The Ethics of Ethnic Identity: Jorge Portilla versus Christine Korsgaard

From the thought of mid-twentieth century Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla, I develop an account of what I call 'ethics of ethnic identity,' which include: a) a set of norms of agency grounded in ethnic identity, or *ethnic norms of agency*—reasons for action and obligations that spring from a given ethnic identity, and b) a type of normativity governing these ethnic norms of agency. I argue that one of the theoretical advantages of this account is that it fares well with respect to human flourishing, moral obligations, and freedom and autonomy. I also develop an account of ethics of ethnic identity from Christine Korsgaard's account of the sources of normativity and use it as a sophisticated foil against which my elaborations of Portilla's views can be fruitfully contrasted.

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Jorge J. E. Gracia (1942-2021) was a prolific Cuban-American philosopher whose expertise extended far and wide, including significant pioneering work in Latinx and Latin American philosophy.[1] In the preface of his groundbreaking *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, he encourages fellow Hispanic-American philosophers to take the study of Latinx and Latin American philosophy: "We, Hispanics/Latinos, need to begin the process of reflection about who we are" (2000, viii). This "need" to understand "our collective identity" is itself rooted on our need to understand "our own individual identities" (2000, x), and this self-understanding Gracia ultimately justifies in the name of *authenticity* or "to be true to ourselves" (2000, 187).[2] In these

[1] Gracia's works include influential treatises on the Medieval philosophy (1987), hermeneutics (1995), the relationship between history and philosophy (1991), metaphysics (1988), and influential works on Latinx philosophy (2000, 2008), amongst many others.

[2] What *authenticity* amounts to is a controversial topic. In this paper, I wish to leave the idea at its general level of 'being true to oneself,' for, as will be clear in section one, I leave this normative notion aside to meet Garcia's challenge of grounding ethnic norms of agency on normativities other than authenticity. For Gracia, the transition from having a Hispanic identity to thereby having reasons to better understand the historical-cultural particularities characteristic of Hispanics is straightforward. This is so because Gracia argues for a conception of Hispanic/Latino identity on what he calls a historical-familial model of ethnic identity, a conception that precisely understands Hispanic/Latino identity in terms of its historical-cultural particularities. For Gracia, to be Hispanic/Latino is to already possess—in virtue of historical-familial location—at least some of the cultural resources—hermeneutical tools, motivational profiles, aesthetic sensitivities, values, etc.—which are historically-culturally characteristic of Hispanics/Latinos. Thus, better understanding the historical trajectories that gave rise to these cultural resources would enable Hispanic/Latinos to better understand that which makes them what they already are in virtue of their historical-familial location.

brief remarks, we get a sketch of what I call an 'ethics of ethnic identity,' which include: a) a set of norms of agency grounded in ethnic identity, or *ethnic norms of agency*—reasons for action and obligations that spring from a given ethnic identity, and b) a type of normativity governing these ethnic norms of agency. Gracia's sketch of the ethics of Hispanic identity is thus the following: being Hispanic gives Hispanic-philosophers reasons to take seriously the study of Latin American philosophy, and it is *authenticity* that provides the normative force governing the reasons for action and obligations that Hispanics have because of their ethnic identity. Gracia's basic picture is attractive, and it is also popular in some scholarly circles.[3]

Jorge L. A. Garcia is unconvinced, however. Responding to Gracia, Garcia makes a distinction between 'being Hispanic' and 'having a Hispanic identity' (2015, 96). One is Hispanic simply in virtue of one's ancestry, and one possesses a Hispanic identity to the extent that one is *interested in* cultural-historical issues characteristic of Hispanics. Garcia thinks that in either case, Gracia's ethics of Hispanic identity are inadequate. If one is Hispanic but does not have a Hispanic identity, then Gracia's appeal to authenticity is off the mark, for there is no underlying Hispanic identity to which one must be "true." Even if one does have a Hispanic identity, however, Garcia is suspicious of any normativity that may spring from such ethnic identity. The reasonable position, he claims, is to be a *deflationist* about ethnic identity:

> The kind of [ethnic] deflation I have in mind, however, has less to do with ontology and more with evaluation. I think that we do well to de-emphasize ethnicity, take it less seriously, and recognize that someone's ethnicity may have little connection to who she ought normally to regard herself or others, may have little relation to what is sometimes thought of as her 'moral identity,' that is, to what she ought to be, or do, or prefer, or seek in life. (2015, 96)

Garcia's evaluative deflationary account of ethnic identity is partly based on his ontologically deflationary account of ethnic identity: to possess an ethnic identity is just to have a particular set

[3] Jorge L.A. Garcia (2015, 96) points out that something like Gracia's picture is often uncritically assumed in much of the works by scholars working on ethnic studies, for example.

of interests coupled with the possession of a particular ancestry. If so, Garcia insists, one's ethnic identity cannot ground what one ought to prefer (or do or be) given that one has an ethnic identity only to the extent that one *antecedently prefers or is interested in* issues culturally-historically characteristic of such an ethnic identity. The individual—with its interest, goals, duties, and responsibilities—is *ontologically prior* to her ethnic identity, and thus ethnic identities by themselves cannot ground any normativity, Garcia insists.

Because of his deflationist account of ethnic identity, Garcia himself chastises Gracia for chastising Hispanics who take no interest in Hispanic issues (2015, 96). Garcia also presents a challenge: "the normative [claims grounded in ethnic identity] need defense through some articulated connection to moral or intellectual virtues, or to recognizable moral responsibilities" (2015, 97). Garcia's challenge is vague, but the basic idea is straightforward: for accounts of ethics of ethnic identity to be *credible* proponents of these accounts must show how ethnic norms of agency are supported by other recognizable normative notions like moral and intellectual virtues or moral responsibilities.

