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Hispanic/Latino Identity:

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I

What Should We Call Ourselves?

Should we call ourselves Hispanics? Should we call ourselves Latinos/Latinas (henceforth, Latinos/as)?¹ Or should we reject any name? These are the only realistic alternatives we have, for there is no other term in wide use to refer to us. "Ibero Americans" and "Latin Americans" exclude important components of the worldwide Hispanic/Latino population, and they are not generally accepted. Indeed, both terms exclude United States citizens and Iberians, so they are of no use if we want to be more inclusive.² *Raza* and *Chicano* have been proposed by some sociologists and activists to refer to those of us who live in the United States, but they are objectionable for many obvious reasons, and have also failed to establish themselves.³ *Chicano* is simply too narrow, comprising only members of the Mexican-American community; it is a term completely foreign to anyone who is not a member of that community, in this country or elsewhere.⁴ And *raza*, which means "race" in Spanish, is too racial a term to be of any use and, again, is narrowly associated with the American south-west.⁵ Moreover, some of the objections that will be raised here against "Hispanics" and "Latinos/as" apply even more clearly to *raza* and *Chicano*.

This issue has to do with the following questions: What does the use of names like "Hispanic" and "Latino/a" entail? Should we use one and not the other? Should we reject any name? And if we are going to make decisions of this sort, on what basis should we make them? These questions are important because names *identify*; they tell us both about what they name and about what we know concerning what

they name. Is there, then, as philosophers would say, a set of necessary and sufficient conditions associated with either of these two names that defines who we – Hispanics or Latinos/as – are? Moreover, if these conditions exist, do they apply to us regardless of time, at a particular time, or at more than one, but less than all, times? In this chapter I examine arguments against the use of “Hispanic,” “Latino/a,” and any other name. Let me begin by pointing out some facts about the origin and grammar of “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” which are seldom acknowledged and which explain some of the controversy and confusion concerning their use.

1 Hispanics vs. Latinos/as

“Hispanics” and “Latinos/as” are used as nouns and adjectives. Their adjectival forms clearly indicate that they were originally intended to be descriptive. This or that was called Hispanic or Latino/a, and to this day we speak of Hispanic or Latino/a foods, countries, and so on. But we also use “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” as nouns, in which case we speak of individual persons or groups of persons. We speak of a Hispanic or Latino/a, and of Hispanics or Latinos/as.

“Hispanic” in English is a transliteration from the Spanish *hispánico/a*, which is always an adjective. The corresponding noun is *hispano/a*, which is also used as an adjective.⁶ In Spanish one refers to *un hispano* or *una hispana*, but not to *un hispánico* or *una hispánica*. All these terms come from a common root: the Latin term *Hispania*, which was used by Romans to refer to the Iberian peninsula. The origin of the term *Hispania* is itself clouded in mystery. A common view is that it is of pre-Roman origin and originally meant “land of rabbits.” In time, linguistic evolution turned the Latin *Hispania* into the Castilian *España* (Spain), which, because of the military successes of Castilians in the Iberian peninsula, came to be appropriated by them for the kingdom they established and the country which to this day they largely control.

Castilian hegemony was slow in establishing itself. The process that led to it began with the *Reconquista*, the 700-year campaign waged against the Moors by Christian kingdoms in the Iberian peninsula. There were several fronts along which this campaign took place, but three were particularly significant and gave rise to three important political units: the one in the west gave rise to Portugal; the one in the

east, to the Principality of Barcelona; and the one in the center, to Castile. There were also other kingdoms which were eventually integrated into these three, such as Navarre, Aragon, the Balearic Islands, and Valencia.

Of the three most important kingdoms, Castile was particularly aggressive and successful in conquering territory. Ferdinand of Aragon (at the time, Aragon was already unified with the Principality of Barcelona, the Kingdom of Valencia, and the Balearic Islands) and Isabella of Castile were married in the fifteenth century, so after the death of Isabella in 1504 and some squabbles among the throne's heirs, modern Spain first came under the rule of a single monarch, Ferdinand himself. From this time on, *España* has been reserved for this political union, although there was a relatively brief period of time in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which Portugal was part of it, insofar as the King of Spain ruled over Portugal also.

One of the consequences of these historical events is that the term *español* came to be used not only for the citizens of Spain, but also for the Castilian language. Today in Spain and Latin America, when referring to language, *español* means the language of the Castilians, although *castellano* is also used to refer to it. In the United States, the English translation of the term (“Spanish”) is used likewise. Interestingly, however, *hispano* is used not only in connection with the inhabitants of Spain, regardless of their ethnic origin, but also for the inhabitants of Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and for persons of Spanish or Latin American descent who live in the United States. Sometimes, however, the term is reserved for Latin Americans of presumably pure Spanish ancestry.

“Hispanic,” the English counterpart of *hispano/a*, is used essentially in the same way in the United States, except that sometimes Spaniards are excluded from the class of people it denotes. “Hispanic” frequently carries the sense of not being European.⁷ It has the connotation of being derivatively Spanish and therefore not truly Spanish. If one is called Spanish, this means that either one is a Spaniard or is a descendant of Spaniards, and this in turn means that one may be Spanish, or sometimes, but not always, derivatively Spanish, namely, Hispanic. On the other hand, the official position taken by the United States Bureau of the Census in 1988 treats “Spanish” and “Hispanic” in the same way.⁸ This reflects a usage that goes back quite a bit. Indeed, contrary to claims sometimes voiced in the US, “Hispanic” was

not created by the American Census bureaucracy in the 1970s, although it is true that the Census did not officially adopt it until that time.⁹

The situation is different with the use of *hispano/a* in Latin America and Spain, for this term is used for Latin Americans, Spaniards, and descendants of Latin Americans and Spaniards in the United States. Note also that the Portuguese and the Brazilians are not generally included under the category of *hispano/a*.¹⁰ *Hispanoamérica* usually includes countries which were former colonies of Spain, not Portugal. But the English "Hispanic" frequently includes both descendants of Spaniards and Portuguese, and of course of Latin Americans.

