

Prof. Ofelia Schutte
Interviewed by Antonio Correa Iglesias
July 2017

I encountered Ofelia Schutte's work through Jorge Gracia's book, *Identity, Memory, and Diaspora*. Prof Schutte creates new meaning and a new understanding of philosophy. Her remarkable contribution has inspired persons who believe in a non-reductionist view of philosophy. Her work has three foci: Nietzsche's philosophy, an unwavering defense of feminist theory and Latin-American philosophy. This interview seeks to provide an overview of her work. .

Ofelia Schutte is a Professor Emerita of Philosophy at the University of South Florida, where she was a Professor and Chair of the Department of Women's Studies from 1999 to 2004. She then served as a Professor of Philosophy from 2004 until she retired in 2012. Professor Schutte is recognized by many as one of the world's leading Latina feminist philosophers, one who has played a crucial role in launching the field of Latin American Philosophy within the United States.

ACI: Why did you become a philosopher? Was it a difficult decision?

OS: Thank you, Professor Antonio Correa Iglesias, for inviting me to do this interview. I also wish to thank the University of Miami's program on Ethics, Bioethics, and Philosophy in Cuba for supporting this project.

Why philosophy? I had a deep intellectual attraction for philosophy from my very first contact with the subject in my freshman year of college. Although the college did not offer a major I took as many courses as I could. Over the years there was a transition between being a student of philosophy, becoming a philosopher, and being a philosopher. I reserved a great deal of idealism for that higher title. It took me a long time, many publications, and numerous speaking engagements before I viewed myself as a philosopher. One earns the identity of a philosopher through social practices involving one's recognition among peers, colleagues, and students who show appreciation and respect for one's work.

Was it difficult? Initially, the major difficulties were circumstantial: obstacles that kept me from the full-time study of philosophy at the Ph.D. level. I had to overcome significant limitations, including the death of my father at the beginning of my senior year of college, financial constraints, and the lack of guidance as to how to move on to higher education (having been a recent immigrant in the U.S.). I kept on studying, one way or another. Eventually I realized that the next step was to apply to Ph.D. programs in philosophy. At Yale I found myself in a superb learning environment and among some of the brightest people I had ever known.

I was very fortunate to have had a very supportive dissertation advisor who encouraged me to write in a way that strengthened my own voice. He challenged me constantly to do original work. I will always be grateful to him for the type of professional ethics and mentorship that he exemplified.

With respect to the gender barriers found in academic philosophy, I did not notice any adverse treatment until I was forced to outperform some of my male colleagues prior to tenure. I also perceived some skepticism about the merit of my areas of specialization in feminism and Latin American philosophy when I came up for promotion to full professor rank. I think these were inherent biases in the field of philosophy, not being accustomed to seeing many women serving in Ph.D.-granting departments, and much less a Cuban-born Latina philosopher. In spite of these barriers (and also because of them) I have received a lot of support from many colleagues. Through research, teaching, and service I have also supported the goal of including more members of underrepresented social groups in philosophy. The obstacles we face are real and they deserve special attention and support.

ACI: Philosophy has different meanings in different contexts and political circumstances. What meaning does philosophy have today?

OS: I think that in the globalized context characterizing the world today there is no homogeneous meaning. There are also different types of meaning we could talk about: descriptive, normative, utopian.

Personally, I think of philosophy both as an activity and as a type of learning. Both senses are captured in the etymological sense of the celebrated love of wisdom. The activity refers to an earnest, often passionate, dedication to the pursuit of knowledge through the sustained analysis of concepts, ideas, or questions arising from the precariousness, perplexity, and challenges facing the human condition. Philosophy deals with qualitative, not quantitative factors. It can also be self-reflective: it can investigate the modalities involved in its own ways of thinking (of course, up to a point). The methods and formats of philosophy vary: for example, throughout the history of Western philosophy we see the dialogue, aphorisms, the essay, the scholastic argument, dialectics, critical theory, conceptual analysis, and so on.

