

On the Distinctive Value of Mexican American Philosophy: Beginning with the Concerns and Intuitions of Mexican Americans by Lori Gallegos de Castillo and Francisco Gallegos

## **On the Distinctive Value of Mexican American Philosophy: Beginning with the Concerns and Intuitions of Mexican Americans**

by Lori Gallegos de Castillo and Francisco Gallegos

### **English Abstract**

It has been said that all philosophy begins with a set of concerns and a set of intuitions. With this idea in mind, we ask: Would it be helpful to understand Mexican-American philosophy as a kind of philosophy that begins with the concerns and intuitions of the Mexican-American community? On this view, what distinguishes Mexican-American philosophy is the orientation from which the philosophical investigation proceeds. Such an orientation is shaped by the experiences and relationships that are characteristic of those who identify as Mexican-American. We offer a list of concerns and intuitions that we suggest are widely held by the Mexican-American community. Focusing on questions surrounding linguistic assimilation in the U.S., we illustrate how beginning from these particular starting points might alter the way we think about philosophical issues.

### **Resumen en español**

Se ha dicho que toda filosofía comienza con un conjunto de preocupaciones y un conjunto de intuiciones. Con esta idea en mente, preguntamos: ¿Sería útil entender la filosofía mexicanoamericana como un tipo de filosofía que comienza con las preocupaciones e intuiciones de la comunidad mexicanoamericana? Desde este punto de vista, lo que distingue a la filosofía mexicanoamericana es la orientación desde la cual procede la investigación filosófica. Dicha orientación está determinada por las experiencias y relaciones que son características de quienes se identifican como mexicanoamericanos. Ofrecemos una lista de preocupaciones e intuiciones que sugerimos son ampliamente compartidas por la comunidad mexicanoamericana. Al centrarnos en las preguntas que rodean la asimilación lingüística en los EE.UU., ilustramos cómo comenzando a partir de estos puntos de partida particulares puede alterar la forma en que pensamos acerca de las cuestiones filosóficas.

### **Resumo em português**

Foi dito que toda a filosofia começa com um conjunto de preocupações e um conjunto de intuições. Com esta ideia em mente, perguntamos: Seria proveitoso entender a filosofia américo-mexicana como um tipo de filosofia que começa com as preocupações e intuições da comunidade américo-mexicana? Sob esta visão, o que distingue a filosofia américo-mexicana é a orientação a partir da qual a investigação filosófica procede. Tal orientação é moldada pelas experiências e relacionamentos que sejam característicos daqueles que se identifiquem como américo-mexicanos. Oferecemos uma lista de preocupações e intuições que sugerimos serem amplamente usadas na comunidade américo-mexicana. Focando em questões ao redor da assimilação

linguística nos EUA, ilustramos como ao se começar a partir destes pontos de partida em particular poderia alterar a maneira como pensamos sobre assuntos filosóficos.

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All philosophy begins with a set of concerns and a set of intuitions.[1] Concerns and intuitions are likely to reflect, to some extent, a thinker's lived experiences, as well as the social, historical, and political context in which she finds herself. With this idea in mind, we ask: Would it be helpful to understand Mexican American philosophy as a kind of philosophy that begins with the concerns and intuitions of the Mexican American community?

We begin in Section One by offering reasons to think that this approach to conceptualizing Mexican American philosophy is more promising than some alternative approaches to the issue. In Section Two we provide a tentative list of concerns and intuitions that may be said to be held by the Mexican American community and therefore will ground and shape Mexican American philosophy. In the concluding section we briefly identify and address some hesitations one might have about this particular approach to the conception of Mexican American philosophy.

In what follows, we are not primarily concerned with providing necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a work of Mexican American philosophy. Instead, we proceed on the assumption that Mexican American philosophy can offer something *distinctive* and *valuable* to both the Mexican American community and the discipline of philosophy as a whole.[2] On this basis, we ask: What conception of Mexican American philosophy best enables us to appreciate the distinctively valuable contributions that Mexican American philosophy can make?

We will argue that the Mexican American community has a distinctively valuable *epistemic standpoint* on a number of issues, and that Mexican American philosophy is the practice of articulating and applying this epistemic standpoint to a variety of philosophical topics. We hope that by providing clarity about what Mexican American philosophers are up to, this conversation may provide a helpful orientation to those who produce Mexican American philosophy and assist those who seek to advocate for Mexican American philosophy to other philosophers, students, and non-philosophers in the Mexican American community.

Before we proceed, we would like to take a moment to locate ourselves as investigators of Mexican American philosophy and to explain our motivations for pursuing this project in this way. We think of ourselves as Mexican American. Our father grew up on a ranch in Baja, California, Mexico, and our mother in the suburbs outside of Denver, Colorado. Growing up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, we have always cherished

our Mexican heritage. Indeed, much of what we know and value has arisen because of our sense of connection to both Mexico and the United States.

We recognize that our experience as Mexican Americans is not the same as others' experience. In a number of ways, we have had certain social privileges that not all Mexican Americans share. First, we are visibly white, and this has undoubtedly shaped our social experience. Second, our father immigrated legally, so we did not grow up burdened by fears about deportation. Third, we grew up in city in which anti-Latinx racism is relatively subdued and Hispanic identity is, in some very specific ways, even celebrated. These experiences of privilege may, in some cases, make us less acutely sensitive to certain aspects of Mexican American identity that are of central importance to others. We also have less privileged experiences that have shaped our experience as Mexican American. We grew up relatively poor, and many of our family members in Mexico have lived and still live in poverty. The closeness of poverty has, unsurprisingly, influenced our thinking about Mexico and the U.S.