The main goal of this paper is to sketch an account of ethics of ethnic identity that meets a set of criteria that I develop from Garcia's challenge: these criteria include i) human flourishing, ii) freedom and autonomy, and iii) moral obligations. The challenge is to square the normativity arising from ethnic identities with the normativities in these other more well-known notions. The account of ethics of ethnic identity I present is itself an elaboration of the thought of mid-twentieth century Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla (1919-1963).[4] Before developing this account from

[4] Jorge Portilla was a member of a group of important Mexican philosophers in mid-twentieth century called 'The Hyperion Group' (for more details on this group see Hurtado and Sanchez (2020: 8.4); Sanchez (2012: Ch. 1); Santos Ruiz (2016); and Dominguez Michael (2015: Ch. 7)). Portilla himself never took a university position, published little, and died at a relatively young age, so his thought has not enjoyed the traditional academic means of transmission

Portilla's views, however, I develop an alternative account of ethics of ethnic identity from Christine Korsgaard's influential account of the sources of normativity. This alternative account serves multiple purposes in this paper: i) Korsgaard's views can be straightforwardly extended into an account of ethics of ethnic identity that meets Garcia's challenge, thus proving a clean illustration of what such an account would look like; ii) it provides an illustration of the application of the criteria I develop from Garcia's challenge; and iii) it serves as a sophisticated foil against which Portilla's own views, and my elaborations thereof, can be constructively contrasted and its relative strengths can be more easily appreciated; in particular, I argue that the account of ethics of ethnic identity developed from Portilla's views has a relative theoretical advantage of faring better with respect to *moral obligations* than the account developed from Korsgaard's views.

Here is the plan. In section one, I elaborate Garcia's challenge into a set of criteria for assessing the plausibility of accounts of ethics of ethnic identity. In section two, I present Korsgaard's views on the sources of normativity and develop an account of ethics of ethnic identity that meets the criteria set forth in section one. Finally, in section three, I develop an account of ethics of ethnic identity from the thought of Jorge Portilla and highlight how this account fares better with respect to moral obligations than the account developed from Korsgaard's views. I conclude that both accounts validate Garcia's worry that mere ethnic ancestry is insufficient for ethnic norms of agency to have normative force, but, nonetheless, they also show that Garcia's challenge can be met and that something very close to Gracia's picture of the ethics of Hispanic identity is ultimately vindicated.

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and has thus not received the attention it so richly deserves. Portilla's thought has received some brief attention in Spanish speaking circles (Krauze 1966, Reyes 2003, for example). His works have also come to the attention of English-speaking philosophers, see bibliography.

1. Criteria for Assessing Ethics of Ethnic Identity

Garcia claims that theorists like Gracia who want to ground norms of agency on ethnic identity cannot simply appeal to *authenticity* but must ground such norms in *other* recognizable normative notions like moral and intellectual virtues and moral responsibilities. I think that the demands of this challenge are too stringent, for it presupposes Garcia's evaluative deflationist account of ethnic identity. Nonetheless, I agree with Garcia that proponents of accounts of ethics of ethnic identity will do well by coming to terms with how their accounts relate to normative notions other than authenticity, notions like moral and intellectual virtue, or human flourishing more generally, and moral obligations. Arguably, the plausibility of accounts of ethics of ethnic identity is connected to the way in which these accounts augment or suppress human flourishing or promote or undermine moral behavior. Another normative notion that Garcia does not explicitly address, but which may be undergirding his criticisms, is that of freedom and autonomy. Many thinkers have worried that the social-navigational facility afforded by internalizing social expectations comes at the cost of undue constraints on individual freedom and autonomy.[5] Such worries naturally extend to expectations grounded on ethnic identity. Here are, then, some criteria for assessing the adequacy of accounts of ethics of ethnic identity:

1. **Human Flourishing Criterion:** promoting human flourishing counts in favor of an account of ethics of ethnic identity and undermining human flourishing counts against it.
2. **Moral Obligations Criterion:** providing reasons for action or obligations, grounded in ethnic identity, that are immoral counts against an account of ethics of ethnic identity.
3. **Freedom and Autonomy Criterion:** enabling individual and collective freedom and autonomy counts in favor of an account of ethics of ethnic identity and suppressing them counts against it.

[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau's memorable remark that "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains" (*The Social Contract*, 1.1) is perhaps one of the most well-known articulations of this idea.

Several clarifications are in order. First, this list is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, these are merely a few criteria that I find plausible, but which remain contestable. My overall project would thus benefit from some defense of their adequacy; however, that must be a project for another occasion; at best, the persuasiveness of the two accounts presented in this paper that meet these criteria can be construed as indirect support of the adequacy of the criteria themselves. Second, all the major normative notions featuring in these criteria are themselves controversial, so these criteria are subject to drastically different interpretations and the plausibility of each criterion will thus depend upon the plausibility of each of these more precise interpretations. These criteria are thus best understood as general schema that must be made more precise by individual proponents of accounts of ethics of ethnic identity, and the plausibility of any such account will thus partly depend upon the plausibility of the more precise interpretation of these general criteria.

2. Christine Korsgaard on the Ethics of Ethnic Identity

I have chosen to discuss Korsgaard's work in this paper for several reasons. One reason is that the plausibility of the criteria presented in section one can be more easily assessed by looking at more than one example of accounts of ethics of ethnic identity that meet those criteria. A second reason is that Korsgaard's account of the sources of normativity can be easily extended into an account of ethics of ethnic identity thus presenting a neat and plausible example of an account that meets Garcia's challenge. A third reason is that the account I develop from Korsgaard's views provides a sophisticated foil against which Portilla's views, and my elaborations thereof, can be constructively contrasted and its relative strengths can be more easily appreciated.

2.1 Korsgaard on the Sources of Normativity

The main goal in Korsgaard's insightful work *The Sources of Normativity* is to argue that the normativity of morality—and of obligations and reasons for action, more generally—comes from the self-reflective nature of the human mind. People confront normative problems in the business of acting and device normative conceptions as solutions to these normative problems (1996, 46f). These conceptions are *normative* precisely because they are *reflectively endorsed* by an agent as solutions to her normative problems. Two of Korsgaard's fundamental theses are: "The normative word 'reason' refers to a kind of reflective success" (1996, 93), and "obligation arises from reflective *rejection*" (1996, 102). It is thus the self-reflective structure of the mind that grounds the normativity of an agent's reasons for action and obligations, the former by reflective endorsement and the latter by reflective rejection.