An easy and conventional way of describing the activity of philosophy is to focus on the rational argument. Much of the contemporary debate about what counts as philosophy has to do with methodology. Some methodologies are said to be better than others insofar as they become the exemplars of what a rational argument should look like. I find this to be too narrow an approach. The way I look at it, the reasoning involved in philosophy needs to make sense, of course, but there is more than one way to engage it and it needs to be connected to life. The life of the mind is necessary and extraordinarily important, but not sufficient for my sense of philosophy. To find philosophy engaging I need to sense the ways in which philosophical activity (even if confined to a logical exercise) is connected to existence.

With regard to the second part of the meaning I have outlined, or what I have called the type of learning in whose pursuit we engage, this refers to a body of work that the philosophy student must master, let's say, as a point of departure from which to continue its current or on-going pursuit. In university education at various points in history this would be identified as the canon of philosophy – the fields and texts that characterize the meaning of institutional philosophy at any particular time. However, we need to be aware that the academic canon is a socio-cultural construction as are the boundaries that are placed at the borders of academic disciplines. These boundaries help to distinguish various fields from one another, but they can also limit the conditions for cutting-edge trans-disciplinary collaborative work.

In recent years especially there has been a growing awareness of the importance of trans-disciplinary studies where important philosophical issues arise and where philosophy has an appropriate role to play. Similar observations may be made regarding the relationship between theory and practice (applied philosophy) as well as the interaction between academic fields and community projects. For this we need to feel comfortable with the notion of “impure” disciplinary practices (philosophical *mestizajes*) and the relevance of flexible “border zones,” allowing for open questions in our philosophical pursuits. A balance needs to be struck between the elements of the canon or tradition we wish to keep and the willingness to incorporate new developments or understandings of philosophy arising from current challenges.

ACI: Western Philosophy, or philosophical thinking in the Western world, is founded in a disciplinary perspective of “reality”. Is contemporary philosophy the dissolution of the disciplinary perception of reality? What are your thoughts on this?

OS: “Reality” has many different meanings. Depending on what ontology is pursued, the logical referents for what count as the “real” will vary. In this broader sense the question of “the really Real” has been a central focus of Western philosophy: is it names (nominalism), is it ideas (idealism), is it matter (materialism), and so on. One easily finds these debates in the older tradition of metaphysics, but also across the board into the theory of knowledge, and other branches of philosophy. Various patterns of dualism often accompany such deliberations.

I'm not quite sure what you mean specifically when referring to the loss of a sense of reality in contemporary philosophy. Perhaps you mean the linguistic turn and you wonder if I think this is a turn away from reality. If so, perhaps you are referring to the focus on the logic of statements (typically found in some areas of analytic philosophy) as distinguished from attention to the nature of reality. The linguistic turn has different features in Anglo-American analytic as compared with the European continental tradition in which I was trained. Here I will limit my comments to continental philosophy, where the influence of phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and critical theory, among others, has played a large role. In the continental tradition I find a strong link between the philosophy of language and existential and social reality.

I think it's relevant for philosophy to analyze philosophical as well as other forms of discourse. With the methods of continental philosophy, discourse analysis can be done in a critical cultural context and not merely as a logical exercise closed in upon itself. Discourse analysis is very important because, whether we like it or not, language projects a representation of the world and the relations and interactions among the elements of that world. Viewed in this way to focus on language or discourse is not necessarily a distraction away from reality. In fact it can be an indispensable way of understanding reality. One could go so far as to say that the sense I have of myself and of the ways in which the world is made up is given to me almost entirely if not completely by language. If you have ever tried to quiet the mind in meditation, you will find that it is very difficult to do so. Similarly, with a passing perceptual or aesthetic experience, the sense of the moment comes and goes in a flash unless it is embedded in a narrative. Narratives make sense of reality, whether ethical, political, scientific, historical, religious, or explicitly fictional. Each has its own characteristics. As a result, one of philosophy's tasks is to keep us aware in a critical manner of the purposes, justification, appropriateness, and limits of various discursive practices and how they invoke, represent, or come to signify what we call reality.

ACI: Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel are philosophers who created the perception of the end of philosophy in a modern sense. Nietzsche, on the other hand, created an understanding of the end of culture. What do you think about this distinction?