We note these aspects of our experience as a way of acknowledging that ours is only one kind of Mexican American experience. We thus do not claim to be experts or to have the last word on the topic of Mexican American identity. It is not our aim to be gatekeepers, and indeed, we are deeply concerned to avoid discourses which improperly exclude people. While thinking carefully about how to make sense out of liminal cases may sometimes be important, our primary focus here is identifying central patterns and core features of Mexican American philosophy, rather than providing a definition with clean edges.

## §1. Conceptualizing Mexican American philosophy

### *Three misguided approaches*

How, then, can we conceptualize Mexican American philosophy in a way that allows us to appreciate what makes it distinctively valuable? Three possible answers to this question can be identified by looking at the long-standing debates surrounding the conception of Latin American philosophy.[3] Each approach appears to have significant drawbacks. First, "Mexican American philosophy" might refer to any sort of philosophical inquiry that is done *by* Mexican Americans, regardless of the topic or the content of their arguments. This conception, however, seems unlikely to pick out what is distinctively valuable about Mexican American philosophy. A second option is to restrict the category to include only philosophical inquiry that is *about* the identity and experiences of Mexican Americans. This conception is more promising, but it seems unlikely to clarify what contribution Mexican American philosophy can make to the discipline of philosophy as a whole or to anyone who is not already interested in understanding the identity and experiences of Mexican Americans.

A third option is to think of Mexican American philosophy as a kind of philosophy that is done *from* the "world" of the Mexican American. By analogy, consider Buddhist

philosophy or Aztec philosophy. These philosophies are not *about* what it is like to be Aztec or Buddhist; rather, they address the big philosophical questions of life—the ultimate nature of reality, how we ought to raise our children, and so on. Furthermore, what makes them cohesive kinds of philosophy is not simply that they are carried out by Aztecs or Buddhists, but, rather, that each kind of philosophy articulates and defends the metaphysical, ethical, and political ideas that *constitute* the worldview of the Aztec people or communities of practicing Buddhists and which guide and reflect their common *way of life*. In a similar manner, then, one might suggest that Mexican American philosophy is an articulation of a distinctive kind of worldview, one that could be located within the pantheon of “world philosophies” alongside Aztec philosophy and Buddhist philosophy.

However, this approach overlooks the diversity of Mexican Americans and the fact that there is not one basic worldview that Mexican Americans share. Likewise, to the extent that Mexican Americans participate in a distinctive “way of life,” this way of life will need to be described in terms that are much thinner and looser than what we might describe as the Aztec or Buddhist way of life. On the one hand, we can say that Mexican Americans participate in the U.S. American way of life;<sup>[4]</sup> on the other hand, Mexican Americans participate in a number of smaller-scale “ways of life”—for example, they practice a variety of religions, raise their kids in a variety of ways, and so on.

### *Mexican Americans as a social group*

For the purposes of conceptualizing Mexican American philosophy, we suggest that it is best to think of Mexican Americans as a *social group*. As Iris Young (1990, 43) explains, a social group is a group that is constituted by and constitutive of members’ identities. Membership in a social group has a subjective and an objective aspect. Subjectively, group members identify as members of the group—that is, they feel that being a member of the group is part of what makes them who they are—and can affirm or downplay aspects of that identity, as well as subjectively determine the particular ways in which they take up and interpret that identity. Objectively, members of social groups are embedded in material institutions and located in a wider social space, so that they find themselves “thrown” into their identity as members of this group in ways that they do not choose and cannot directly control, unlike the members of a club, who can “opt out” of membership at their discretion.

The complexity of social groups brings up difficult questions about the criteria for membership. Could a person still be Mexican American if they felt no sense of identification or solidarity with the Mexican American community? Could a person be Mexican American if they felt a strong sense of identity and solidarity with the group, but did not have an ancestral connection with Mexico? And what if this person speaks with a Hispanic accent, is fluent in Spanish, has brown skin, and lives in Los Angeles, so that strangers in their community typically assume that they are Mexican American? While such complexities make precise definitions impossible, they reflect the complexities of identity that we encounter in real life.

Thinking about Mexican Americans as a social group (rather than as a group that shares a distinctive way of life, like the Aztecs or Buddhists) is useful because it allows for diversity among members and flexibility with regard to personal identity, but also indicates that what Mexican Americans have in common is substantive and concrete *patterns of experience* in a shared social world—patterns of experience that distinguish Mexican Americans from other social groups. The diversity of Mexican Americans reflects the fact that individuals are always members of several social groups simultaneously (Young 1990, 48). Thus, Mexican Americans are differentiated by their gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, and so on, and each of these social groups are oppressed or privileged in specific ways, depending on how our society systematically distributes advantages and disadvantages to members of various social groups. For this reason, we can predict that the experience of wealthy, cis-gendered Mexican American men will differ in important ways from the experience of other Mexican Americans. But despite these important differences, Mexican Americans generally share some important aspects of their subjective identity—namely, they identify as Mexican Americans—and they generally share important aspects of their experience in society as well—namely, they are recognized by others as being Mexican American and experience structural forces that affect Mexican Americans differentially in their interactions with social institutions, such as schools, workplaces, grocery stores, courtrooms, and so on.