Essential to Korsgaard's account is the notion of *practical identity*. She understands a practical identity "as a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (1996, 101). It is an agent's practical identities that guide her reflection: "And all of these identities give rise to reasons and obligations. Your reasons express your identity, your nature; your obligations spring from what that identity forbids" (1996, 101). Korsgaard elaborates:

> When an impulse—say a desire—presents itself to us, we ask whether it could be a reason. We answer that question by seeing whether the maxim of acting on it can be willed as a law by a being with the identity in question. If it can be willed as a law it is a reason, for it has an intrinsically normative structure. If it cannot be willed as a law, we must reject it, and in that case we get obligation. (1996, 113)

There are several Kantian elements in this picture. For Kant to say that the will is free is to say that it is a self-determining causality, and this implies that the will cannot be determined by factors causally alien to the will itself; furthermore, as a causality the will must operate on laws, so the will must be a law unto itself, or autonomous, lest it not be free (1996, 97f). The will acts freely, then, when the maxim of its action can be willed as a law by the agent. The distinctive element

introduced by Korsgaard is the notion of a practical identity built into the Kantian test for willing a maxim to be a law.[6] An agent's practical identities settle her reasons for action and obligations by being built into her reflective practices and thus facilitating the consistent willing of maxims as laws for beings with such practical identities. Korsgaard even claims that the *normativity* of obligations is grounded in an agent's practical identities precisely because the agent *obliges herself* not to act in ways forbidden by her practical identities lest she is no longer able to think of herself under the descriptions of these practical identities, descriptions under which she values herself and finds her life worth living and finds her projects worth undertaking (1996, 91). She writes: "Sin, dishonor, and moral wrongness all represent conceptions of what one cannot do without being diminished or disfigured, without loss of identity" (1996, 117). It is precisely the threat of losing or disfiguring her identity that leads an agent to oblige herself to act in the ways in which the conclusions of her reflective practices lead her to act, and this is the ultimate source of the normativity of the agent's obligations, for Korsgaard.

Another central element of Korsgaard's picture, one that departs from Kant's picture, is Korsgaard's distinction between 'the categorical imperative' and 'the moral law' (1994, 99). For Korsgaard, the nature of free will, as a self-determining causality, establishes that all free choices must have the form of a law issuing from the will itself, and this is the categorical imperative (1996, 99). The categorical imperative, as a demand to act only on maxims that can be consistently willed to be laws, is indeed a law of free will, as Kant wanted. However, Korsgaard thinks that the same cannot be said about 'the moral law,' for the moral law is the demand to act only on maxims that can be willed to be laws *by all rational beings considered as such* (1994, 99). This distinction can be nicely illustrated by appealing to the notion of *practical identity* explicitly built

[6] Korsgaard persuasively argues that she is only making explicit an idea present in Kant himself (1996, 237).

into the test of willing a maxim to be a law. *The moral law* demands that agents act only on maxims that can be willed to be laws by a being conceiving of herself *as a human being as such*. So, the scope of this law must range over all rational beings for it to be *moral* (1994, 99). By contrast, the categorical imperative can be satisfied by the exigencies of merely contingent practical identities. For example, a Puritanical Christian *as such* can will into a law the maxim "read the Bible to know God's word" and cannot will into a law the maxim "engage in pre-marital sex to experience pleasure." The former maxim, then, gives her a reason to act because it constitutes *an expression* of her practical identity; whereas the latter maxim gives her an obligation because acting accordingly would *disfigure* or *distort* her understanding of herself as a Puritanical Christian. For Korsgaard, this *normativity* springing from contingent practical identities and the categorical imperative is a legitimate one: "There is a sense in which these obligations are real—not just psychologically but normatively" as well (1996, 257). In Korsgaard's picture, then, only *moral* obligations have human universality, and it is precisely *human universality* that makes them *moral obligations*. Korsgaard further claims that it is the distinctive feature of the morality of the Enlightenment that it forms a conception of practical identity that incorporates all human beings as members of humanity as such—irrespectively of any merely contingent practical identities (1996, 117). Korsgaard concludes: "It follows from this argument that… Enlightenment morality is true" (1996, 123).

2.2 Ethics of Ethnic Identity *a la* Korsgaard

From this basic sketch of Korsgaard's views on the sources of normativity an account of ethics of ethnic identity can be straightforwardly developed. Korsgaard cites ethnic identities as examples of the practical identities with which her account is concerned (1996, 101). However, merely *being classifiable* as a member of an ethnic group—based on phenotypical characteristics

and ancestry, say—will not do. Korsgaard's account requires that a member of an ethnic group *identify with* and *be invested in* her ethnic identity—that is, for her ethnic identity to be a description under which she values herself and finds her life and projects worth undertaken (1996, 102). This implies that the *strength* of the *normative force* of ethnic norms of agency will be roughly proportionate to *how important* such ethnic identity is for the agent. This gradable normative force, like all normativity in Korsgaard's picture, ultimately depends upon an agent *obliging herself* to act in particular ways to express or preserve the relative integrity of her self-conceptions, and the prospects of meaning or significance that these self-conceptions afford. Thus, a basic sketch of an account of ethics of ethnic identity straightforwardly follows from Korsgaard's picture. Because ethnic norms of agency are only applicable to those that *identify* with a particular ethnic identity, the picture presented here is best described as *ethics of ethnic identification*.

Furthermore, this account fares well with two of the criteria in section one. The normativity in this account is that of freedom and autonomy—an agent freely and autonomously obliging herself to act in accordance with the norms specified by her ethnic identity—so this account passes the third criterion with flying colors. Ethnic norms of agency are not *impositions* onto an agent from without; rather, they are just particular ways in which the agent freely and autonomously determines herself to act given her self-conceptions and the categorical imperative structuring the self-determining activities of her will. Furthermore, this account also fares well with regards to the Human Flourishing Criterion. Built into Korsgaard's notion of a practical identity is that the agent values herself under that description and finds her life and projects worth undertaking. This valuing-under-a-description can reasonably be read as a type of *perceived* human flourishing: the importance of a practical identity for an agent is directly related to the agent's valuing her life and her projects under the description provided by her practical identity. The strength of the normative

force governing ethnic norms of agency will thus be directly tied to the agent's perceived human flourishing afforded by her ethnic identity. The standard specified by the Human Flourishing Criterion is thus met, at least in this subjective sense.

However, assessing this account of ethics of ethnic identification based on the Moral Obligation Criterion is more complicated. We turn to this next.

2.3 The Moral Obligation Criterion

Korsgaard's distinction between the categorical imperative and the moral law has important consequences for the account of ethics of ethnic identification just sketched. Her understanding of the categorical imperative imposes formal constraints on ethnic norms of agency: reflective activities enable a person to endorse or reject maxims that can be willed to be laws by agents who identify with the relevant ethnic identity. Thus, Korsgaard's understanding of the categorical imperative enforces a kind of *equality* amongst members of ethnic identities: it is not permissible to act on maxims that make oneself an exception to a law that applies to other members of one's ethnic group.

The way in which Korsgaard's conception of the moral law shapes ethnic norms of agency, however, is more complex. For Korsgaard, moral obligations are obligations that spring from the practical identity of *human being as such*. This conception of oneself as a member of "the party of humanity" (1996, 118), is not an ethnic identity, so the moral law is neither required nor implied by ethnic norms of agency. Ethnic norms of agency need not be moral for them to be legitimately *normative* (1996, 257).