OS: We have a choice as to how we read the history of philosophy. I prefer to look at Kant and Hegel as initiators and originators of important approaches to philosophy that we still find relevant and meaningful in our times, not as exhibiting the end of any specific understanding of philosophy. In each case, their work has had a considerable and definitive impact on the evolution of philosophical thinking up to our own times. Kant initiated the method of critical theory for examining the conditions that make possible a claim to knowledge. His contributions to moral theory and to aesthetics also continue to attract groundbreaking philosophical attention. Hegel developed the method of dialectics in philosophical analysis. New studies examining and reinterpreting Hegel's notion of dialectical reason are still being published with exciting new research that relates to current questions in the field.

There is something resilient about these philosophical theories in that they can find relevance not only in their own times but in subsequent decades and centuries. Obviously we are not reading them as their contemporaries did, but fortunately the work of philosophy need not get stuck in time or within the ideological constraints of the periods in which the philosophers wrote. The meaning of modernity has also evolved over time and is evolving rapidly as we speak. Currently there is a remarkable range of philosophical perspectives on modernity, with one of the latest newcomers to the debate being decolonial theory. While there have been important transformations in the way the world is organized in the current global era, I do not see a consensus on whether or not the modern era has ended or whether what may be called a "modern disposition" or "attitude" toward life, science, values, or philosophy has come to an end.

In the case of Hegel, another way in which his influence is still felt concerns the philosophy of history. Even those who disagree with historicism or with Hegel's particular German Idealist approach find it hard to ignore that philosophical inquiry does have some historical roots. But how to interpret the meaning and course of history is a separate question. One of Nietzsche's most interesting works is his *Meditation on History*, the second of his *Untimely Meditations*. A critic of Hegel's Western-centered approach to the philosophy of history, Nietzsche declared that history is "nothing but a Western prejudice." While quite aware of his own place in historical time, Nietzsche took a distance from his contemporaries' views of history and questioned the primacy of linear time. He did not contemplate the notion of an end without also contemplating a new beginning, or a rebirth. As far as Nietzsche is concerned there is no end to culture as long as there are humans around with a creative spirit along with the social conditions allowing them to create life-enhancing values. He diagnosed various symptoms of what he considered decaying or ascending cultures. At the same time, he called for "philosophers of the future" to take responsibility for supporting the renewal and renovation of culture in the spirit of life-affirming values. Today such issues as protecting the earth in light of humans' polluting and destructive practices would find resonance in the Nietzschean concept of a life-affirming culture.

ACI: Why "Nietzsche without masks"? When I read your book, I sensed a new approach to western philosophy. Even when Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysical is an attack of certain inferences?

OS: The subtitle of my book, *Beyond Nihilism*, is *Nietzsche without Masks*. In the first lines of the Preface I explain that in calling attention to reading Nietzsche without masks, the reference is to our own (that is, the readers' masks), not so much Nietzsche's. This clarification is important because Nietzsche himself called attention to his love of masks. He played with the notion that he kept his readers wondering what aspects of his thoughts were revealed compared to those he preferred to hide. The figure of the mask also suggests a culturally constructed artistic form used in multiple rituals and celebrations from carnivals to religious and warlike performances. Part of what makes Nietzsche such an interesting and challenging philosopher to unravel is his love of literary masks as well as the variety of styles and perspectives through which he developed and articulated his thoughts.

My decision to approach a reading of Nietzsche from a Dionysian perspective refers to Nietzsche's project of pursuing philosophy as an affirmation of life. My argument is that in creating this perspective Nietzsche's theories about metaphysics, morality, and cultural values range from those that, as he claimed, would move Western culture beyond nihilism to those that in my judgment do not succeed in overcoming some of the life-negating premises he criticized in his approach. In other words, some of his positions fail to overcome the psychology of *ressentiment* or the various dualisms that he criticized. I take the spirit of reading him "without masks" to mean that as readers we have the responsibility for intellectual honesty in showing the range of positions Nietzsche holds, some of which may be appealing to us and some of which we may

deplorable. I argue against a “safe” approach to reading Nietzsche in which he is either dismissed entirely as a negative figure in the history of philosophy or studied on the condition that his more controversial views are ignored or excused as accidental features of the times in which he lived. By reading Nietzsche without masks I offer an interpretation that addresses both the positive and the negative aspects of his thought.