### *Concerns and intuitions*

As members of a social group, Mexican Americans tend to share some patterns of experience, and it is these patterns of experience that can best account for why Mexican American philosophy is a distinctively valuable kind of philosophy. This is because the patterns of experience that Mexican Americans share tend to generate a set of *concerns and intuitions*. By “concerns” we mean commitments and attachments that influence what we find important and unimportant, desirable and undesirable. By “intuitions” we mean beliefs and dispositions to believe, which may be relatively vague, unarticulated, and held without explicit reasoning. Concerns and intuitions are important elements of our “epistemic standpoint,” the pre-theoretical orientation to the world that functions as our starting place for thinking about things. As a starting point for thinking, our concerns and intuitions do not determine what we will believe, desire, or do in any given case. A concern can be outweighed by other concerns, and we often override our initial intuitions after reflection. But although concerns and intuitions will not determine the outcome of our thinking in any given case, these elements of our epistemic standpoint shape our thinking in important ways.

A person’s pre-theoretical orientation to the world typically reflects the patterns of their experience. For example, if a person’s experience is marked by repeated instances of racial prejudice, racism will likely be a pressing concern for them, and claims that the U.S. is a “post-racial” society will be more likely to conflict with their



intuitions. For this reason, light-skinned Mexican Americans may not share the same concerns and intuitions about racism as Mexican Americans who have darker skin. But despite the diversity of the Mexican American community, in the following section we will describe some concerns and intuitions that reflect patterns of experience that are widely shared by Mexican Americans as a group.

These concerns and intuitions, we suggest, are refined and disseminated through *public discourse* as Mexican Americans speak, write, live, and make art that expresses their views about the meaning of their identity, the issues they deal with in their everyday lives, and the way their identity as Mexican Americans influences their attitudes about those particular issues.[5] In this way, the concerns and intuitions of Mexican Americans are not merely the privately held thoughts and feelings of an aggregate of individuals, but are the philosophical orientation of a genuine collectivity.

If we are correct that Mexican Americans share certain patterns of experience, and these patterns of experience generate a set of concerns and intuitions that are further developed through public discourse, then there is reason to think that these concerns and intuitions will influence the philosophical arguments that are put forward and taken up by Mexican American philosophers. After all, any philosophical inquiry will be shaped by the concerns and intuitions of the philosophers engaged in the inquiry. For all philosophers, our concerns guide our selection of topics, influence the way we frame and articulate our inquiry, and sustain our interest. Our intuitions determine whether a given claim will require more or less evidence to overcome the burden of proof, influence how we form all-things-considered judgments in the face of uncertainty and complexity, and draw our attention to certain ways of addressing philosophical problems. Insofar as all philosophical inquiry is shaped by a set of pre-given concerns and intuitions, there is no neutral “view from nowhere” from which to begin. For this reason, Mexican American philosophy, so-conceived—that is, philosophical inquiry that is shaped and guided by the concerns and intuitions of the Mexican American community—would not stand in contrast to philosophy as such, but would merely be explicit about its starting points.[6]

### *Advantages of our approach*

A central advantage of thinking about Mexican American philosophy in terms of the concerns and intuitions of Mexican Americans—rather than the *beliefs* or *perspectives* of Mexican Americans—is that it enables us to articulate the relatively unified and distinctive epistemic standpoint of Mexican Americans as a social group while avoiding the assumption that Mexican Americans share a “worldview” or will necessarily agree with one another about any particular issue. Despite sharing a set of concerns and intuitions, the way in which individual members of the Mexican American community make judgments about and respond to their shared concerns and intuitions may vary widely. For example, any given member of our community may take up any number of positions about immigration and may find certain positions to be intuitively plausible that are not widely held by the community as a whole. However, when

Mexican Americans advocate positions that conflict with the concerns and intuitions of the wider community, they are likely to acknowledge it as a “counter-intuitive” view and will present it as such. For example, they might say, “I know it is not common to support very restrictive immigration regulations, but hear me out...”

Another advantage of this approach is that it provides an answer to the question of whether non-Mexican Americans can produce Mexican American philosophy. On our view, the answer appears to depend on the extent to which the thinker is able to take up the concerns and intuitions of Mexican Americans. It seems plausible that those who do not personally identify as Mexican American can nonetheless be deeply immersed in Mexican American communities, so that they come to grasp, in a nuanced way, many of the social experiences of Mexican Americans.

In this way, we believe that thinking about Mexican American philosophy as we suggest here—as a kind of philosophy grounded in and shaped by the concerns and intuitions of Mexican Americans—balances the need to identify what makes Mexican American philosophy distinctively valuable with the need to acknowledge and respect the diversity of our community. However, the persuasiveness of this claim will depend on the answer to this question: Can we collectively identify a set of concerns and intuitions that are widely shared by our community, and that reflect some of what distinguishes our community from other social groups?

