31 It has at least three sources. One is that nations require some foundation. The glue that binds nations

29 I say much more in chapters 5 and 6 of Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality.
together is the political will of a people to live under a system of laws that regulate the relations of the members of the nation, and this in turn involves a certain degree of self-identification of the members with the group. But this also requires that there be some common background to the members of the group. If they are going to self-identify with the group and accept certain laws, there must be some common values and shared assumptions. Moreover, self-identification requires symbols through which the members of the group can unite, such as flags, celebrations, anthems, and particularly traditions. Naturally, these could also be part of the ethnicity of the members of the group, and can be easily considered ethnic elements because ethnicity tolerates all kinds of features, and particularly cultural ones. So this leads some to think that a nation is, after all, an ethnos. The mistake here is that the requirements for nationality are minimal if compared with the requirements for ethnicity. Agreement about living together under certain laws is not enough to constitute an ethnos. More is required. The foundational structure of nationality is too basic and skeletal to sustain an ethnos. This is in fact a substantial advantage, for it makes possible for nations to be constituted by many ethnic groups.

A second reason why ethnicity is frequently identified with nationality is that, just as in the case of race, nationality can give rise to ethnic features. If the key to ethnicity is the historical relations among members of a group, then a nation constitutes a powerful factor of ethnicity generation. Nations force their members to deal with each other, consign them to a territory helping develop their relations further, and bring them together in all sorts of ways. Moreover, isolation from other nations and groups helps the process. And, as is well known, nations often try to promote the ethnic (and even racial) homogenization of their members in order to create stronger national bonds and make governing easier. Indeed, in some cases attempts have been made


to make a certain ethnicity a condition of membership in certain nations.\textsuperscript{34} And it is often the case that, even after the dissolution of a political group, an ethnic feeling remains in the group.\textsuperscript{35} But, again, this does not mean that we need or should conflate the notions of ethnos and nation. It only means that one can contribute to the origin of the other in particular circumstances and that the categories can overlap or even coincide in certain contexts.

A third reason why nationality is often conceived in ethnic terms has to do with the legitimate complaints of ethnic groups in states in which they are oppressed. The Kurds in Iraq felt for a long time that their only way to terminate the oppression they have suffered in the Iraqi state because of their ethnicity was to liberate themselves and form a sovereign state themselves. Obviously, their experience of ethnic discrimination led them to think that the only way to avoid it is by forming an ethnic state of which they are the nation.\textsuperscript{36} Opposition, however, is not a sufficient reason for the ethnic understanding of nations insofar as there are other ways of doing away with such oppression without incurring the problems that result from the creation of ethnic states.

We need, then, to keep in mind that, although closely related, the notions of nationality and ethnicity are not the same. Moreover, as I explain in chapter 3, some pernicious consequences often follow in countries where ethnicity and nationality are not distinguished. In the present context the confusion does not rise with the Latino ethnos, for there is no such nation as the Latino or Latin American nation. But when we use terms such as Mexican or Cuban, we must be clear as to whether we are using the terms for ethnne, nations, or a combination of the two.

\section{V. Latino Identities}

In conclusion, to reject essentialism does not force us to reject Latino identities, and to accept the value of particular identities does not, prima facie, preclude

\textsuperscript{34} Guibernau, “Nations without States,” p. 6. See also Will Kymlicka, “Ethnicity in the USA,” in Guibernau and Rex (eds.), \textit{The Ethnicity Reader}, p. 240.


\textsuperscript{36} Many authors argue that this aim to create a state that represents the nation is essential to nations and a nationalist spirit. See, for example, Dan Smith, “Ethical Uncertainties of Nationalism,” \textit{Journal of Peace Research} 37, 4 (2000), 494. Allen Buchanan, \textit{Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Summers to Lithuania and Quebec} (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), pp.152–3, has proposed a list of conditions in which ethnic groups seek secession from a state. See also Anthony Smith, \textit{The Ethnic Origins of Nations} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
general identities. That Latinos share no essence does not mean that we do not share a general identity. And the same applies to more particular identities such as Mexican or Dominican. Moreover, that we are Latinos does not entail that we reject the Mexican identity some of us have, or vice versa. We do not need to choose between generalism and particularism. We can be Latinos and Mexicans or Quechua. General and particular identities can, and do, coexist. The Essentialism vs Eliminativism Dilemma and the Generalism vs Particularism Dilemma are based on a misguided conception of identity. If we adopt the Familial-Historical View of Latino identities, the dilemmas disappear. So, yes, I am Latino and Cuban, among many other things, and all these identities serve to describe me, give rise to particular feelings in me, and function as sources of action for me. In the next chapter I examine two key objections that can be brought against this view in relation to individuation.