With regard to your comment that when you read *Beyond Nihilism* you sensed a new approach to Western philosophy, I must say I am intrigued. Sometimes readers discover something in a work about which the author is unaware. I do remember that when I started reading the prominent philosophical works on Nietzsche at the time (Kaufmann, Danto, and so on), I kept thinking, “that’s not how I read Nietzsche; there’s something missing there.” I had no model of Nietzsche interpretation when I wrote my book. It was not only my first book but as far as I know (and I could be wrong about this) it was the first book-length study of Nietzsche written from an explicitly feminist perspective. The entire time I wrote it I felt that my perspective was running against the tide of current Nietzsche scholarship. For this reason I made every effort within my reach to understand Nietzsche’s perception of his philosophical task as best I could.

ACI: In your book “Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without masks,” you introduced the following idea on “the meaning of life:”

“After all, if Nietzsche is correct that life is the ground of meaning, then it is only through the recognition and acceptance of the totality of our lives that we receive the power to make sense of reality through symbolic structures, both logical and metaphorical”

Is life a totality in a world of discipline? This is a remarkable approach to science and philosophy in the XIX century. Could you further explain this idea?

OS: At the time I wrote *Beyond Nihilism* I was very influenced by holistic views of life. My perspective stemmed not just from Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal recurrence of all things and his analysis of all there is as energy (or what he called “the will to power”) but also from the ecological views of the interconnectedness of all life on the planet. For philosophy to serve as an affirmation of life in its totality, as Nietzsche held, philosophy could not be limited to the neat and tidy operations of logic. The notion of the Dionysian in Nietzsche always points to an overflow, to some excess that spills over or exceeds efforts at categorization and classification. This is not to say that we should stop using rational categories or logic to understand the world of experience or to improve on the process of reasoning, but simply that when it comes to the affirmation of life, according to Nietzsche, such methods are limited in relation to, for example, art and music. This led him to argue that philosophy should be rooted in something larger than itself, with that larger aspect not being religion but an aesthetic affirmation of life.

I offered an extensive analysis of Nietzsche's critique of the figure of Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to develop this point. The outcome of these deliberations, in my view, is to propose that we need a *combination of methods* in order to deal with what I called the multi-dimensional existential issues that Nietzsche and other existential philosophers have been concerned about.

I did not have a word for it then but today it is clear to me that another word for what I called "combination" would have been *mestizaje*. By this I mean that if philosophy is to be attuned with life, its methods need to admit of mixture – epistemic and cultural *mestizajes*, if you will. For Nietzsche a plurality of perspectives is always needed for the human understanding to function at its best. That's why in looking at ancient societies he favored polytheism, decrying monotheism. That's why in his later philosophy he adopted the genealogical method (with its focus on the multiple configurations of power relations) for understanding contemporary values. Nietzsche advocated a "gay" science or joyful wisdom [*die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, as he entitled one of his major books]. This means a broad concept of science transcending both narrow specialization and results limited in range and scope. Nietzsche thought in terms of the consequences of scientific, artistic, and other values for millennia, not just for today's reward or tomorrow's profit. He was an expert at transgressing orthodoxies in a way that provokes and challenges our thinking about settled practices and conventional norms.

To your question of whether looking at the totality of life was a possible stance in the nineteenth century: I am not an expert in the exact history of ideas of any particular era. Whether or not it was "in the air" at the time, Nietzsche developed this perspective. I do think that religion, and in particular Christianity, has offered a view of the totality of life in its eschatological teachings about the creation of the world and the end of time. But in the Christian narrative that Nietzsche knew, this earthly life was represented only as a trial of sorts before moving on to either eternal punishment in hell or eternal joy in heaven. Along with other intellectuals of his time, Nietzsche thought that such a view of human existence represented a negation of life. So it is reasonable to think that in 19th-century Germany he had the conceptual tools to overturn such a narrative by presenting what, following his terms, I have called his Dionysian approach to existence and to the affirmation of life.

ACI: Let's talk about Latin-American philosophy... From your perspective, Latin American philosophy is a comprehension –or reduction- of identity and political emancipation. Could you explain this argument?

OS: It may surprise you if I say that I have not written about political emancipation, at least not the way I understand that terminology. I clarified the basic terms used in the title of my book *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* in the Introduction and first chapter. The reader will quickly see that I have made every effort, in addition, to distinguish between *social* (the topic of the book) and *national* liberation. I do not use the term *political* because it is too vague to refer to the concepts I explore in

my work. As philosophers I believe we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our readers to avoid misunderstandings and potentially distracting terms.