Nonetheless, Korsgaard insists that an agent would act immorally, or "be evil," if she chose to act against the dictates of the moral law and in favor of one of her merely contingent practical identities (1996, 250). She elaborates:

> Finally, if an agent consciously and reflectively *decided* to treat a contingent practical identity as giving him a reason that is ungrounded in moral or human identity, either ignoring the claims of morality altogether, or deliberately subordinating morality's claims to the claims of this practical identity, then he would be evil. (1996, 250, emphasis in original)

Korsgaard is *not* claiming that norms of agency grounded in merely contingent practical identities have normative force only to the extent that they fall within the bounds of the moral law. As we have seen, she denies this (1996, 257). What is being claimed here, rather, is that it is immoral to *deliberately chose* to act on norms of agency generated by merely contingent practical identities which *the agent recognizes* as either divorced from, or in direct opposition to, the dictates of the moral law. The picture that emerges here is a variation of liberal nationalism:[7] the view that special considerations can be given to members of one's ethnic groups, but only after, and within the confines of, meeting the demands of liberal morality, especially that of respecting the equal rights of members of other ethnic groups. Liberal nationalism is a credible candidate to pass the Moral Obligation Criterion; however, Korsgaard's version, which requires agents to develop and reflect upon a practical identity of *humanity as such*, does not *neatly* pass this test.[8]

This can be illustrated by Korsgaard's disagreement with a view she calls "substantive moral realism." For Korsgaard, substantive moral realism is the view that there are *intrinsically normative entities*, or moral facts, that exist independently from any correct procedure for answering moral questions (1996, 35f). For substantive moral realists, moral questions are

[7] See Tamir (1993) and Miller (1995), for example.
[8] Another complication I am ignoring in the main text is that Korsgaard herself is not committed to saying that moral obligations always trump non-moral obligations (1996, 125). She writes: "conflicting obligations [moral and non-moral] can both be unconditional; that's just one of the ways in which life is hard" (1996, 126).

epistemic questions—questions about whether specific moral claims *are true* or whether they accurately describe the normative part of the word. By contrast, Korsgaard's view, or "procedural moral realism," merely states that there are correct procedures for answering moral questions (1996, 35). Correct answers to moral questions can be attained by engaging in correct moral procedures—namely by the Kantian reflective practices we have already discussed—and not by discovering any moral facts with independent existence, for Korsgaard.

Korsgaard's rejection of substantive moral realism implies that the value humans have—and thus the moral demands to respect humanity—are themselves *not* moral facts that exist independently of the Kantian reflective test. Thus, for an agent to fail to take her humanity and the humanity of others into consideration in her deliberation is itself *not* a *moral fault*. This is so because when an agent fails to consider her humanity and that of others, the moral law does not in fact apply to her, for the normative force of the moral law is precisely the agent obliging herself to act on the basis of the results of her reflective activities guided by the categorical imperative and her practical identity of humanity as such; when the agent fails to reason in this fashion *nothing* obliges her to act in accordance with the moral law.[9]

When this happens, Korsgaard does think that there is a type of mistake going on, but this is a mistake in reasoning or in reflection. It is the mistake of failing to raise the normative question until it reaches an "unconditioned" end, an answer that no longer allows for raising the normative question (1996, 94). For Korsgaard, raising normative questions begins when an agent notices an impulse she possesses to act in a particular way, and the agent asks herself whether this impulse is a reason for acting. Often the answer to this self-reflective question is given by a merely contingent

[9] For example, Korsgaard's discussion of the role of dishonor guiding the Knight seems to imply that morality, as we post-Enlightenment thinkers understand it, is simply not applicable (1996, 73).

practical identity. Yet, this answer is not unconditioned, for the agent can now ask whether the recommendations provided by her merely contingent identity are *really* reasons for action, or obligations. The answer to this second question can be provided by yet another more general practical identity, and so on. Crucially, Korsgaard thinks that every time the normative question is being asked the normative force of the answers given at lower levels of reflection are themselves put into question, and that this process of raising normative questions is only satisfactorily terminated when the agent arrives at an answer that itself does not permit for the raising of the normative question anew (1996, 125). This only happens, Korsgaard insists, when the agent forms a conception of herself as *a human as such*, a conception that is no longer merely contingent. Here the agent reaches the ultimate source of normativity for all previous levels of reflection, and this final and unconditioned answer *is morality*, for Korsgaard. There is thus a sense in which the normativity of merely contingent identities *does* ultimately depend upon the normativity of morality—for the normativity operating at lower levels of reflection depends upon the normativity operating at higher levels—but this only happens when the agent manages to raise and answer normative questions to their unconditioned end.

An example can help. Consider Frida. Suppose that Frida notices in herself a strong impulse to paint self-portraits that in several respects depict elements of her Mexican culture. She asks herself whether this impulse is a reason to act. Frida identifies *as a Mexican painter*, and this practical identity together with the formal constraints of the categorical imperative enable her to think of her impulse as a reason to act. Suppose, further, that Frida also notices that her *Mexican painter identity* also permits her to will into law maxims like "create art schools to train Mexican painters" and "redistribute public funds from medical research to art schools to train Mexican painters," etc. Being conscientious, Frida wonders whether these courses of action licensed by her

Mexican painter identity are really reasons for action. Suppose Frida notices a broader conception of herself *as Mexican*. As Mexican, Frida still endorses the creation of art schools to train Mexican painters, but no longer endorses the redistribution of public funds from medical research to this end; her Mexican identity forbids this latter course of action even though her Mexican painter identity licenses it. Frida reconciles this tension by endorsing only maxims licensed by her *Mexican painter identity* that are *subordinated* to the maxims licensed by her *Mexican identity*, for she recognizes that the normativity of the former in some sense depends upon the normativity of the latter, as Korsgaard insists (1996, 119). Suppose further that Frida notices that her Mexican identity also licenses maxims like "restrict migration into Mexico to preserve the Mexican cultural heritage" or "establish a global market in which the natural resources and labor of other countries can be exploited for the economic well-being of Mexicans," etc. Being conscientious, Frida asks whether the courses of action licensed by her Mexican identity are really reasons for action. She, finally, arrives at, or perhaps develops for the first time, a conception of herself as a member of *the party of humanity*, a practical identity of *human as such*. To her dismay, Frida notices that the maxims licensed by this final practical identity conflict with some of the maxims licensed by her Mexican identity, in particular the maxims that seek to promote the well-being of fellow Mexicans without regard of, or even in direct opposition to, the well-being of people in other countries. Frida finds herself in a predicament: she must choose between her deep inclinations to act in accordance with the maxims licensed by her Mexican identity or in accordance with the demands of the moral law to treat non-Mexicans as possessing equal dignity with Mexicans and thus as deserving equal consideration in moral deliberation. If Frida chooses to act based on the maxims licensed by her Mexican identity, but in opposition to the maxims licensed by her human identity, Frida would be doing something immoral and to some extent also irrational, for the normativity of the maxims

licensed by her Mexican identity ultimately depend upon the normativity of her human identity, and she is in some sense sensitive to this dependence. If Frida chooses to act only on maxims licensed by her Mexican identity that are *subordinated* to the maxims licensed by her human identity, then Frida would act morally and with full rationality. Frida has thus reflected her way into a version of liberal nationalism that arguably passes the Moral Obligation Criterion. Not bad.