Clearly, this is a confusing picture; there is no consistent reason why the terms *hispano/a* and "Hispanic" are used in the way they are.¹¹ If these terms are to be used we must clarify some of these confusions and establish some parameters. Interestingly, very little has been done in this regard in Spain or Latin America in spite of the fact that *hispanismo* has been much discussed by both Spaniards and Latin Americans. Since the so-called Generation of '98 to this day, there has been a steady stream of literature surrounding this theme.¹² Indeed, during Francisco Franco's dictatorship in Spain there was a concerted effort to establish *hispanico/a* as the term of choice to describe Spanish and Latin American cultural phenomena in an effort to bring Latin America back into the Spanish fold. This effort was not restricted to the government. One of the Spanish intellectuals who left Spain because of the aftermath of the Civil War, Eduardo Nicol, proposed the term *hispanica* to refer to Spanish and Latin American philosophy.¹³

Unfortunately, the situation is not much better with "Latino/a." This term was created by the French to distinguish non-Anglo America from Anglo America. They needed a term that could integrate French America, Spanish America, and Portuguese America into a single unit in order to contrast it with Anglo America, and they successfully introduced *Amérique Latine*. "Latin," of course, means of Latin origin, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon. Like many things the French have done, this one stuck; although generally the French living in North America and the West Indies have come to be excluded from the category. The world generally refers to Spanish and Portuguese America as Latin America, and the inhabitants of Latin America refer to themselves as *latinoamericanos* and to their part of the world as *Latinoamérica* or *América Latina*. Few include Quebec and the French Antilles in Latin

America. *Latinoamérica* and *América Latina* are direct translations from English and French respectively.

This linguistic background gave rise to the term "Latino/a," which has become an English word and, following English conventions, is capitalized. The term is widely used to refer to persons of Latin American descent, regardless of their ancestry. Thus the children of persons of Polish-Jewish descent born in Latin America, who emigrate to this country, and their children, are considered Latinos/as. African Cubans and their children who live here are also considered Latinos/as. All descendants of pre-Columbian populations from Latin America and most of those from parts of the United States who were part of the Spanish colonial empire are considered Latinos/as. However, Native Americans, i.e. United States citizens who are of pre-Columbian origin, but whose ancestors lived in areas outside what constitutes United States territory today, are not so considered. Moreover, children of Spaniards born in Latin America again are considered Latinos/as, although Spaniards themselves are not, and the children of Spaniards who emigrated directly to the United States are sometimes considered Latinos/as and sometimes not.

So here we are, with two names to choose from to refer to ourselves. Of course, it should be one of the dearest principles of decent human conduct that every person should be allowed to choose how he or she is called, even though this is seldom in fact the case. Everyone should be allowed to choose his or her name, because names have serious consequences. Some names disempower those who have them in ways that have serious repercussions throughout their lives.¹⁴ And every group should, in principle, be allowed to choose its own name as well, as long as the members of the group are permitted to object and call themselves by whatever other name they choose. I say "in principle" because ignorance and prejudice should not be allowed to go unchallenged. It is not good to allow a view based on misinformation to go unchallenged, particularly when that view affects other people. It is for this reason that I have decided to speak, although what I am going to say here should not be taken as an attempt to thwart creativity and the rights of individuals and groups with respect to this issue.

These remarks should be enough warning that we are quite divided when it comes to the name we want to be called, to such an extent that some of us become very agitated and even angry when someone calls us what we do not wish to be called. Some of us want to be called

Hispanics and object to "Latinos/as," whereas others want to be called Latinos/as and will not tolerate "Hispanics."¹⁵ Indeed, some go so far as to forgo association with other Hispanics/Latinos because of the use of one of these terms. A few years ago, when the Committee for Hispanics in Philosophy of the American Philosophical Association sent out a survey to determine how many of us there were in the philosophical community, faculty and graduate students in general responded and voiced no serious objections. But at least one large group of undergraduate philosophy majors in a California school chose not to answer the survey because of the term "Hispanic" in the Committee's title.

Apart from those opposed to "Hispanic" or "Latino," there are others who reject any name which unites them with other groups of Hispanics/Latinos. Matters have been aggravated because of bureaucratic efforts on the part of US government agencies since the 1970s to impose the term "Hispanics" without proper acknowledgment and respect for the legitimate differences of various groups lumped together under the term. The use of the term "Latino/a" has been in part a grassroots effort to oppose this artificial bureaucratic homogenization.¹⁶ So, what is the issue? Why the fuss?

2 The Case Against "Hispanics"

Of the many objections that could be mustered against the use of "Hispanics" to refer to us, five stand out.¹⁷ They are quite different arguments, and their logical and persuasive force is also quite different. The first and second could be described as empirical, for they argue that there is no empirical justification for the use of the term. The third is more difficult to characterize. I am tempted to call it moral but, when we examine it, it will become clear that this is not quite right. And the fourth and fifth objections are pragmatic in the sense that they point to the undesirable consequences of the use of "Hispanic." Let me run through these objections.

The first objection argues that "Hispanic" is at least useless and at most confusing because it has no clear connotation; that is, a clear set of properties shared by the things it names. In this sense, the use of "American," for example, is both useful and fairly clear, for at least Americans have in common that they are citizens of the United States.

There is, then, something common to all persons called American, and this makes effective the term's denotation (i.e. the things it names). Some will want to argue that there are other features common to Americans but if so, this is icing on the cake; for a single property is sufficient to justify the use of the term.

Something similar can be said about some more general terms such as "human," for example. The claim is that every human being has something in common with every other human being. Although there is some dispute as to what that is, many accept the view that it is at least the capacity to reason, or the capacity to use language, and so on. Likewise, red things have in common that when we look at them under certain conditions, they appear to us in a certain way that allows us to distinguish them from other things we do not call red.

Now, the argument against the use of "Hispanics" is precisely that there is no property or set of properties connoted by the term and, therefore, that "Hispanics" cannot be effectively used to denote anything. In short, because we cannot point to any definite, precise connotation for the term, it cannot be used to pick out anything.¹⁸

One of the premises on which this objection is based is that, in order for a term to be used effectively, it must connote some property, or set of properties, which is common to all the things of which the term is predicated. This is what philosophers usually refer to as an essence: a set of properties which always, and only, characterizes the things called by the same name. This is a widespread view for which much support has been offered in the history of human thought.