In the context of the Americas I associate the terminology of “political emancipation” with the notion of national independence. The traditional version of this concept refers, for example, to the political emancipation of Hispanic American republics from Spain’s colonialism or to the American Revolution against the British. Some of the radical versions refer to national liberation from imperialism. Another way to analyze the concept of national liberation is by focusing on the subjects interpellated in discourses of political emancipation viewed as national liberation. Such subjects are referred to as “the people,” “citizens,” or in terms of the direct nationality being addressed: for example, *mexicanos*, *chilenos*, etc.

My philosophical work, by contrast, is directed specifically at the question of *social* liberation. This has to do with the liberation of various social sectors of society from structures of oppression that repress them on account of some specific feature such as sex, gender expression, race, ethnicity, economic status (poverty), disability, and so on. Of course, if the social liberation movements are successful, this will result in changes to the existing laws of the state and such a change may be described as political. My philosophical interest, however, is not on state or local politics but on the *cultural* processes that result from taking up these matters of consideration or that make such socio-cultural transformations intelligible theoretically. In my book I bring to the reader’s attention a range of theoretical and philosophical approaches to the relations between cultural identity and social liberation, among them, Mariátegui’s socialist approach to Peruvian reality, the philosophy of *lo mexicano*, the philosophy of history based on the concept of *mestizaje*, the philosophy of liberation, the theology of liberation, and Latin American feminist perspectives.

In exploring the question of cultural identity and social liberation in such a variety of intellectual and social movements between the 1920s and the 1980s I was especially interested in taking a non-Eurocentric and non-Anglocentric approach. This is one of the reasons I had a strong interest in Mariátegui’s conception of an indigenous socialism and in Leopoldo Zea’s notion of *mestizaje*, for example. In taking a non-Eurocentric and non-Anglocentric approach to the study of Latin American philosophers and social thinkers I was inspired deeply by José Martí’s well-known figure and concept of *nuestra América*.

So, let me reformulate the question to what led me to write *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*. Why this topic out of all available topics?

The topic of cultural identity in Latin American thought is very powerful. It has been used by conservative, liberal, and progressive thinkers in supporting their social views with the added vigor of rooting their beliefs in the cultural values they hold most strongly. One of my aims was to try to disconnect the understanding of cultural identity from views holding that, for example, women’s equality is a concept foreign to our culture or that indigenous people must be kept subordinate to “civilized” Eurocentric

values. In other words, I wanted to show not only that a balance of social liberation alongside notions of cultural identity is needed but that for decades Latin American social and intellectual movements have displayed this correlation in one or another form – that there is a distinct history of this type of correlation.

Another important aim of my study was to expand (not contract or reduce) the existing understanding of Latin American philosophy in the United States so as to include interesting philosophical issues stemming from relevant work in interdisciplinary areas, such as Marxism and feminism. While my initial interest in researching Latin American philosophy stemmed from the work of Leopoldo Zea and Enrique Dussel (both of whom I first met in 1981 at the Interamerican Congress of Philosophy held at Florida State University in Tallahassee), you see how the book eventually included many other methodological and thematic orientations, such as Mariátegui's socialist anthropology, feminism, and the theology of liberation. My intention there as well as in much of my other work in philosophy (to the degree that my expertise allows, of course) has been to cover a broad range of socio-cultural backgrounds and methodological orientations.

Finally, with regard to my perspective on Latin American philosophy as a field of study as distinct from the research pertaining to my own work, my perspective is quite broad. As you know, for several decades along with Professor Jorge Gracia and others I have advocated for the recognition of the field of Latin American philosophy in the United States. A high point of achievement for me in this respect was the co-edited publication (with Susana Nuccetelli and Otávio Bueno) of the Wiley-Blackwell *Companion to Latin American Philosophy* (2010). (Incidentally, Professor Bueno, a highly recognized philosopher, is one of your colleagues at the University of Miami.) The *Companion* is an extensive comprehensive collection of essays (over 500 pages) on historical, thematic, and methodological contributions to this field. Throughout my professional life I have also served on numerous associations, editorial boards, and committees aimed at supporting diversity and inclusiveness in the philosophy profession, including the APA Committee on Hispanics/Latinos in Philosophy and the APA Committee on Inclusiveness.