However, had Frida been less conscientious, had Frida not raised the normative question past the ethnic norms of agency she derived from her Mexican identity and the categorical imperative, it would *not* have been a *moral fault* for her to act on the very maxims that she *in fact* concluded to be *immoral* because she raised the normative question to its unconditioned end. On this picture, then, whether the moral law restricts ethnic norms of agency depends upon whether a particular agent raises the normative question to its unconditioned end. This is a radical implication indeed, and one that, I think, makes this account of ethics of ethnic identification not neatly pass the Moral Obligation Criterion. As we shall see below, one of the relative advantages of the account of ethics of ethnic identity I develop from Portilla's views is precisely that that account does neatly pass the Moral Obligation Criterion.

3. Jorge Portilla on the Ethics of Ethnic Identity

As we have seen, from Korsgaard's influential account of the sources of normativity an account of ethics of ethnic identification can be straightforwardly developed. Furthermore, this account serves both a) as an illustration of the criteria presented in section one, and b) as a sophisticated foil against which Portilla's own views can be fruitfully contrasted. Repeating the structure of section two, in this section, I first present a purely exegetical discussion of some central

views of Portilla—his account of freedom, self-creation, and interpretative horizons—and then I use these views to develop an account of ethics of ethnic identity and assess it based on the criteria presented in section one.

3.1 Portilla on Authentic Freedom and Self-Creation

Portilla claims that humans "live 'always already' in the atmosphere of freedom" (F 52/MS 159), and that "freedom is so inextricably intertwined with all aspect of human existence… it is inherent to action" (F 53/MS 160).[10] Portilla also insists that freedom is "a perpetual surging toward value" (F 33/MS 142). This essentially value-directed freedom in Portilla's thought I call "authentic freedom."[11] Furthermore, values loom large in Portilla's existentialist phenomenology: "all human life is steeped in value. Wherever we turn our gaze, value gives sense and depth to reality… All of our acts are order toward the realization of some value" (F 32/MS 140-141). Portilla insists that "responsible action" is an "action with sense" and that value is "the only thing that give[s] sense to action[s]" (F 85/MS 188). For Portilla, values present themselves in everyday life not indifferently but instead: "all value, when grasped, appears surrounded by an aura of demands… the value solicits its realization" (F 18/MS 129), a value: "offers itself to my freedom, calling on my support in order to enter into existence" (F 24/MS 134). Value presents itself to human consciousness as value-that-demands-its-actualization, and this demand comes from "the very heart of the world that surrounds me" (F 32/MS 141); it is "like a small void… as something that things themselves are lacking" (F 32/MS 141). Value-as-demand thus also presents itself inexorably as value-as-promise-of-fulfillment, as "an appeal to things themselves to my action, for the world to finish perfecting itself and to reach a certain fullness" (F 32/MS 141). To respond

[10] Translations are my own unless a translation is cited.
[11] See my (blocked for blind review) for more details.

affirmatively to the demands value is to *take the value seriously* (F 18-19/MS 129), and thus to use one's freedom to help "the world to finish perfecting itself."

Furthermore, for Portilla, values are also inexorably connected to self-creation. Just like values can appear to human consciousness as demands for the world to finish perfecting itself, so "value can also appear as a demand, as a need to fill a void in the very center of my existence. It appears then as a norm of my self-constitution, as the perpetually elusive and evanescent indication of what *my* being ought to be" (F 32/MS 141, emphasis in original). So at least some values present themselves to human consciousness as demands-and-promises-for-*self*-fulfillment. Some values *phenomenologically show up*[12] in this way in everyday life in part because they are central means for self-understanding: "value attracts us like a whirlwind in the center of which our own self appears, illuminated by the value's aura" (F 32-33/MS 141). For Portilla, an agent understands herself in part by seeing herself in relation to a value she is trying to actualize; an agent creates herself as a value-creating-self by committing to realizing a value in the world. Portilla provides the following example:

> Getting dressed hurriedly in the morning, drinking a cup of coffee in a rush, walking down the street in long strides, and, perhaps running, distressed, after a bus that barely stops to let me get on – [these] are nothing but the external signs of my determined (intentional) pointing toward the constitution of my own 'punctual being.' If after all of this, I finally do arrive on time to the office at the hour stipulated by a set of rules, and breathe a sigh of relief, then, am I punctual yet? It is evident that this is not the case. It is simply that today I got to work on time. (F 33/MS 141)

Punctuality is the value that unifies and makes intelligible a collection of other acts—like drinking a cup of coffee in a rush and walking down the street in long strides—and combines them into a meaningful whole that is *striving to be punctual*. Values are thus perpetually evanescent guides

[12] Portilla—as an existentialist phenomenologist—is committed to taking the way in which phenemona appears to first-person experience as philosophically foundational. Thus, for Portilla, to point out that something *shows up* in experience is to point out the ultimate level of philosophical analysis, and the ultimate court of appeal when it comes to philosophical plausibility.

or norms for self-constitution: value "is but the ideal unity of all my actions" that serves as the "guide" or "direction and limit" of my "valued self-constitution" (F 33/MS 142). But "the value has escaped me once again. I have not succeeded in incorporating value into myself… *My* punctuality is but the ideal unity of all my actions geared towards it" (F 33/MS 141-2, emphasis is original). For Portilla, there is a fundamental ontological gap between being and value: "Value and being do not seem to ever be able to unite in a definitive manner" (F 71/MS 176). Thus, for Portilla values must remain ever-unattainable norms of perpetual self-constitution that can never be fused with *our being*.