## **§2. Concerns and intuitions in the Mexican American community**

What might some of the concerns and intuitions that inform Mexican American philosophy include? Here, we explore a brief list of possibilities.[7] This list of concerns and intuitions is not, by any means, exhaustive, nor is it closed to revision. To the contrary, insofar as social groups and the identities and voices that shape them are adapting and changing, groups’ concerns and intuitions are not permanently fixed. The list that follows is meant to indicate areas from which Mexican American philosophical investigation has and may continue to proceed.[8]

### *Concerns*

With respect to areas of concern for the Mexican American community, immigration is likely near the top of the list. Given that Mexico and the U.S. share a border and that the largest immigrant group in the United States is Mexican; given the heightened politicization of immigration, which has given rise to more frequent and public expressions in the U.S. of resentment, fear, and hatred towards immigrants; and given the ways in which immigration status drastically affects the lives of members of the Mexican American community, issues surrounding immigration are bound to be of central concern to Mexican Americans. Mexican American communities include members who are immigrants themselves or who are descendants of Mexican immigrants. They may live and work in communities with many immigrants. They might sometimes be mistaken for immigrants when they are not, or they may be read by

others as not-fully-American. Many Mexican Americans may have concerns stemming from vulnerability to deportation and family separation. Many immigrants may have concerns emerging from longing for a home to which one cannot return, or emerging from the need, desire, and impossibility of making a home where one does not feel at home.[9]

Second, concerns about identity are a likely source for Mexican American philosophy. Questions about what it means to be Mexican American and what distinguishes Mexican Americans from other groups are often of concern to Mexican Americans. Social groups typically define themselves in contrast to other social groups, and with this in mind, we can expect that the public discourse of the Mexican American community will be particularly characterized by a concern about the differences and similarities between Mexican Americans and Mexicans, Anglo-Americans, and other Latinx groups.[10] Similarly, concerns about conceiving Mexican American identity as a positive identity, the desire to preserve and enhance this identity in the face of pressures to assimilate, as well as concerns about having one's identity recognized by others in certain ways may be widespread within the Mexican American community.[11] Concerns about making sense of a hybrid identity, about experiencing oneself as *ni de aqui, ni de alla*, about not fitting all the way in or being able to escape or transcend being Mexican American are relevant.[12] Relevant here are concerns emerging from experiences of pride and shame regarding one's minority cultural identity.[13]

Related to concerns about identity are, third, concerns about heritage and tradition. This category may include concerns about recovering aspects of one's cultural identity that have been lost, sharing aspects of one's heritage that may be underappreciated, and desiring to understand where one fits into larger histories and to reconstruct those histories.[14] Mexican Americans may also have concerns that emerge from discovering and experiencing significant cultural traditions, and desiring to honor those traditions or to explore the relevance of those traditions to lives that may seem further removed from those traditions.[15] Mexican American philosophy may manifest this concern through reflection on its own historical and theoretical heritages.[16]

Fourth, language is an area of concern for Mexican Americans. Language is often a significant indicator of cultural identity. The languages one speaks, how well one speaks them, and which dialects and accents mark one's speech reveal aspects of a person's upbringing and the social groups to which they belong. Language may be taken to betray one's inauthenticity as Mexican or as American, as well as one's status as foreign-born or native-born. Dialects locate and connect a speaker to a particular geography and region, while also marking a distance between oneself and others.[17] Many Mexican Americans are aware of a time when speaking Spanish in the U.S. was seen as shameful, and children were punished in schools—often severely—for speaking Spanish. Such experiences stand in stark contrast with newer movements for bilingualism in early education and the challenge of raising children to speak any language other than English when they grow up in the U.S. Concerns about language



also coalesce upon questions of linguistic exclusion, accommodation, and translation. Inability to speak English in the U.S. produces dependency, vulnerability, loss of autonomy, and barriers to social recognition and connection. One experience common to children and spouses of immigrants is the need to act as a translator and advocate for family members who do not speak English. Translation also emerges as a central theme for those who occupy more than one cultural or linguistic world, while seeking to reconcile these worlds. Spanish language media serves an important role in connecting, informing, empowering and, perhaps, enabling the segregation of non-English-speaking communities.

Fifth, social, political, and moral recognition is a significant concern for the Mexican American community. Experiencing one's group as marginalized and the need to improve conditions within Mexican American communities produce the need for political resistance.[18] Within this broad area of concern are more specific concerns, including concerns about conditions of labor. Historically, Mexican workers have been contracted to perform low-wage jobs in the United States, and such economic incentives have been a driving force for immigration. The Bracero program, for instance, sponsored approximately 5 million border crossings, with many agricultural workers obtaining green cards. Exploitative labor conditions are exacerbated when workers are undocumented, poorly educated, or do not speak fluent English. Notable political movements, such as those led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta have been responses to these conditions.[19] Another specific area of concern having to do with political recognition relates to land ownership and political sovereignty. A definitive moment in Mexican American history is the annexation of parts of Mexico by the U.S., which produced communities of Tejanos, Nuevomexicanos, Californianos and indigenous groups that were formerly Mexican. Effectively, the U.S./Mexico border crossed these groups of people, some of whom found refuge in lands that remained largely isolated from Anglo intervention, while others were subsequently dispossessed of their land.

### *Intuitions*

In addition to these concerns, one also finds widely held intuitions within Mexican American communities. (Note, again, that intuitions can be vague and subtle, and are not necessarily consciously articulated for those who have them. A person can also have conflicting intuitions). One such intuition is the awareness that existing social and political arrangements in the U.S. reflect a colonial history.[20] Even when this intuition is not fully articulated, Mexican Americans seem to be more aware of the ways in which colonial histories have shaped present day Mexican American communities and their marginalization within broader American society.