ACI: In the book “Cien años de filosofía en hispanoamérica: 1910-2010” Margarita M. Valdes -who is the editor of this book- makes the following statement:

“El dilema que se planteó en la década de 1960 entre hacer una filosofía latinoamericanista o una filosofía universalista parece haber quedado atrás, pues se ha respondido en la práctica: ambas formas de hacer filosofía pueden convivir y florecer” (p. 19).

What do you think about this?

OS: Thank you for referring me to this book. I have always considered Professor Margarita Valdés an eminent analytic philosopher. Her edited anthology is an important contribution to the study of Latin American philosophy.

[Quoting Valdés:]

“The dilemma set forth in the 1960s between doing a Latinamericanist philosophy or a universalist philosophy appears to have been left behind, given that it has been answered in practice: both forms of doing philosophy are able to coexist and flourish” (p. 19).

I agree with Professor Valdés’ observation that these two approaches can be seen as coexisting professionally at this time, at least in a number of significant cases. For example, the Wiley-Blackwell *Companion to Latin American Philosophy* that I have just mentioned, which is also one of the sources referenced by Professor Valdés in her Introduction, broadly fits this pattern. The condition for this coexistence, I would add, is that neither orientation take a binary approach in which one of the two is taken as exclusively legitimate while the other is denigrated or discarded.

Still, the situation is more complicated since much depends on the context of the observation. Professor Valdés offers this distinction in the context of the practice of academic philosophy in institutions of higher learning in Hispanic America and in the light of various international publications. If instead of looking at the resulting academic practices of doing philosophy we were to look at the creative spirit motivating philosophers to do philosophy, the analysis of differences between philosophical orientations is open to other interpretations. For example, in the same volume, in the chapter on the history of philosophy in Mexico, Professor Guillermo Hurtado notes that on one side there has been a type of modernizing spirit according to which doing philosophy means keeping up with the latest theories available in modern and contemporary times. On the other there has been the “counterproposal” of doing philosophy “authentically” in keeping with the cultural needs and characteristics of the region. I agree with Professor Hurtado’s judgment when he notes that doing philosophy authentically does not necessarily mean isolating it from a universalizing orientation. What it does mean, I would add, is modifying the concept of the universal or deferring its formulation so as to take into account the cultural needs of people in underrepresented regions of the world.

I think that these two accounts of the contrasting tendencies found in the history of philosophy in Latin America are not contradictory. Both offer very helpful historical perspectives as long as we keep in mind their distinct contexts. In other words, one thing is to look at the record and practice of institutional philosophy, where the accent tends to fall on matters of fact. Another is to look at philosophers’ motivations and affinities, where the meanings of “modern,” “universal,” “authentic,” or “Latin American” are subject to an evolving debate and to variations in scholarly practices.

ACI: Cuban Philosophy, Philosophy in Cuba, neither or both?

Interview of Prof. Ofelia Schutte by Antonio Correa Iglesias

OS: I think that “philosophy in Cuba” is a clearer category, as long as the definition of philosophy is not too narrow and that the relevance of interdisciplinary studies in and for philosophy is taken into account. “Cuban philosophy” could be understood in a general sense as a shortcut for “philosophy in Cuba.” More specifically and as distinct from the former, “Cuban philosophy” could refer to philosophy whose specific focus is Cuba (its culture, history, literature, etc.). As long as we are clear about the context and the limits of each classification, the rest depends on the priorities of the research projects.

ACI: Cuba had a philosophical “tradition” between the 40’s and 50’s. What happened?

OS: The history of philosophy in Cuba is not one of my academic areas of specialization. It was hard enough to develop the field of Latin American philosophy in the U.S. Philosophy departments kept me busy teaching Existentialism, European continental philosophy, and feminism, with only a small percentage going to Latin American studies. The travel restrictions to Cuba imposed by the U.S. government kept changing, sometimes unexpectedly, and at times with far greater restrictions affecting faculty (like myself) working in state universities in Florida. This meant that it was not possible for me to have a stable or affordable research project related to Cuba. Even so, with great persistence, strong academic credentials, and moral support from many colleagues I was able to attend many conferences in Cuba and sustain some research interests. It was not easy. On average my trips were relatively short. After moving from Gainesville to Tampa in 1999 to chair Women’s Studies most of my research in Cuba has focused on Women’s and Gender Studies, an area I kept pursuing once I went back to philosophy full-time. I did engage with Cuban philosophers in Cuba and at international conferences primarily in the 1990s, so I am not totally unfamiliar with some of their work.