The objection is substantiated by pointing out that "Hispanic" may be understood in a variety of ways – among others, territorially, politically, linguistically, culturally, racially, genetically, and pertaining to a class – yet none of these ways of understanding the meaning of "Hispanic" is effective in carving out an essence, that is, a property, or set of properties, which can be easily identified as essential to Hispanics.

Consider a *territorial* understanding of Hispanic. The justification of this use would consist in pointing out a territory on the basis of which the term could be effectively applied. But this makes very little sense if taken by itself, for on what basis can one establish boundaries to a territory? One can talk about mountains and rivers, but that can hardly explain how to use a term like "Hispanic." Suppose that someone were to insist that Hispanic has to do with everything which involves the Iberian peninsula, for example. This approach has the advantage that

the limits or boundaries of this peninsula appear to be quite clear. There is water all around it except for the north-east, where the mighty Pyrenees rise, separating it from the rest of Europe. So in principle it appears to make sense to have a term to describe the people who live on this piece of land. Yet problems of demarcation arise, for where exactly is the place where the boundary between the peninsula and the rest of Europe is to be drawn? Perhaps at the highest level of the mountains. This could be done, but does it make sense? Suppose there is a little town whose inhabitants are the descendants of six families who settled in an area of the Pyrenees and have now become thoroughly mixed together, although three families came from one side of the Pyrenees and three families came from the other. And suppose the town is located on a plateau through which the highest point crosses and that this point divides the town into two. In accordance with our criterion, we would have to call one of the two sides Hispanic and the other Gallic, or whatever. Surely, this makes no sense in a town which is one town, with people related to each other in various ways.

The attempt to draw territorial boundaries between Hispanic America and Anglo America would encounter similar difficulties. Let us suppose that we accept the Río Grande as the dividing line between them. What do we make of the people of Mexican ancestry on this side of the river and of the people of Anglo-Saxon ancestry on the other? And what do we make of cultural similarities and differences? No matter how one looks at territorial justifications for the use of terms like "Hispanic," they fail, for there is nothing in a territory that can justify many current legitimate uses of the terms.

Consider, then, a *political* understanding of "Hispanic."¹⁹ Here we have several possibilities, all equally unacceptable. One is to consider Hispanic as the political unit we know as Spain. In this sense, Hispanic refers to people who are part of the country, Spain. But there are at least two objections to this understanding of the term. First, the term seems to duplicate another term already in use: "Spanish." Why do we need "Hispanic" when we already have "Spanish" to refer to persons who are part of the Spanish state? Second, the political unit we know as Spain has not always had the same boundaries and, therefore, it has not always included the same groups of people. Indeed, this political unit came into being only after the deaths of Isabella and her successors, Joan the Mad and Philip the Fair, leaving Ferdinand of Aragon as

sole ruler of Castile and Aragon. Prior to this time, there was no Spain. The unification of Spain is supposed to have become complete when Ferdinand annexed the Iberian part of the Kingdom of Navarre in 1512, but this political unit has not always had the same boundaries. During the reign of Philip II in the sixteenth century, for example, Portugal became part of it, although only for a relatively short time. Gibraltar was part of Spain for a couple of centuries before it became British over 200 years ago. And something similar can be said about Perpignan.

Another possibility would be to think in terms of all the political units of the Iberian peninsula taken together: Spain, Portugal, Catalonia, Navarre, and so on. But this is not very helpful, for why should these units be included and others excluded? Why leave out the French Basque region? Why not include Perpignan? What about the Azores and the Canary Islands? And, of course, this leaves out all of Latin America. On what basis can we draw such distinctions to justify the use of "Hispanic"?

Another way to try to justify the use of "Hispanic" is in terms of people who speak Spanish.²⁰ But, strictly speaking, "Spanish" is not the correct name for the language, for the language that goes by that name is in fact Castilian. Castilians have appropriated "Spanish" by a process similar to that by which the United States has appropriated "America." It is a matter of prominence and power. Moreover, this language is spoken by many people who are not native speakers of it and have learned it as a second language. Some of these live in the Iberian peninsula, like the Catalans, the Galicians, and the Basques. Some of them live in Latin America, like the Maya and the Tarahumara. But some of them live in the United States, in Australia, and in Germany. Are all these peoples Hispanics? No one would think so, which means the linguistic criterion is not effective.

Besides, there are people considered Hispanics who do not have Castilian as their native tongue. Consider the case of some Bolivians whose native tongue is Aymara. According to this criterion they could not be considered Hispanic, and yet those who favor the use of "Hispanic" would want to so consider them. Moreover, if the Bolivians were brought to the United States, they would be classified as Hispanics. There is also the case of people who do not speak Castilian at all but are nonetheless regarded as Hispanics. Consider the case of children of Puerto Ricans and Cubans in this country who have never

learned Castilian and yet not only are thought of as Hispanic by many, but also often think of themselves in this way. Clearly, "Hispanic" and "Castilian-speaking" are not synonymous. Besides, there is also the matter of proficiency. How proficient in the language does one need to be in order to qualify as Hispanic? If a level of proficiency is set too high, it would disqualify children and some mentally handicapped persons. And if it is set too low, then it would qualify many students of the language whom no one regards as Hispanic.

Assume for a moment that none of what has been said against making language the criterion of "Hispanic" has merit. Even under these conditions, the linguistic criterion could be questioned insofar as it involves too little for identity. The argument would be that Castilian, or Spanish if you will, is very little more than the elements of a grammar and this would not explain the group's identity. Indeed, how much do some African Cubans, some native Bolivians, and some Asturians have in common linguistically? The accent would be very different, and so would be the vocabulary and even much of the syntax. Would they understand each other? To some extent yes, but one cannot assume so. Under these conditions, then, can language really be taken as the source of Hispanic identity?

To expand the understanding of Hispanic to include other Iberian languages and perhaps even Amerindian languages would not help, for the criterion would be both too narrow and too broad.²¹ It would be too narrow because it would not solve the problem of French Basques, for example, or again, of people from other cultures who learn these languages. And it would be too broad because it would have an even greater lack of cohesiveness than Castilian. The linguistic criterion, then, is of no use.