3.2 Portilla on Communal Interpretative Horizons

Unlike Korsgaard,[13] Portilla highlights the social dimensions of human agency. For Portilla, authentic freedom and self-creation are necessarily embedded in social structures that he calls "interpretative horizons" (CM 125/S 183).[14] These interpretative horizons "are critically important for human action. [For] one of their primary functions is to serve as a wall against which *the meaning* of our actions bounces back like an echo" (CM 126/S 184, emphasis added). An agent understands what her action *means* by understanding the way in which it is going to be received by other members of her community. Human agency is thus *existentially* dependent upon the presence of these communal interpretative horizons, for: "all action is performed always with the assumption that it will be accepted and that it will get a response from others or from a group" (CM 126/S 184). Portilla claims that humans find themselves always already embedded in

[13] Korsgaard does, it must be admitted, complicate her Kantian picture by permitting a Wittgenstein-inspired conception of reasons not as private, but as "public in their very essence" (1996, 135). Engaging with these additional complexities, however, is a task beyond the purposes of this paper.
[14] Gallegos (2023) provides excellent discussions of this topic.

complex and overlapping communal interpretative horizons informing and enabling human agency:

> We also always live in a multiplicity of communal horizons that mix and weave with one another and that always remain potential or actual, depending on whether our *action* reveals or conceals them. We always live simultaneously immersed in a national community that can take various forms, ranging from the political to the aesthetic: in a professional community, a guild, a class, a family. (CM 125-6/S 183-4).

Portilla's suggestions here are intriguing. What matters most for our purposes is that, for Portilla, human agency and interpretative horizons existentially depend upon each other: an agent cannot act unless she understands the *meaning* of her action as informed by some interpretative horizon, and human action itself "reveals or conceals" interpretative horizons. I take this to mean that, for Portilla, interpretative horizons are *socially constructed*: they depend upon human action *revealing* them, and thus allowing for the possibility that other agents *being sensitive to* these interpretative horizons, which itself enables these other agents *to act* in a way *informed* by these interpretative horizons, and so on. Human agency and interpretative horizons are mutually reinforcing and existentially inter-dependent.

This existential inter-dependence can also be appreciated when interpretative horizons are *fragmented*: "The results is… a general not-knowing what to depend on" (CM 126/S 184), a "lived experience of fragility… of inactivity, of apathy, of that leaving-everything-for-tomorrow" (CM 129/S 187). Fragmented interpretative horizons truncate human agency: "Nothing slows down the impetus toward action more than uncertainty concerning how the work will be done and received" (CM 129/S 187). This type of agential truncation has further lamentable consequences: "It is clear that a failed, unnatural, or badly interpreted action will turn us into introverts, melancholics and hopeless" (CM 130-131/S 188). Because fragmented interpretative horizons bring about a disorientation in human agency, Portilla calls such a fragmentation "quite negative and lamentable" and even "an evil" (CM 132/S 198). For Portilla, because fragmented interpretative

horizons truncate human agency in general, they also truncate authentic freedom and the prospects of self-creation: "Before our eyes, being in general, our own being, will take on a weak, imprecise, and fragile character because the foundation of our action is itself weak, imprecise, and fragile" (MC 129-130/S 187).

3.3 Ethics of Ethic Identity *a la* Jorge Portilla

From this sketch of Portilla's views, an account of ethics of ethnic identity can be developed. What matters for this account is not merely *being classifiable* as a member of a given ethnic identity—based on phenotypical characteristics and ancestry, say—but *occupying* a particular social space in which *ethnic interpretative horizons* operate. As I use the expression, "ethnic interpretative horizons*"* are relatively stable and unified social structures essentially involving *ethnicity* that to some degree specify which categories are important for interpreting reality, which goals are worth pursuing, which life trajectories are feasible or viable, which actions are desirable or reprehensible, which character traits are worthy of admiration or condemnation, etc.[15] Portilla never quite presents interpretative horizons in this way, so this characterization is best understood as a development of his ideas. Furthermore, I say that an agent is *at home* in one of these ethnic interpretative horizons when different courses of action, life trajectories, character traits, etc., *phenomenologically show up* as desirable, valuable, viable, admirable, etc. *because* this agent occupies the social space in which these ethnic interpretative horizons operate. Ethnic interpretative horizons *inform* human agency by serving as the social structures that enable agents to think of themselves and their place in the world in particular ways, and thus make several courses of action *agentially possible*.

[15] I address some of these considerations from a decolonial perspective elsewhere (blocked for blind review).

Because ethnic interpretative horizons inform human agency in these fashions, it follows that someone who is at home in one interpretative horizon will thereby have *reasons for actions*. These reasons for action are best understood as *motivating* reasons: that is, the kinds of reasons *in light of which* an agent acts; the kinds of reasons that provide *explanations* for why the agent acted as she did and not otherwise.[16] To borrow an example from Appiah (2005, 24), ritual purity phenomenologically shows up as valuable to orthodox Jews precisely because of their Jewish identity; the explanation for why orthodox Jews keep kosher is precisely that their Jewish identity provides them with motivating reasons to act in this fashion. Put differently, if an orthodox Jew is at home in a Jewish interpretative horizon, then keeping kosher *shows up* as a valuable course of action for her and she thus has motivating reasons to keep kosher.

So, ethnic identities ground motivating reasons by ethnic interpretative horizons serving as conditions in which different courses of action phenomenologically show up as desirable, viable, worthwhile, etc., for agents that occupy the social spaces in which these ethnic interpretative horizons operate. This is a central part of the ethics of ethnic identity that can be developed from Portilla's views. More ambitiously, the account can also be developed to accommodate *justifying* reasons for action, or normative reasons. These are the reasons that not merely explain why an agent acted as she did, but which also show why acting in that fashion is, in fact, reasonable or justifiable or right.[17] I take Korsgaard's account of the sources of normativity to be concerned with justifying reasons, for instance.[18]

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[16] The distinction between motivating reasons and normative reasons is standard; see Raz (1975), Smith (1994), Dancy (2000).

[17] How motivating reasons and normative reasons relate to each other is a live debate. Dancy (2000, 2-3), for example, argues that there is only one types of reasons for action, but that these reasons can answer two different types of questions: what motivates an agent, and what justifies an agent, in acting.

[18] Korsgaard herself does not state things this way, but her distinction between merely psychological and normative obligations (1996, 257) can not unreasonably be read as tracking this distinction.