Professor Valdés’s book, *Cien años de filosofía en Hispanoamérica (1910-2010)* contains one chapter covering philosophy in Cuba. According to Dr. Pablo Guadarrama, its author and the leading specialist on the history of Latin American and Cuban philosophy in the island, the period from 1947 to 1957 stood out in the history of twentieth-century Cuban philosophy for its accomplishments. Actually, Professor Guadarrama describes this assessment as coming from Alexis Jardines in a work on José Martí published in Cuba in 1990. I think that several conditions contributed to the pre-eminence of philosophy during the period mentioned. These included the presence in the island of a number of distinguished Spanish philosophers and intellectuals emigrating from Spain due to the outcome of the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s; the so-called normalization of philosophy as an academic field in major Latin American countries prior to and around this period; and, as Guadarrama notes, the founding of important philosophical venues for philosophy such as the Sociedad Cubana de Filosofía and the *Revista Cubana de Filosofía*.

After the victory of the Revolution in January of 1959, we all know what happened. If you believe in improved U.S.-Cuba relations, one unfortunate consequence for good

philosophical relations with the United States was the history of U.S. intervention in the island (the Spanish-American War, Guantánamo, the Platt Amendment, etc.) and the U.S.'s prior support for Batista's illicit government. Combined with the hostile global climate of the Cold War and the revolutionary leadership's strong orientation toward a socialist and anti-U.S. imperialist political and economic agenda, this led to a major realignment of Cuba's scientific, cultural, and educational organizations in the 1960s. As Cubans continue to deliberate on the meaning of socialism in today's world, this will surely have repercussions for philosophy.

I believe that in order to create a healthy climate for philosophical contact between philosophers in the U.S. and Cuba it is important for those of us trained in the U.S. to be sensitive to the circumstances in which the practice of philosophy takes place, both here and there. I think that respecting the alterity of the other, withholding from interventionist practices, and letting the interactions proceed respectfully and at their own pace are some of the best ways to build a steady interaction and trust over the long term.

ACI: In his book “Identity, Memory, and Diaspora” Jorge Gracia, who was also interviewed by our Cuban Philosophy Program, establishes a new classification of, “the philosopher who lives in United States and has Cuban roots...” what do you think about this classification?

OS: I agree with this general description in the context in which it was offered, a co-edited volume with Lynette Bosch and Isabel Alvarez Borland aimed at highlighting Cuban-American identity in the arts, literature, and philosophy. The central category Professor Gracia worked with is “Cuban-American” understood as an ethnic identification. Actually, he describes three generations within this general group, including younger generations whose parents emigrated from Cuba. Perhaps we could extend this further to grandparents and ancestors. Having lived in Tampa I found descendants of Cubans who emigrated from Cuba to the Tampa Bay area since the nineteenth century. They embrace their Cuban ancestry while identifying as “Tampeños.” Our socio-cultural constructs and ways of identification show many variations.

Professor Gracia's categories and descriptions fit my situation and that of the philosophers he named in our generation very well. In this respect I think his analysis is brilliant. When it comes to the younger generations my teaching experience has shown that the process of drawing ethno-racial identifications becomes more fluid. I have witnessed the same students selecting different identities for themselves depending on the context. In addition, once in the United States people marry across countries of origin, so their descendants may be Cuban plus Puerto Rican, Colombian plus Cuban, etc., in addition to pertaining to some other origin. They may identify as Latinos and Latinas as well, not to mention other categories in our rich cultural *mestizaje* such as African-descendant, Black, Jewish, or Asian if their heritage is further characterized by such ancestries.