The *cultural* criterion is more promising, although upon careful scrutiny it also fails.²² At first it looks as if culture could function as an effective demarcating criterion of what is Hispanic and what is not.²³ After all, certain cultural practices and traits appear to separate Hispanics from other cultures. Hispanics seem to share all sorts of cultural characteristics which are idiosyncratic to them and are not found in other cultures. These could include language or families of languages, values, religion, social customs, and so on. Culture could solve the problems that territorial and political demarcations pose; it would provide borders for a territory and it would cross artificial political lines. But even culture fails under scrutiny.

Consider the way in which we speak of Hispanics as referring to persons who share the Spanish culture. This certainly raises questions, for what is Spanish culture? The culture of the political unit we know as Spain? Does it include Catalan and Basque cultures? Why do we separate it from Portuguese culture and not from these? But perhaps it is separable from all these, in which case we may be speaking of, say, Castilian culture. But Castilian culture then reduces to the culture of those people who speak Castilian. Should we then say Castilian as a native tongue or Castilian as an acquired language? Or does it have to do with territory after all? Or with political boundaries? And why exclude Latin America? The problem with including Latin America is that we have here a variety of cultures which are well integrated in some cases, and in some cases not, but which cannot under any circumstances be regarded as Spanish. A brief walk through Mexico City's Zócalo and Madrid's Plaza del Sol is sufficient to get the point. Which boundaries should we use and who, then, should we call Hispanic? Clearly the cultural criterion is too vague to be of help, and when we try to pin it down we end up reducing it to the other criteria which we have already found to be inadequate.

Race would prima facie appear to be a better choice. It certainly sounds more scientific. Race does not seem to depend on culture, and those who belong to a race are supposed to share certain clearly identifiable physical characteristics. There would seem to be nothing difficult in separating people according to race. Yet this criterion also runs into trouble: its problems are twofold. First, race is hardly a clear criterion of separation insofar as it appears after all to include cultural and sociological elements.²⁴ We see frequently that people who look different are classified as members of the same race, and people who look similar are classified as members of different races. In some cases, racial classification has to do with recent lineage rather than with anything else. Certainly, the situation of South Africa and the United States is quite ambiguous when it comes to race. In South Africa, race classification has often been changed through legal procedures, and it is generally accepted that in the United States a good proportion of people of color become white every year.²⁵

But this is not all, for even if race were an incontestable criterion of distinction among people, there does not seem to be any race that can properly be called Hispanic. Many of the people who are called Hispanic belong to different races. What would be the characteristics of

a Hispanic race? Even in the Iberian peninsula itself, or even within what we know today as Spain, there is no uniformity of looks or physical make-up. There are even physiological differences between some Iberian groups (for example, the blood profile of Basques is different from that of other Iberians in some important respects). The inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula are perhaps one of the most mixed people in Europe. Apart from the Celts, Iberians, Basques, Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Berbers, Romans, Vandals, Suebi, and Visigoths, the peninsula had a large infusion of Moors beginning in the eighth century and of Jews at various points in its history, and descendants of Amerindians have often moved to it and lived and mixed with other members of the population. Indeed, there are even Africans, Indians (from India), and Asians who have settled (voluntarily or by force) in Iberia at various times, and who have mixed with the population in Spain and Portugal. It would be completely impossible to speak of a Spanish race, or an Iberian race, if one were trying to refer to the people of the Iberian peninsula. And the situation becomes even more complicated when we include Latin America in the picture, for the African and Amerindian elements in Latin America are substantial and they are themselves variegated and intermixed. Moreover, there is the more recent immigration from non-Iberian Europe and Asia. Alberto Fujimori - elected President of Peru in 1990 - is of Japanese ancestry, and there are significant numbers of Asians in Paraguay, Italians and Welsh in Argentina, Germans in Chile, French in Cuba, and so on. What is the Hispanic race, then?

At the beginning of this century, when philosophers were greatly impressed with biology and the evolutionary theory of Darwin, José Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher, proposed the idea that in Latin America there were the makings of a fifth race which, instead of being exclusionary, like the other four, would be a true mixture of all the others. It is a race, he speculated, guided by love rather than interest.²⁶ Vasconcelos's theory was inspiring, but it was flawed from the beginning, for it relied on the unclear notion of race. There is one point in it, however, that is important and of which we should take note: there is no single discernible race in Latin America but, rather, a veritable melange of races and racial mixtures. This point can be extended to cover Iberians and Hispanic Americans. If there is to be a Hispanic race, which I very much doubt, it is still in the making and would necessarily be an extraordinary mixture.

Some argue that it is not race but *genetic lineage* that serves to give unity to Hispanics: genetic lineage is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the proper use of the term and of the identity of those to whom it is applied.²⁷ Prima facie this seems to make considerable sense. It certainly solves many of the problems raised earlier with respect to territory, political boundaries, language, culture, and race. Hispanics can move about, join different nations, speak different languages, have different cultures, and belong to different races and racial mixtures.

Still, there are at least three serious problems with this view.²⁸ The first is that it involves either circularity or a reduction to some other factor, for genetic lineage must always have an origin. Membership in a genetic line presupposes the genetic line. The problem arises because the identity of the genetic line has to be assumed (thus the circularity) or analyzed in terms of non-genetic factors, such as territory, political unit, language, culture, and so on (thus the reduction). If I am Hispanic because I can trace my lineage to my grandparents, what makes them Hispanics?

The second problem is that genetic lineage is both too narrow and too broad as a criterion of identity. It is too narrow because there are Hispanics who have no genetic link to other Hispanics; for instance, some children of Welsh immigrants to Argentina and of Jewish immigrants to various Hispanic nations. It is too broad because it would have to include tenth-generation descendants of Hispanics, who have not lived in a Hispanic country, have not associated with other Hispanics, and do not share with them any cultural traits.

This brings me to the third difficulty: genetic lineage is too imprecise a criterion insofar as it is not clear what it involves. What constitutes genetic lineage? A completely unmixed genealogy or a partially mixed genealogy? If the first, I doubt many of us would qualify; if the second, then the existence of a single Hispanic ancestor, ten generations removed, would be sufficient to qualify. But this does not make much sense.