A second intuition is the recognition that the Mexican American experience is extraordinarily complex—indeed, often fraught with conflicting attachments and attitudes—and tends to defy traditional ideas about racial groups.[21] For one, as neither Mexican, nor Anglo-American, Mexican Americans are often in a position where they

must navigate and negotiate divergent perspectives, cultures, and commitments. Bolstering this intuition is the way that Mexican American families are often racially and culturally blended. In addition, the Mexican American experience is intersectional: Whether one is visibly dark or light skinned, one's gender and sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status all impact the ways in which one experiences their own Mexican American identity. Another way in which the intuition of the complexity of Mexican American identity manifests is in terms of the experience of being a racialized subject, whereby racial, ethnic, and national identities coalesce in ways that are difficult to disentangle.[22]

Another intuition shared in the Mexican American community is the sense that immigrants transcend simple stereotypes—their identities, stories, motives, and impacts are complex and varied. This intuition might be coupled with a capacity to identify with the plight of the immigrant, a capacity that consists simply in a kind of sensitivity and ability to make sense out of or even identify with the experience of people who cross the border. It may arise from the recognition that that immigrant could be me, my father, my brother, my child. This intuition may produce the recognition that immigrants are more than just “aliens,” “criminals,” or “illegals.”[23]

While these concerns and intuitions do not necessarily result in shared views and perspectives, they point to an orientation from which a distinct and valuable program of philosophical investigation can proceed. Such an orientation is shaped by the experiences and relationships that are characteristic of those belonging to the Mexican American social group.

### **§3. Rethinking the ethics of linguistic assimilation**

We believe that this orientation can be a source of insights that are not always apparent to others in the same way. In order to illustrate how beginning from these particular starting points can shape and enrich the way we think about philosophical issues, consider, for example, the ethical/political claim that those living in the U.S. should be required to speak English. Such a view already guides U.S. immigration policy insofar as, with a few exceptions, those applying for citizenship are required to pass a civics exam and written exam conducted in English. This view is also part of a very active national discourse that reflects multiple, intermingled concerns about multiculturalism and national identity, national security, national unity, and racial prejudice. Indeed, several Republican Party leaders publicly put forth English-only arguments in order to drum up their base in the leadup to the 2016 U.S. presidential election.[24] Here, we consider one articulation of the philosophical argument that immigrants to the U.S. should learn and speak English.

One basis for calling for the linguistic assimilation of those living in the U.S. is the civic trust argument. This argument, articulated by Benjamin Boudreaux (2011), maintains that “a shared language fosters civic trust between citizens that undergirds social unity.” (100) Boudreaux defines civic trust as “a disposition to believe that one will

be tolerated by one's compatriots," where toleration consists in "appealing to public reasons for political decision-making." Boudreaux adds that "toleration requires that one can justify political actions to compatriots through reasons they can accept." (100, fn170) While this definition of toleration may seem strange, one might take Boudreaux to be claiming that civic trust—the shared sense that one will be able to freely participate in civic life—requires cooperation with others through a mutual willingness to give an account for one's public behavior and actions in ways that others could, in principle, make sense of. It is a kind of consistent transparency among citizens that allows them to feel secure in their civic membership. Boudreaux argues that civic trust is built through "repeated cooperative interactions under reasonably just institutions." (100) On this view, it is through daily interactions and exchanges, wherein people exercise toleration by giving account of themselves through the language of public reason, that we continually reaffirm our ability to trust.

Boudreaux's claim that immigrants should learn the dominant language is based on evidence indicating that "shared language is a stronger factor in generating trust than other factors such as shared ethnicity or religion." (102) Boudreaux argues that sharing a language facilitates key cooperative interactions. He worries that the inability to have substantive interactions with people who do not speak the native language—including the ability to have discussions about "civic matters or moral outlook"—undermines civic trust. (101) The absence of such reaffirming exchanges may lead citizens to doubt whether immigrants affirm a nation's liberal political values and to lose confidence that they will be tolerated. From the perspective of native-born citizens, it is important to establish trust, particularly in the case of newcomers.

Boudreaux cannot be accused of indifference to the perspective of immigrants. He recognizes, for instance, that from the perspective of immigrants, spoken communication could alleviate fears about how they will be perceived and received by their new state. Our position, though, is that starting from the intuitions described above can generate important considerations regarding the ethics of linguistic assimilation, generally, and the notion of civic trust, specifically.

For example, the intuition that existing social and political arrangements in the U.S. reflect a colonial history brings to light the ways in which any demands for linguistic assimilation may be part of a centuries-long legacy of cultural imperialism within the Americas. On these grounds, we might be suspicious not only of the motive for demanding linguistic assimilation, but also wary of the effects of such efforts on the ability of minority cultural groups to sustain their valuable ways of life and their connections to their heritage and traditions. Such intuitions cast serious doubts about the sincerity of the discourse of "civic trust" and "toleration." Along these lines, Anglo-American nationalism, even in its most covert forms, betrays the possibility of civic trust insofar as it represents efforts to eradicate cultural difference.

Second, intuitions about the complexity of Mexican American identity challenge the assumption that, immigrants aside, the U.S. has a universally shared national

culture. As members of the Mexican American community are likely to recognize, lands that are a present-day territory of the U.S. have long been home to a variety of cultural groups, many of which have ties that predate the existence of the U.S. Furthermore, intuitions about the complexity of Mexican American identity underscore the extent to which people who identify very much as American may nonetheless not identify with dominant, Anglo-American culture.