The problem with any identity classification, especially when there are widespread stereotypical views of the group in question, is that unless you fit the stereotype that is

demarcating you, the classification distorts who you are as well as the way in which what you stand for is represented among others in society. I thank Gracia for not letting the members of our generation fall into a stereotype. It is very important not to conflate the meaning of “Cuban-American” into a handful of images outside of which there are no alternative choices. Gracia also points out that the four members of our generation who pursued philosophy have resided outside of South Florida and that I am the only one who lives and has spent her career in Florida.

There have been countless discussions and debates as to the meaning of the hyphen in “Cuban-American” as well as to the question of the two terms in relation. Now it has been almost ten years since Professor Gracia published this book. Many more Cubans of different generations have emigrated during this period and world-historical conditions have changed, so perhaps an update is needed. In the last decade the push for Latino-descendant philosophers to raise our voices as Latinos and Latinas in the U.S. in defense of other Latinos/as has found increased significance. The need arises given our continued minority status in the philosophy profession despite efforts to pluralize philosophy, on one hand, and, on the other, the militant anti-immigrant sentiments shown currently among some sectors of U.S. society. While most of us have a large place in our hearts for our countries of origin, it’s interesting to note, as José Martí himself experienced during his many years in New York City, how our solidarity extends to other Latinxs and multi-cultural engagements, allowing our social identities a cultural flexibility and philosophical literacy that helps to keep us strong.

ACI: Finally, does Philosophy have a future in our contemporary society that is beyond a solipsist dialogue?

OS: One interesting experience I had when my first book, *Beyond Nihilism*, was published is that I realized that my thoughts no longer belonged exclusively to me. They were no longer in my sole control; now anybody who read my book could do with them whatever they liked. They could say, no, you are wrong; they could misinterpret them or take them in a different direction; maybe they would agree with me up to a point, or perhaps they would understand the book more deeply. Publication made me aware that my innermost thoughts on Nietzsche were out there in a way that they were exposed to readers whom I did not even know. While there was an exciting component to this matter, I had to let go and say to myself: ok, that’s what you get for being a published author.

It’s true that as philosophers we tend to work within a tradition of producing sole-authored work (unlike other disciplines where co-authorship and team work are far more common). But I do not equate sole-authored work with solipsism. The very fact that we use language when we do philosophy and that language is always necessarily social means that philosophical thinking is always already social, regardless of whether a philosopher takes an epistemic solipsist position or not.

The individual, too, is a social individual, no matter whether any particular person views it this way or not. The very concepts of individuality and of the atomic individual are socio-culturally constructed. The idea that there are individual disembodied minds,

each doing philosophy or attaining some notion of identity apart from all else seems totally absurd to me. Such scenarios are delusional if taken literally but perhaps they are a lot of fun to explore hypothetically in philosophy classes, so they keep recurring in academic contexts.

The work I did on Nietzsche was marked by solitude in the professional sense that I did not have a group of cohorts I could join with a similar pursuit and approach in mind. Indeed, the first article I published was entitled “The Solitude of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra.” Subsequently I decided to work primarily on living philosophers with whom I could interact at professional meetings and with whom I could engage directly in dialogue. I also found small professional groups of like-minded colleagues who were interested in similar approaches and issues. These experiences have been facilitated for example by the Society for Iberian and Latin American Thought and by feminist organizations like the Society for Women in Philosophy and the Association for Feminist Ethics and Social Theory.

Extending the dialogue beyond the United States I attended several world congresses and numerous conferences throughout Latin America: Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Cuba, where I established professional relationships with interested colleagues. The interactions I had with my Latin American and Cuban colleagues made a significant difference in my life. Once I embraced the Latin American and feminist philosophical aspects of my social identity both in the U.S. and abroad, I never felt alone any more as a philosopher. I mean, we do not all have the same opinion just because we are Latinos/as, or feminists, and sometimes we actually have very important differences among us, but at least personally I have found myself in the midst of philosophical communities and not stranded on a lonely post. Also, in our daily lives in the United States, as more Anglo-American philosophers take an interest in our perspectives and traditions, a movement that is happening today as we speak, we Latinas and Latinos find far more welcoming philosophical environments in which to participate actively and relate to the rest of the profession.

Thank you again for inviting me to participate in your interview series on Cuban philosophers. I think this will mean a lot especially to younger people in the profession who, because of time or other limitations, will not have a chance to interact personally with us.