Finally, "Hispanic" could be used to denote a certain *class* of people. The problem is that it becomes very difficult to speak of any such class. In order to speak meaningfully in this way, we would have to begin by separating out a larger group of people, from among whom we could distinguish some as belonging to the class of Hispanics. But which is that larger group of people? Those who speak Castilian? Those

who live in Spain? Those who live in Latin America? Those of a certain race or ancestry? We already saw the difficulties posed by the attempt to demarcate any of these categories. All the same, suppose we were able to do this. We would still have to separate the Hispanic subgroup from the larger group and do it in terms of class, for example. But which subgroup or class should we refer to as Hispanic? Some think that Hispanics should be those with Spanish ancestry. But surely that would bring back the problems associated with the use of "Spanish" and, moreover, this is not how most people use "Hispanic." And other criteria, such as education, social status, and so on, also fail, for they would obviously tie the group to non-Hispanic groups which have the same level of education, social status, and so on. It does not seem to be possible effectively to distinguish Hispanics from other groups of people on the basis of education or any of the criteria mentioned.²⁹

In short, the empirical objection is that there is in fact no identifiable property, or set of properties, that one can identify which is shared by those people one would want to call Hispanics, and that therefore we lack a proper criterion for distinguishing them from others. Using philosophical jargon, we could say that the use of "Hispanic" is unjustified insofar as there are no identifiable necessary or sufficient conditions either for its proper use or for the identity of those to whom it is applied. None of the conditions mentioned – territory, political unit, language, culture, race, genetic lineage, or class – functions either as a necessary or a sufficient condition. We must, then, abandon the project of trying to identify Hispanics based on any kind of empirically discernible property.

Note that this objection can be used not only against the use of "Hispanic" but also, more radically, against any attempt to lump Iberians, Latin Americans, and some Americans into a group. I shall return to this when we speak of the no-name alternative, but now let me turn to the second objection against the use of "Hispanics."

The second objection is also empirical insofar as it argues that there are no empirically discernible grounds which justify the use of "Hispanic." It argues thus not because it finds the term has *no* connotation, as the first objection did, but because the connotation of the term (1) is too narrow, excluding some necessary elements, and (2) is skewed, privileging some elements over others. The point is made that the use of "Hispanic" to describe members of the Latin American community in Latin America, or the Latino community in the United States

unfairly privileges the Spanish, Iberian, and European component, cultural or racial, of these communities, leaving out, sometimes altogether, essential elements. "Hispanic" means somehow derivatively Spanish or Iberian, and therefore European, privileging this element in contrast to the Amerindian and African elements which are integral parts of our community. Sometimes this argument is made in terms of nationalities. It is claimed that the use of "Hispanics" is not sensitive to national differences which must be respected. This version of the argument is weaker, for these so-called national differences are often no more than artificial constructs superimposed on widely different peoples by certain powerful elites.

Understood in its cultural or racial sense, however, this is a powerful objection. Labels and names establish priorities and send messages, and if "Hispanic" does indeed privilege the Spanish, Iberian, or European elements to the detriment or exclusion of Amerindian and African elements in our community, then it is certainly unacceptable. If the term can only be understood in this way, then it should be dropped in favor of some other more inclusive and less biased term.

The third objection against the use of "Hispanics" argues that, although the term may be perfectly appropriate when applied to Spaniards in particular or Iberians in general, and even when applied to descendants of Spaniards or Iberians in Latin America and the United States, it is unconscionable to use it to refer to Latin Americans or to Latinos/as in the United States who have no Spanish or Iberian ancestry. The reason is that the ancestors of these people suffered enormous atrocities and egregious abuses at the hands of the Iberian conquistadors and, in many cases, the consequences of those atrocities and abuses are still quite evident. "Hispanics" is primarily descriptive of the people responsible for those atrocities and abuses; to apply the same term to those who suffered at their hands is not only indelicate but morally repugnant.

It should be clear why earlier I characterized this objection as a moral objection. Its force is largely a moral one: it is morally wrong to call Latin Americans and Latinos/as "Hispanics." Nonetheless, it is not clear that there is any justifiable moral principle from which this conclusion could be derived. Perhaps one could argue that it is derived from the principle "It is wrong to use a name for the oppressed that belongs to the oppressor." But this is not helpful, for it is not clear in turn why this principle has any moral force. That is, although the form

of the principle is prescriptive, it is not at all obvious why it should be adopted. Indeed, there are situations in which it is certainly beneficial to use a name that belongs to an oppressor for the oppressed, since identification with the oppressor might help the oppressed avoid some oppressive measures. And if life, death, and the just apportionment of goods to the oppressed depends on the use of the oppressor's name, someone who is defending the oppressed would seem to be morally compelled to use the name. It is not clear, then, that the principle in question is morally justifiable in all circumstances. Nonetheless, the fact that both the principle and the objection are presented as moral judgments could warrant characterizing the objection as moral even if its moral justification is missing, unclear, or impossible.

There is a version of this objection that is particularly significant for the use of "Hispanics" to describe those of us who live in the United States, and especially Hispanics/Latinos from the south-west who are *mestizos* or consider themselves Mexican American. The objection is that "Hispanic" has been appropriated in the south-west by a small group of people who consider themselves to be of pure Spanish ancestry, in order to distinguish themselves from "Mexicans," whom they consider *mestizos* and, in their racist eyes, a lower class of human being. Under these conditions, does it make sense to use "Hispanics" to refer precisely to *mestizos*, or to Mexican Americans?³⁰ Two points merit reflection. First, if this term has been used to differentiate and discriminate, it cannot now be used to unite. Second, if the use of the term implies pure Spanish, non-*mestizo*, and non-Mexican, then how can it be used to include *mestizos* and Mexicans?

The fourth objection against the use of "Hispanics" is pragmatic. It argues that the use of this term has unacceptable consequences. These result from the fact that, no matter what one says, "Hispanics" first and foremost applies to Spaniards, and thus can be used to refer to Latin Americans and Latinos/as only secondarily or derivatively. This makes the latter two second-class citizens as it were, and perpetuates a relation of dominator-dominated between Spaniards in particular and Iberians in general, on the one hand, and Latin Americans and Latinos/as on the other. It would not be practically beneficial for the latter two, then, to allow themselves to be called Hispanics. This is not to claim that there would be effects of the sort that took place during colonial times. Latin American countries are now completely independent from Spain and some are even more powerful and richer than Spain.

Moreover, Latinos/as in the United States are completely out of reach of any kind of power, political or otherwise, that Spain could exercise over them. Still, there would be a kind of psychological dependency and a sense of cultural subservience which would not be salutary for Latin Americans and Latinos/as.