Third, the intuitiveness of the plight of the immigrant for Mexican Americans reveals the way in which arguments about civic trust and the obligation of immigrants to learn English often rely on overly simplistic narratives about immigrant experiences. For instance, Boudreaux's argument assumes a society that includes only native-born citizens or immigrants who will be welcomed into the community once they meet certain legal requirements. This narrative assumes that all immigrants are seeking a path to citizenship. The fact is, though, many immigrant community members do not have a viable path to citizenship. Barring a very unlikely, major change to immigration laws, many immigrants will never receive the benefits of legal recognition, and they will not be integrated into society in a free and equal way, no matter how long they are present. Their membership in the nation will always be fragile, unauthorized, and contingent. Given that this category of people is accorded very minimal legal and social recognition, demands for them to learn the language come across as unreasonable and unjust.

As this example illustrates, philosophy that is guided by a distinct set of concerns and intuitions has the potential to shape how we approach philosophical issues in substantial ways.

### **Conclusion: Questions for further consideration**

By way of conclusion, we would like to identify three hesitations about our proposal that deserve further consideration. The first hesitation stems from the way in which our view about Mexican American philosophy conflicts with another common view of the role of philosophy. One of the major tasks of philosophy has been to challenge dominant metanarratives and to question that which is taken for granted. If Mexican American philosophy is that which emerges from a particular set of widely shared concerns and intuitions, whence critique of those concerns and intuitions? Perhaps the way in which we are conceptualizing Mexican American philosophy makes philosophy into a practice that reifies, rather than challenges, existing paradigms.

The second hesitation is concerned with the question: Who is excluded by the way in which we have conceptualized Mexican American philosophy? One might worry that even though our approach is more expansive than others, it may nonetheless risk evoking a particular representation of Mexican American philosophy that excludes certain groups of Mexican Americans. Do we risk begging the question about the group's concerns and intuitions by looking to those whose voices are most prominent?

In response to these concerns, we remind the reader, first, that it is not our view that all Mexican American philosophy involves a unified set of beliefs or perspectives. Because of this, our approach does not foreclose disagreement. Second, given that Mexican Americans are a diverse group of people, it can be expected that even as they are part of the Mexican American community, they also have membership in other social groups. As a result, they are likely to have concerns and intuitions that are influenced by those memberships. For instance, someone who identifies as Mexican American might also identify as African American. These ways of identifying are likely to generate a multiplicity of concerns and intuitions that could be in tension with one another or with the concerns and intuitions of Mexican Americans whose group memberships differ. Third, we believe that concerns and intuitions are not fixed, and that powerful articulations of hidden or silenced concerns and intuitions can produce major shifts in collective consciousness. Anzaldúa's writings on borderlands and the new *mestiza* are a powerful example of work that has disclosed previously under-articulated, but nonetheless widely-held concerns and intuitions. A promising upshot of thinking about Mexican American philosophy in this way is that our conception is not thematically limited. There are countless, dynamic concerns and intuitions that have yet to be philosophically articulated and investigated.

Another question one might have about our proposal is whether it risks overemphasizing academic cultural recognition as a prerequisite of philosophy, with the effect that certain marginalized voices become inaudible as philosophical.[25] (Indeed, our own citation practices indicate the centrality of academic philosophical work.) One of the distinctively valuable aspects of Mexican American philosophy is its potential to contribute in unique ways to cross-cultural philosophical conversation. Precisely because it emerges from concerns and intuitions that diverge from those that typically inform Anglo-American philosophy, it is positioned to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and to offer different conceptual resources. At the same time, though, the philosophical value of work outside of the Anglo-American academic context is all-too-often denied because the concerns and intuitions that inform it fail to register as meaningful. Our sense is that Mexican American philosophy should be more responsive to the voices of those who are oppressed. Yet, any conceptualization of Mexican American philosophy is at risk of replicating dominant frameworks that render certain politically marginalized voices philosophically inarticulable.

In response to this concern, we would note that one of the benefits of thinking about philosophy as emerging from concerns and intuitions is that it permits us to acknowledge that philosophy is linked, in a deep way, to lived experience. With this point in mind, we are sympathetic to relatively expansive conceptions of philosophy that make the practice of philosophizing central to the sense-making practices of all human beings. While the constraints of space do not permit us to articulate and defend such an expansive conception of philosophy here, we hope that by affirming the philosophical value of the concerns and intuitions of everyday people, our account will be compatible with such a conception.



As our responses to these three hesitations indicate, we have sought to offer an account of what makes Mexican American philosophy distinctively valuable without putting forth a firm set of conditions for what might count as Mexican American philosophy. We have avoided claiming that Mexican Americans share a distinctive lifeworld, or even shared self-understandings, perspectives, and beliefs, but we nonetheless hold that the patterns of experience and public discourse of the social group generate a distinctive set of concerns and intuitions, which then orient and guide the inquiry of Mexican American philosophers in a way that is particularly valuable to both the Mexican American community and to philosophy as a whole. Conceptualizing the practice in this way highlights how the lived experience of Mexican Americans can be a source of insight about philosophical questions.

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## Notes

[1] Thanks to Clark Donnelly for suggesting this formulation.