Because interpretative horizons are existential conditions for the possibility of human agency, they are also existential conditions for the possibility of human flourishing. If so, agents have *prudential reasons*—considerations that promote their well-being—to sustain and propagate the various interpretative horizons that operate at the various social spaces which they occupy. For example, orthodox Jews have *motivating reasons* to keep kosher because keeping kosher *shows up* as valuable, and they also have *prudential reasons* to send their children to Hebrew school, donate to their local synagogue, appreciate Jewish cuisine, etc., precisely because these types of activities sustain or propagate the Jewish interpretative horizons that enable them to *make sense* of themselves and their place in the world, and thus facilitate their agency and flourishing in various ways. In preserving or promoting the social structures that serve as conditions for the possibility of their agency, orthodox Jews indirectly promote the type of human flourishing that is facilitated by these social structures. Thus, it is *prudent* for them to preserve their ethnic interpretative horizons. (I elaborate on these points below).

3.4 Cultural Preservation and Values

For Portilla, however, merely being at home in some interpretative horizons does not suffice for it to be valuable for agents to preserve such interpretative horizons. Despite thinking about interpretative horizons as both breakable and indispensable for human agency, Portilla is strongly critical of *cultural conservativism*—the view that preserving one's culture is *itself* valuable. Portilla detects this cultural conservative tendency in some of his fellow Mexican literary critics and harshly chastises them for it. These Mexican literary critics reject the works of several prominent Mexican writers of the day as *un-Mexican* because these writers employ European styles or embody European tendencies. Portilla objects to these literary critics thus:

> This presupposes the previous acceptance that Mexico is not a nation anymore, that it is not a participant of the universal community, but a sealed repository of human culture. That we have nothing in common with men of other nationalities. This assumes that Mexico is or possesses a specific good that is put in danger by the communicative action of the foreign writer; and, furthermore, that Mexicans possess an excellence that can be contaminated by contact with that which is alien to it. (*Critica* 161/GS 167)

As Portilla sees it, cultural conservatives make the mistake of regarding their nations, or cultures, as sealed units possessing distinctive excellences, excellences that become contaminated by exposure to, or intermingling with, distinct cultures. Cultural conservatives misunderstand what cultures and cultural values are, Portilla thinks. As he sees it, each culture stands in relation to other cultures as "a participant of the universal community" (*Critica* 161/GS 167), and in general: "culture is nothing but the concrete expression of the *universal*" (*Critica* 161/GS 168, emphasis in original). What Portilla has in mind here is that for *cultural values*—things regarded as valuable within specific cultures—*to be true values* they must be *universal values*. What Portilla means by 'universal values' is at least twofold: i) universal values are transcendental, or not exhausted by their contingent historical-cultural manifestations: transcendent "value always transcends its contingent actualizations" (F 71/MS 176), and ii) universal values are, at least in principle, *recognizable as values* by people from different cultures; they are, at least in principle, *communicable* across cultural divides and historical periods. Because universal values are inter-culturally communicable, Portilla thinks it is a transgression of "serious thought" (DT 172) to dismiss the thought of a thinker simply based on their historical-cultural location. To feel entitled to dismiss thinkers because "Their truth is a truth of their time" (DT 170) is "giving up on reason" (DT 172) and thus failing to think *seriously*, for Portilla.

Portilla thinks that cultural conservatives are making a similar transgression of "serious thinking" when they regard a cultural practice as valuable simply because it is *theirs*. Portilla writes: "When a group of people begins to consider itself wonderful because of what it has of its 'own' and what makes it 'different,' it is already preparing [for] the destruction of other peoples.

But this is no longer 'culture'; this is war" (*Critica* 162/GS 168). Portilla's underlying point is that people who regard their culture valuable merely because it is *theirs* have thereby undercut the prospects of meaningful inter-cultural communication, and thus of international peace. This is a serious mistake in thinking, claims Portilla.

Importantly, to say that some values are universal in this fashion is not to abandon the claim that values can only appear in human consciousness mediated by *some* culturally-historically specific interpretative horizons. For example: "'Justice' is 'justice that is to be realized in the community'" (F 32/MS 141), and as such it requires the interpretative horizons operating within this community. However, the universal value of *Justice* in its "pure ideality" (F 19/MS 129) is nonetheless not reducible to its many historical-cultural manifestations, manifestations which "give it local color" (*Critica* 161/GS 168). Portilla's picture of the inter-cultural communicability of universal values requires that there is enough commonality across these different *cultural colorings* of *universal values* to permit agents in different cultures to talk to each other in meaningful and potentially fruitful ways.

These general observations about Portilla's notion of culture and value have several implications for our account of ethics of ethnic identity. One important implication is that the prudential reasons generated by ethnic interpretative horizons are *not* those of *mere* cultural preservation; rather, these prudential reasons must be tied to human flourishing—which Portilla understands objectively as "the development of each individual as a person to the maximum of his or her possibilities" (F 57/MS 164)—universal values, and the prospects of authentic self-creation that these horizons in fact afford.

3.5 Meeting Criteria

I think that the account of ethics of ethnic identity that can be developed out of Portilla's views fares well with regards to all three criteria presented in section one. The account neatly meets the Human Flourishing Criterion. One important implication of Portilla's objectivist conception of human flourishing is that not all interpretative horizons are equally able to facilitate *actual* human flourishing. For example, sexist interpretative horizons—those make it *agentially possible* for women to think of their value as exhausted by the extent to which their life and talents are *useful* to men, etc.—*fail* to facilitate as much human flourishing as the interpretative horizons operating in more equitable societies. This also implies that the *strength* of the prudential reasons an agent has for maintaining or propagating the interpretative horizons in which she finds herself at home would itself depend upon the extent to which the societies in which these horizons operate *in fact* create or guarantee the conditions for human flourishing. Thus, the *motivational reasons* that spring from ethnic identities need not depend on actual human flourishing, in this picture, but the *normative reasons* must, and this is as things should be, I think.

Furthermore, this account also neatly passes the other two criteria, and a contrast with Korsgaard's views can readily bring this to light. Portilla's views are best described as a version of what Korsgaard calls 'substantive moral realism.' In alignment with what Korsgaard calls 'Enlightenment morality,' Portilla thinks that human dignity is the value of *humanity as such* and that this value is grounded in the fact that humans are free and responsible for their actions (F 54/MS 161). Portilla writes: "this person… [has] human dignity. To the extent that this person becomes responsible, he or she becomes free, and, to the extent that this person becomes free, he or she affirms him or herself as a human being" (F 55/MS 162). Portilla continues: "freedom vindicates for itself all the privileges of its phenomenological, judicial, and metaphysical significance, and it manifests itself as a truly active sense of human existence on all its levels: as a

foundation for what is *human as such*" (F 57/MS 163, emphasis added). Furthermore, and contra Korsgaard, for Portilla the value of humanity as such *is* a *normative fact* to be *recognized* both in oneself and in others; this basic recognition of the value of humanity as such grounds a "loyalty that is personal and free" (CM 136/S 193), and as such it serves as the starting point of all authentic relationships and "true communities" (CM 135/S 192). Contra Korsgaard, for Portilla the recognition of the value of *humanity as such* does not result from sophisticated Kantian reflective activities carried to their unconditioned end, nor is it mediated by having a non-contingent practical identity of humanity as such. Rather, the recognition of the value of humanity as such happens in a *concrete* reciprocal-cognition of freedoms: "freedom, the only possible basis for genuine recognition of people by people, and the freedom of others, the only element that could make the recognition valuable" (F 77/MS 181).