The fifth and final objection is also pragmatic. It points out that the use of "Hispanics" has negative associations. Not only does "Hispanic" imply "derivatively Spanish," but it is associated in many places with negative qualities: laziness, shiftiness, lax morals, low class, lack of education, drug use, and so on. It also suggests mixed race, which in racist societies can have negative consequences. The use of "Hispanics," then, can create a hostile atmosphere for us, may lead to discrimination, and obstructs our proper integration in societies where we constitute a minority, such as American society.³¹

3 The Case Against "Latinos/as"

The case against the use of "Latinos/as" begins with an empirical objection similar to the first objection given against the use of "Hispanics."³² I say "similar" rather than "the same" because those who propose the use of "Latinos/as" do not include Iberian countries in the designation. Indeed, one of the reasons why they favor "Latinos/as" rather than "Hispanics" is that they associate the latter with Spain. They are impressed in particular with the second, third, and fourth objections presented earlier against the use of "Hispanics." They will have nothing to do with a term which they believe primarily designates a former oppressor and whose cloud still hangs over those whose ancestors it once dominated. But even if one restricts the use of "Latinos/as" to Latin America and certain members of the population in the United States, the empirical issues raised in connection with the use of "Hispanics" can still be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, because the population of Latin America and the presumed Latin American population in the United States appear to have as little in common as the presumed referents of "Hispanics" have. There is no need, however, to go over the ground we have already covered. Instead, I shall turn to five other objections which apply in particular to the use of "Latinos/as."

The first of these argues that if the designation "Latinos/as" is held not to apply to the Iberian countries, then it is too narrow to be of use.

If the argument in favor of "Latinos/as" and the rejection of "Hispanics" is that "Hispanics" is not acceptable because of the abuse Iberians bestowed on the native population of America, then what do we make of descendants of Iberians who live in America and whose ancestors first settled here several hundred years ago? Certainly they could not be Latinos/as. But if they are not so, what are they? In short, what do we make of the *criollo*?

Criollo was used during the colonial period to designate persons of Spanish ancestry who were born in America.³³ Obviously, *criollos* and their descendants are descendants of Spaniards; they have some elements of Spanish culture, including the language; and they never suffered the atrocities that the conquistadors inflicted on Africans brought to America as slaves and on Amerindians. Indeed, some of them, or their ancestors, may have been responsible for some of those atrocities. This means that if the use of "Latinos/as" is precisely intended to leave out everything Spanish or peninsular, then *criollos* and their descendants must also be left out. What are these people going to be called? How are we to regard them? I imagine some would want to undo history by sending them back to Iberia, but wants will not change anything in this case. Descendants of *criollos* are in Latin America to stay.

A comparison with Africans brought over to Latin America makes clear further problems. Africans are as foreign to America as *criollos*.³⁴ Indeed, there are *criollos* whose families have been in America longer than any African family living in America. So if *criollos* are to be excluded from the extension of "Latino/a" because they are of non-Amerindian descent, then Africans should also be excluded. Moreover, the same reasoning will force us, if we are interested in unbiased consistency, to exclude mulattos (the mix of European and African) and to raise the question of what to do with the population resulting from the mix of Amerindian with non-Amerindian. Should we also ship Africans back to Africa and drown anyone of mixed lineage? And what do we do with mixed culture? Do we reject anything Iberian? This would include the language, of course. But what do we put in its place? English, the language of other oppressors?

Even a short perusal of the history of most of Latin America will show that much that is valued and constitutive of Latin America today is the result of the efforts of *criollos*, mulattos, and *mestizos*. It makes no sense to use a designation which necessarily excludes any of them.

But this is not all. There is another important fact that must be taken into account in this matter, and this is that Latin America is eminently mixed. There are some Latin Americans who can claim pure Iberian ancestry. And there are also some Latin Americans who can claim pure African or Amerindian descent. But the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Latin America and the majority of Latinos/as in the United States are mixed. For them to reject "Hispanics" is to reject part of who they are genetically. But not only that, it is also to reject part of who they are historically and culturally. Latin America today is not pre-Columbian America, nor is Iberia what it was before its encounter with America. The current culture of Latin America and Iberia is a mixture of elements from America, Africa, and Iberia which came together in its history.

A second reason against the use of "Latinos/as" is that Latin Americans or American Latinos/as should not be allowed to monopolize the term. If "Latinos/as" is taken to mean "of Latin origin," as opposed to Anglo-Saxon, then Iberians have as much right to the name as do Latin Americans and American Latinos/as. Indeed, their right to the name is certainly greater than that of Amerindians, for there is nothing that these have genetically, culturally (except through Iberia), or historically (again except through Iberia) in common with the Romans. Furthermore, who is going to tell the French, who first coined the term precisely in order to separate themselves and other "Latins" from Anglo-Saxons, that they and their descendants in America do not have a right to the term? On what basis can the argument be made?

This brings us to the third objection, namely, that "Latinos/as" is too broad a designation. "Latinos/as" means Latin or of Latin origin, and the Latins were the ancient Romans - in fact, only a small group of people from Latium, the land around Rome. The term "Latin," however, is also used as an adjective to refer to certain parts of Europe in the Middle Ages in which the Latin language was used or to peoples who used the Latin language. In this sense, the Latins are contrasted with the Muslims or the Jews, for example. According to this criterion, not just residents of what later came to be Italy and Spain were called Latin, but also residents of Germany and Britain. Moreover, eventually the term has come to be applied to peoples whose languages are derived from Latin, speakers of so-called Romance languages. Thus speakers of Spanish, Italian, Catalan, French, Romanian, and so on are called Latins, but speakers of English, German, or Russian are not.