[2] In formulating the goal of our inquiry in this way, we follow José-Antonio Orosco (2015) in his excellent essay, “The Philosophical Gift of Brown Folks: Mexican American Philosophy in the United States.” Orosco draws from Du Bois to argue that the importance of Mexican American philosophy can be justified along two lines. First, by examining and articulating the experience of Mexican Americans, Mexican American philosophy may be of service to the Mexican American community. Orosco argues that this service will consist in “developing theories and strategies of resistance against discrimination and oppression from dominant U.S. society” (26). We agree, but we hesitate to delimit in advance the specific kinds of contributions that Mexican American philosophy will make to the Mexican American community. Second, the importance of Mexican American philosophy also lies in its activity of “identifying ideals, concepts, or what Manuel Vargas (2010) calls ‘cultural resources’ that might be offered as ‘gifts’ to the broader society” (26). These ‘cultural resources’ may have philosophical value insofar as “[what] is taken as ‘reasonable’ interpretation of our moral, social, or political

life might actually be very partial or limited” (27), and so considering the Mexican American perspective on a given philosophical question may correct for the blind spots of other philosophers. Our own essay attempts to clarify and elaborate upon this suggestion by identifying the concerns and intuitions that constitute the distinctive epistemic standpoint of Mexican Americans, and to illustrate the philosophical value of this epistemic standpoint in the specific case of debates over linguistic assimilation.

[3] See, for instance, Mendieta (1999); Nuccetelli (2003); and Gracia, ed. (1988–89).

[4] For the purposes of this essay, we are focusing on Mexican Americans who live in the U.S.

[5] It is worth noting that to the extent that our essay participates in this public discourse, our analysis is not merely descriptive but also constructive.

[6] Our approach to the conception of Mexican American philosophy is similar to the view offered by Orosco in “The Philosophical Gifts of Brown Folks” (2015). We agree with Orosco that Mexican American philosophy is best understood as “the working up or the elaboration of the perspective” of the Mexican American community *in some sense*. (24) One important difference between our views is that while we think of Mexican Americans as a *social group*, Orosco thinks of Mexican Americans as an *ethnos*: “Mexican American philosophy is best understood as an ethnic philosophy; that is, it is the philosophical work produced by the Mexican American ethnos” (24). Here Orosco follows Jorge J. E. Gracia, who defines an ethnos as a group of people “who have been brought together by history. The model of the family is used as a metaphor to understand how an ethnic group can have unity without having all the members of the group necessarily share some first order properties at any particular time in the history or throughout that history. Not all of them need have the same height, weight, eye color, degree of intelligence, customs or even ancestry. Ethne are like families in that they originate and continue to exist as a result of historical events, such as marriage, but their members need not share common properties, although they may in certain circumstances do so.” (Gracia, 2010, 260). We expect that there may not be much difference between these views with regard to who is counted as a member of the Mexican American community. However, we suggest that our view provides a more satisfying account of Mexican American philosophy. Unlike the concept of *social group*, the concept of *ethnos* makes no reference to the subjective and interpersonal experience of group members. But it is these (1) *subjective and interpersonal* experiences that can explain why a group would have a distinctive set of (2) *concerns and intuitions*, which, once refined through (3) *public discourse*, can become a distinctive and philosophically valuable (4) *epistemic standpoint*. Orosco does not provide an equivalent story about how sharing membership in an ethnos leads people to share a philosophically valuable “perspective,” and this makes his account less satisfying. Furthermore, the concept of social group is more equipped to account for the flexible and dynamic nature of the epistemic standpoint of the Mexican American community, as new voices in the public discourse and new events in the world shape our subjective identities and our experiences in social space. In contrast, ethnos is an anthropological concept designed to speak about the movement of large populations over relatively long periods of time, and so the concept of an ethnic philosophy calls to

mind traditions that are relatively stable over many decades. (Along these lines, we worry that Orosco's reference to the "perspective" of the Mexican American ethnos invisibilizes the diversity of views within the Mexican American community.) Finally, by grounding Mexican American philosophy in the experiences of a social group, we can better appreciate its structural similarities to other kinds of philosophy that are based in the epistemic standpoint of particular social groups—such as queer theory, a philosophical perspective based upon the experience of queer folks—in which members do not share an ethnicity and the group is not constituted through familial heritage.

[7] It is surprisingly difficult to find high-quality research that establishes the percentage of Mexican Americans who share any given attitude, as most polls and surveys fail to distinguish between various kinds of "Latinos" or "Hispanics." Furthermore, even if we had such data, we would face a number of difficult interpretive issues, such as deciding exactly how widely an attitude must be shared in order for it to be considered to be an attitude "widely shared" in the Mexican American community. Since we are not social scientists, and so are not qualified to decipher complex polling data, we draw this list of suggestions from our own experience as Mexican Americans working within professional philosophy. It would be impossible to identify all of the sources – from early childhood memories to conversations with family members and colleagues, to Spanish-language television, to music and literature, and so on – that have contributed to our own sense of what might plausibly be a widespread concern or intuition for Mexican Americans. In presenting this list, we do, however, cite the work of a number of contemporary scholars working in philosophy departments who are either Mexican American or who indicate that that they understand their own work to be Mexican American philosophy. We also cite the texts referred to by Orosco in "The Philosophical Gift of Brown Folks" (2015), since this is currently the only published essay that directly addresses the definition of Mexican American philosophy. We provide these citations in order to give the reader some orientation to this field. While we find that this cited work is consistent with our proposal about how to conceptualize Mexican American philosophy, we have some worries about offering these citations: First, it is not our aim to construct a canon, but we recognize that acknowledging some works and not others may have unintended exclusionary effects. Second, we recognize that the list of scholars we cite is extremely limited in comparison to the great wealth of relevant and philosophically rich scholarship that has been generated outside of philosophy departments—for example, in Chicax studies, comparative literature, women's and gender studies, and so on—and which has no doubt informed our own concerns and intuitions. We hope that the suggestions and citations we provide here can be taken by readers in the spirit they are given, as mere starting points, laid out for purposes of orientation.