Something in the vicinity of Hegel's resolution of the master-slave dialectic is clearly in the background of Portilla's notion of reciprocal-recognitions of freedoms,[19] but what Portilla cites with approval is Martin Buber's influential account of the I-Thou relationship. Portilla writes: "a perfect community can only be that in which an 'us' is sustained in its totality by a tight interlacing of personal relations… reciprocally bound within the relation 'you and I,' without either of the two finding the other as a mere 'he' or 'she' but always as an essential 'Thou'" (CM 138/S 194). For Portilla this fundamental reciprocal-recognition of freedoms *precedes* language and conceptual frameworks: it is "a 'you and I' for whom the relation is immediate, without the interpositions of any previous scheme, without any conceptual game or without any image" (CM 135/S 192).[20] For Portilla, then, the value of *humanity as such* is built into the *concreteness* of freedoms, and for

[19] Portilla's close friend Rosa Krauze reports Portilla's familiarity with Hegel's work (1966, 9).
[20] Very similar remarks can be found in Buber's classic work: "The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination... No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation… Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur" (1970, 63).

people *to recognize* this value is for them to engage in a pre-linguistic reciprocal-recognition of each other's freedom that founds true communities. For Portilla, the *humanity* to be recognized in *concrete* cases is nothing but a freedom that is ontologically prior to the self,[21] a freedom that entails responsibility for free actions and *demands* recognition from other freedoms, and thus *obligates* other freedoms to treat it as what it is: namely a freedom that demands recognition as such.

Incorporating Portilla's account of true communities illustrates how the account of ethics of ethnic identity to be developed from these views neatly passes the standards set by both the Moral Obligation Criterion and the Freedom and Autonomy Criterion. Portilla himself never explicitly developed any *moral* theory, in Korsgaard's sense. However, given Portilla's heavy reliance on freedom and human dignity, it is not unreasonable to develop out of his views the claim that *moral* obligations *are* the obligations humans have towards each other due to their humanity as such, irrespective of any contingent particularities, as Korsgaard herself powerfully articulates. If we add this Korsgaardian notion of morality to Portilla's picture, then in *true communities*—as Portilla understands them—the mentioned reciprocal-recognition of freedoms ensures both the individual *freedom and autonomy* of members of these true communities and the *moral treatment*, amongst such members, that itself should be understood as ultimately grounded in the mutual-recognition of each other's freedoms.

Extending this observation to ethics of ethnic identity, we can now say that to the extent that ethnic norms of agency emerge from *true communities*, these norms will meet the standards of both the Freedom and Autonomy Criterion and the Moral Obligation Criterion, at least with

[21] See my (blocked for blind review) for more details.

respect to members of these true communities. Furthermore, in this picture, ethnic interpretative horizons need not license or ensure the recognition of the freedom and autonomy of members of different ethnicities, but contra Korsgaard, this failure is indeed a *moral* failure for *their humanity,* and *concrete freedoms*, demands this much. And this is as things should be, I think.

CONCLUSION

Jorge J. E. Gracia encourages fellow Hispanic American philosophers to take up the study of Latinx and Latin American philosophy, and he grounds such recommendation in the name of authenticity. Jorge L. A. Garcia is unmoved. Garcia distinguishes between *being Hispanic*—having Hispanic heritage—and *having a Hispanic identity*—being interested in cultural-historical issues characteristic of Hispanics. One's ethnic heritage by itself is insufficient to ground any normativity, Garcia insists, and even having a Hispanic identity by itself will not do. For the individual—with its interest, goals, duties, and responsibilities—is *ontologically prior* to her ethnic identity, Garcia insists, and thus ethnic identities by themselves can neither have nor ground any normativity, at best any such normativity can only be borrowed from other recognizable sources of normativity, like morality or intellectual virtue. This is Garcia's challenge to Gracia.

In this paper, I have developed Garcia's challenge into a set of criteria for assessing competing accounts of ethics of ethnic identity: these accounts are credible to the extent that they promote human flourishing, compliance with moral obligations, and freedom and autonomy. I have developed two accounts that meet these criteria, and thus also meet Garcia's challenge. From Korsgaard's account of practical identities as sources of normativity, I have developed an account of ethics of ethnic identity that is compatible with Garcia's deflationary account of ethnic identity,

but nonetheless grounds the normativity of ethnic norms of agency in another recognizable normativity, namely freedom and autonomy. From the thought of mid-twentieth century Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla, I have developed an account of ethics of ethnic identity that challenges Garcia's deflationary account of ethnic identity. For Portilla, the individual *is* her identities which are actively constructed by her ontologically prior acts of freedom, a freedom that must operate within the parameters of relatively unified interpretative horizons. Ethnicities often are embedded in interpretative horizons, so deflating ethnicities, for Portilla, often amounts to undermining some of the existential conditions that make agency possible and the prospects for human flourishing that these afford.

Both accounts vindicate Garcia's insistence that one's ethnic heritage *by itself* is insufficient to ground ethnic norms of agency; this normativity requires that one also *identify* with one's ethnicity, as Garcia insists. Nonetheless, both accounts also meet Garcia's challenge, and the criteria I develop from it; I have further argued that the account I develop from Portilla's thought has at least one relative theoretical advantage: it fares better with respect to moral obligations than the account developed from Korsgaard's views on the sources of normativity. Finally, according to Portilla's picture, Jorge J. E. Gracia is ultimately correct. For Hispanic American philosophers who are at home in some Hispanic interpretative horizon, further study of Latinx and Latin American philosophy will enable them a) to understand better some of the social-historical particularities that structure or shape some existential conditions for their agency and the prospects of human flourishing that these afford, and b) to participate more effectively in the social construction of their identity; and, arguably, both of these will help Hispanic American philosophers *be truer to themselves*, as Gracia insists.

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