Recall that the reason for the introduction of the term "Latin America" was precisely to encompass all Latins from America, so that they could be contrasted with Anglo-Saxons, speakers of non-Latin derived languages. Indeed, if we go back to the nineteenth century, when the term was placed in use, we see that those who advocated it emphasized precisely the Roman and French connection: Latin America is Latin because of its legal (Roman law) and religious (Roman Catholic) traditions.³⁵

In short, the exclusive appropriation of "Latin" by Latin Americans and "Latinos/as" in the United States is unwarranted. Moreover, the use of the Spanish version of the term, namely "Latinos/as," is even more paradoxical. Why in God's name use a Spanish translation of "Latin" to refer to oneself when one wants to avoid any Spanish connotation? And if what is desired is to get away from any Eurocentric terminology, why use anything that has to do with what is quintessentially European: Rome? Have we forgotten that Rome has been the symbol and icon for all European imperialism, expansion, militarism, conquest, and colonization for the past 2,000 years? Have we forgotten Charlemagne, Charles V, Napoleon, and Hitler? Rome has been the inspiration, the fuel that has kindled the ambition of every tyrant who has wanted to set himself up as the king of the world, and of every nation that has had aspirations of establishing preeminence above all others. Never mind the argument that Roman imperialism, military expansion, conquest, and colonization also resulted in the spread of learning and the advancement of those conquered. Such advantages were unintended and accidental byproducts of a process initiated for very different reasons, and they could have been achieved by other, more peaceful and beneficent means. Rome stands for the dark side of this process. Thus, to use "Latin" or "Latino/a" as an act of rebellion against Iberian and European expansionism is not just paradoxical; it is ridiculous. Those who argue strenuously for this term either have a very short memory or a very selective one. Good foundations, however, require both a good and an integral memory. This is a lesson that those peoples who suffered at the hands of Hitler have learned well, and we should learn from their experience. We must be faithful to the facts, and we must be careful with what we establish as our symbols.

There is one last objection against the use of "Latinos/as" that needs to be voiced. If it is objectionable to adopt any name imposed by a

foreign group of people, why should we adopt the name the French gave us? The adoption of the French name seems to be another example of the servile attitude some of us have with respect to certain European countries, and particularly the French and the English. To bow to the French or the English is as bad as bowing to the Spanish or the Portuguese; in fact, it may be worse, for most of us have some Iberian blood and certainly much of the Iberian cultures, but how much have we taken from the French or the English in comparison? If the point is to liberate ourselves, then we must certainly not follow the French initiative; we should be the ones to find a name for ourselves.

4 The Case Against Any Name

The picture I have painted does not bode well for the enterprise that seeks to find a name for the group of people some call Hispanics and others call Latinos/as. Indeed, perhaps the best thing would be to abandon the whole enterprise: there should be no name for us. And here in some ways the arguments mirror those already rehearsed. I should like to refer to four in particular, which may be characterized as empirical, political, logical, and pragmatic.³⁶

We have seen versions of the empirical argument already; it points out that there is nothing that so-called Hispanics/Latinos have in common. There is no unity, no reality which stands behind the name, for there are no common properties to all Hispanics/Latinos. Any name, then, would be an artificial creation by a few who have aims of their own in mind: political dominance, wealth, or whatever. A search for elements of unity, as we have already seen, leads nowhere. Indeed, as some scholars have pointed out, even denominations like "Latin America" are problematic.³⁷ There is no Latin America. There is only a group of countries and very different societies which, as wholes, have nothing in common. The denomination "Latin America," just like the denomination "Hispanic" or "Latino/a," has been imposed by persons or groups of persons for whom it is convenient to lump together the countries or peoples from this part of the world. The purpose behind this is usually domination and exploitation.

Consider the following four countries, all of which are regarded as Latin American: Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico. Spanish is the lingua franca in three of these countries (Argentina, Ecuador, and

Mexico), while the other (Brazil) has Portuguese. In Argentina the population is primarily Caucasian and of European descent; in Ecuador the population is predominantly Amerindian, composed of descendants of various tribes which were under Inca domination before the encounter; in Brazil, most of the population is of African origin or it is a mixture of African and Portuguese; and in Mexico the population is primarily of Amerindian origin and includes such different Amerindian peoples as the Maya and the Aztecs. The geography and economies of these four countries are different, and so are many elements of their cultures. On what basis, then, can they all be lumped together under the term "Latin America?"

Now let us turn to Hispanics/Latinos in the United States. Do we really form a community? What do Chicanos, Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, and so on have in common? What does a wealthy Cuban, who claims to have pure European ancestry, and who came to the United States in 1960 as a political exile, have in common with a poor *bracero* of Meso-American ancestry, who crossed the United States border with Mexico illegally in search of manual labor? Some say: not race; not social status; not economic means; not values. It is even questionable that they speak the same language or have the same religion. Perhaps their languages follow the same grammar, but when it comes to vocabulary, accent, and pronunciation, the differences between them are as large as one would expect of peoples who speak languages as different from each other as Portuguese and Castilian. And something similar can be said about religion. A case could be made that the version of Catholicism in which most Cubans believe is a different religion from the Catholicism permeated with elements of the Amerindian religions in which many *braceros* believe.³⁸

This same comparison could be repeated over and over again. The point is obvious: the Hispanic/Latino community in the United States does not share anything in common. But this should not be surprising, since we already saw that the Hispanic/Latino community outside the United States does not share anything in common either. If we are going to talk about communities, we must talk about smaller groups, perhaps national groups: Cubans, Chicanos, Dominicans, and so on. Perhaps we should in fact divide these groups: Cubans from Cuba and American Cubans; Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the United States. Or perhaps we should subdivide them even further: Cubans from Cuba, Cubans from Miami, Cubans from New

York, and so on. Indeed, Puerto Ricans themselves have found a name for Puerto Ricans from New York: Neo-Ricans. And then we must also think in terms of gender differences. Perhaps the units should be reduced even further, to female Neo-Rican, and so on. It is these smaller units that share something, and it is to these smaller units that individual persons feel attached. Their sense of belonging is first to them and only later, if at all, to this artificially created category of Hispanic or Latino/a.³⁹ And I say "if at all" because there is considerable evidence that points to deep-rooted rivalries and resentment between some of these communities. I remember, for example, that the first thing I heard on the radio in 1972, when I went to Puerto Rico as visiting professor, was an ultimatum from the "Comando Anticubano" to all Cubans living in the island: "Leave Puerto Rico within a week or your personal safety will be in jeopardy."

The use of any single name for these diverse groups involves a forced homogenization of what is not homogeneous, and thus a distortion of the reality in which we live. There is no Hispanic or Latino natural kind; rather, this kind is an artificial one created by bureaucrats, government agencies, foreign nations, or particular groups who want to exert their power over others or establish hegemony over them. Homogeny leads to hegemony.