[8] It is interesting to compare the list we present here with the mission statement of the recently formed Society for Mexican American Philosophy: "This society is dedicated to the support and promotion of Mexican American philosophy in all of its diverse manifestations. It seeks to provide a venue for inquiry into philosophical issues that are of particular concern for Mexican Americans and, more broadly, persons of Latin American descent. To this end, the society is particularly interested in social justice issues (e.g. imperialism, colonization, immigration, civil and human rights, race, gender,

discrimination, and language) as well as issues pertaining to identity and citizenship in its various forms (e.g. social, political, or cultural). This society also supports historical and contemporary research on Mexican philosophy, including the philosophies of Mexico's indigenous peoples and current work on indigeneity. Lastly, this society supports scholars who are or wish to become actively engaged in their communities by providing a venue to present civically-engaged scholarship.” (Society for Mexican American Philosophy web page, accessed April 30, 2017.)

[9] Examples of work that take up this concern include Mendoza (2016); Orosco (2016); Carlos Alberto Sánchez (2011a; 2011b); Díaz (2010); Silva (2015); and Cisneros (2013).

[10] Mexican Americans reside some place in between these two groups, with self-constituting connections to and divergences from both groups. As Robert Sanchez puts it in an unpublished paper: “It is not quite Mexican, not quite American; it is different and yet the same; it is a form of resistance but also a form of reconciliation; it is a kind of nostalgia, but faces forward; and it is mine but also theirs.” This complexity, he says, “reflects the need to be honest, to bridge, to diversify, to negotiate, and not to forget.” See Robert Sanchez, “Chicano/a or Mexican American: A Philosophical Reflection,” 17.

[11] Orosco (2015) references Armando Rendon’s *Chicano Manifesto* (1971) as a text that examines Mexican American cultural identity and calls for the recognition of ethical obligation by the U.S. to other peoples.

[12] Orosco (2015) references Elihu Carranza’s *Chicanismo: Philosophical Fragments* (1977) as a text which “examine[s] the hybridity of Mexican American identity and proposes that the resolution of the Mexican American identity problematic could offer new concepts for conceiving race in the United States” (25).

[13] One central figure in the analysis of Mexican American identity is, of course, Gloria Anzaldúa. Her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) has inspired an enormous amount of scholarship, too voluminous to do justice to here. A number of difficult questions arise about whether to categorize some of this work as works of Mexican American philosophy. For example, Mariana Ortega’s book, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (2016) offers extended discussions of Anzaldúa. Ortega herself is from Nicaragua, and she does not specifically address a Mexican American audience. Should this text be considered a work of Mexican American philosophy, simply because it examines the work of Anzaldúa? What if she were to present her work at a conference for Mexican American philosophy, thereby explicitly entering into the current conversation within Mexican American philosophy? Fortunately for us, these difficult questions are beyond the scope of our analysis, because, again, we do not seek to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a work of Mexican American philosophy, but simply an account of Mexican American philosophy that captures its distinctive value.

[14] Orosco (2015) references Carlos Alberto Sánchez’s attempt to bridge U.S. American philosophers with Mexican American thought. See Sánchez (2015).

[15] Some examples of work in this vein include recent work on Aztec philosophy, such Maffie (2015); and Santana (2008). Orosco (2015) also points to Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Reyes Lopez Tijerina, who look to Mexican American culture to describe alternatives to the materialist values of dominant U.S. American society, and to the work

of Tomas Atencio, which provides a model of grassroots knowledge production in Northern New Mexico. See Montiel, et al (2009);

[16] This kind of conversation is underway within the Society for Mexican American Philosophy, which hosted its first annual conference in 2017.

[17] This is a major theme throughout Anzaldúa's (1987) work. See, especially, Chapter 5.

[18] For an articulation of this view in the context of Latin American philosophy, see Silva (2015).

[19] See Orosco (2008).

[20] Orosco (2015) references Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez (1988), whose work questions discourses of multiculturalism that privilege a white dominant-colonial perspective; Also see Ruíz (2012).

[21] For one account of this complexity, see Jacqueline Martinez (2000). Also, importantly, this lesson is communicated in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa writes: "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be a Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode... Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (79).

[22] See Alcoff's (2011) analysis of this phenomenon as it relates to Latinxs.

[23] For an analysis of the term "illegal," used as a label for undocumented immigrants, see Mendoza (2016).

[24] See, for instance, Kaplan (2015); Goldmacher (2016); and Feeny (2015).

[25] We wish to thank Elena Ruíz for her paper "The Hermeneutics of Mexican American Political Philosophy," (May, 2017). Her work helped to inspire our consideration of these points.

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