The political argument against the use of a single term to refer to Hispanics/Latinos goes something like this. The reason that there are no properties that can be associated with the peoples for whom we are seeking a name is that they are not a cohesive group of people, free to develop as a community and a society. The only thing that these diverse peoples have in common is their marginalization and the domination imposed on them by others. But even here the marginalization is different and the domination comes from different sources, failing to justify a common name. Latin America in particular has been pushed to the margins of both Anglo-Saxon America and Europe and has suffered domination from a variety of colonial powers and industrialized nations. The countries of Latin America have suffered political domination from Spain, Portugal, and other powers that ventured into America. And all these countries have endured the economic exploitation of the United States, and some of them have experienced economic exploitation from France and Britain as well. The exploitation and domination that this part of the world has suffered has divided it into classes whose interests are diametrically opposed and who share

only a patina of culture. Deep down, there is no cohesive society, no people, for their authenticity has been stolen and their only unity lies in their being the object of exploitation of one sort or another. Until the forces of oppression are defeated, there will not be a people, a society, a group of persons that will share characteristics that make them one. Therefore, any attempt at naming us should be resisted.⁴⁰

The sociological objection argues that there is no evidence that all members of the group to which others refer as Hispanics/Latinos use a single name to refer to themselves, or have any consciousness of being a unified group. Yet, so the argument goes, self-naming, or at least consciousness of identity, is a necessary condition for ethnicity.⁴¹ It makes no sense, then, artificially to impose a name on people who do not accept it, and who do not think of themselves as one people.

The logical argument can be formulated as follows. Human beings all have the same nature, and cultural and ethnic differences are merely superficial and accidental.⁴² To think otherwise is to confuse what is essential with what is accidental, and thus to make a kind of type mistake.⁴³ There is no point in trying to find something that characterizes Hispanics/Latinos and that separates them from other societies and groups. Logically, the search for the essential characteristics of a culture or ethnic group is futile. Cultures and ethnic groups are in a constant process of change, and are merely superficial. The essential elements of human society are not different from one group to another, but are rather the same for all human beings. We should stop the effort to find common characteristics of groups that separate them from other human beings and, likewise, we should stop trying to find names that are appropriate to identify them. Humanity is one, and any attempt to break it apart is bound to fail.

The last argument is pragmatic. We should stop any attempts to give a name to all so-called Hispanics/Latinos, not just because there is no evidence that we share anything that other human beings do not also share, but more importantly because to do so facilitates our oppression, marginalization from the mainstream, and alienation. Giving us a name provides a handle for our manipulation. Identification and naming always have a practical aspect, even when it is not the only aspect of naming. When a group identifies and names itself, it is usually to separate itself from others with whom it does not wish to be identified, and often such an act is preparatory to hostile action against those others. When a group is given a name by some other group, the

aim is also similar: separation and hostility. Hence, when it comes to groups of people, identification and naming are seldom benign, carrying with them dangers to those identified and named, or to others who become contrasted with them.

There are other problems with identification and naming as well, for identifying and naming always involve an emphasis on similarities and the neglect of differences. This in turn may generate false generalizations about the members of the group which is identified or named. They are all regarded as the same or as largely the same, and their individual differences are ignored in order to make them fit the general mold which justifies their name. This gives rise to stereotypes, caricatures, and distortions which in turn are used to justify prejudice and bias.

From this it is a short step to the obliteration of individuality. Individual persons become indistinguishable members of a set whose members are essential replicas of each other. The individual person ceases to be who he or she is and becomes merely one unit of a kind.⁴⁴ Why take the risk, then? It is better to be without a group name and to have only individual names. In this way we are who we are, as individuals, and can be treated as such. We do not have to suffer by association. Nor will we be tempted, as individuals, to regard ourselves as higher, greater, or superior to others. The twentieth century has had enough superior and inferior nations, races, cultures, and societies. Let us abandon any attempt to reestablish them by giving up the effort to find a common name for any group of people, including those some like to call Hispanics and others Latinos/as. We are better off as Jorge, María, and Cuauhtémoc.

One version of this objection argues against all existing ethnic names, and particularly "Hispanics" or "Latinos/as," because these labels have bad connotations among the general population. They create a negative perception of those named and tend to perpetuate their disadvantageous situation in society. To call someone Hispanic or Latino/a, like calling someone negro or colored, carries with it all sorts of negative baggage, demeaning the person and harming him or her in diverse ways.

Finally, there is the question of distribution of resources. In a country like the United States, where many resources are administered by a vast bureaucracy, the distribution of resources depends on the understanding by the bureaucracy of the groups among which they are to be

distributed, and this in turn depends on the classificatory categories and names used by the bureaucracy. The lumping together of all Hispanics/Latinos into a group which ignores the different features and conditions of different groups of Hispanics/Latinos has serious and adverse consequences for the well-being of some members of these groups.⁴⁵ Faulty science leads to faulty public policy and faulty social justice. Resources are given to those who do not need them simply because they are classified in a certain way. This strains available resources, depriving those who really need them. I can vouch for this personally, for I have seen college scholarships go to children of well-to-do families merely because they are classified as Hispanic/Latino, whereas really needy students have had to do without assistance.⁴⁶

5 Conclusion

There is no reason why anyone should doubt the good faith with which the reasons presented against the use of "Hispanic," "Latino/a," or any other name used to identify us are proposed. Indeed, the honesty and frankness with which these reasons are stated vouches for their authenticity and gives them credibility. But there is more to it than this. Opposition to naming in general, and especially to the particular names we have discussed, is rooted in the deep-seated need to feel worthwhile, to validate what and who we are. There is nothing so destabilizing to one's self, as an individual person or as a group, than being treated and regarded as something other than what one thinks of oneself. It implies a splitting of one's identity, the undermining of one's credibility, and the destruction of one's dignity. Names have the power to do this. To find out that one is regarded as what one thinks one is not, is shattering. No wonder many of us resist naming in general, or are opposed to some particular name which we think does this. Nevertheless, this is not the whole story. Names are important because they reveal our identity. This is the topic of the next chapter and a useful propaedeutic to the presentation of my thesis in chapter 3, where I argue not only that a name is useful for us, but it is also necessary in order to understand ourselves.