

CHAPTER 6

What Is an Ethnic Group?
Against Social Functionalism

SUSANA NUCCETELLI

Prominent among the philosophical issues raised by ethnically diverse societies are questions concerning the collective identity of the groups of people that constitute them. Here I argue that ethnic-group identity depends in part on external factors grounded in a people's history of interactions with others and with the environment. This externalist thesis can be made out, however, only if it meets a number of challenges, one of which is brought by 'social functionalism,' a view advocated by Akeel Bilgrami (1995). Although originally offered as a thesis about religious-group identity, social functionalism would *mutatis mutandis* also apply to ethnic-group identity. After showing that Bilgrami equivocates between two identity theses, I reconstruct social functionalism as a doctrine about ethnic-group identity. Given that doctrine, it is the fundamental commitments of members of an ethnic group that determine their collective identity. Furthermore, such commitments, even when negotiable and context dependent, amount to a group-identity-constituting factor that fulfills a certain social function for each member of an ethnic group. But, as I argue here, there are reasons to reject social functionalism. For one thing, 'Twin Earth' cases show that it provides neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the identity of ethnic groups. And it cannot accommodate some plausible intuitions about the semantic features of the words used to talk about ethnic groups. But externalism accommodates both the Twin Earth cases and those plausible semantic intuitions. In addition, it better captures the fact that, in the case of Hispanics and many other ethnic groups, whether or not members share a fundamental commitment is irrelevant to their being collectively who they are.

I.

Can someone who holds no religious beliefs at all be a Muslim? In a personal anecdote, Bilgrami recounts how he was ‘a Muslim for five minutes’ during an unfriendly encounter in a Hindu neighborhood in India.¹ It is not difficult to see that the force of this anecdote rests on an equivocation between two possible construals of the noun, ‘Muslim.’ Although this word is often used to indicate adherence to a certain religion, it is sometimes also used to indicate membership of an ethnic group. As a religious-group term, *Muslim* can be truly applied to all and only those whose religion is Islam. If interpreted in this narrow sense, Bilgrami’s story is simply false: no person with no religious beliefs at all can be a Muslim for any period of time. But religious-group terms such as *Muslim*, *Jewish*, and *Christian* also admit another construal under which they are ethnic-group terms (hereafter, EGTs). That is why, for instance, we may truly say that Albert Einstein and Karl Marx were Jewish, even though by no stretch of the imagination can they be counted among those whose religion is Judaism. Thus, charity requires that we understand Bilgrami’s anecdote in this broader sense: it is as an EGT that he means it, not a religious-group term at all.

Understood in this way, the question ‘What is a Muslim?’ turns out to be a question about the identity of Muslims as an ethnic group—rather than as a religious group. Nonetheless, on Bilgrami’s account, it is adherence to Islam that determines the ethnic identity of Muslims.² Furthermore, Islam is there taken to be an identity-constituting commitment of Muslims that fulfils a function for all members of that ethnic group. Underwriting this claim is the social functionalist’s thesis that

SF 1: Whatever determines membership of an ethnic group is a factor that fulfills a social function for the members of the group.

Assuming that adherence to Islam is the factor that determines the collective identity of Muslims, we may now ask: What, if any, is the social role Islam fulfils for the members of that group? Bilgrami has it that to fundamentalist Muslims, Islam is *the only* basic value they uphold—while to moderates it is but one value among others. This appears to lead to the conclusion that there might be no sin-

1. Bilgrami recalls saying, to his surprise, “I am a Muslim,” when looking for accommodation in a Hindu neighborhood in India—even though he was not a believer in Islam. “It was clear to me that I was, without strain or artificiality, a Muslim for about five minutes. This is how negotiable the concept of identity can be.” See A. Bilgrami, “What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity,” in *Identities*, ed. K. A. Appiah and H. L. Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 199.

2. *Ibid.*, 198–99.

gle, overarching social function of Islam that is one and the same for each member of that group.

But, on Bilgrami's view, this is *not* so. He holds that there is a nonreligious, overarching social function Islam fulfills for all members of that ethnic group, since it has the role of providing Muslims with a sense of autonomy from the West and a sense of dignity—which are contingent on the historical, social, and material circumstances faced by members of the group. As a fundamental commitment of all Muslims, Islam has “recognizable historical sources and has a vital function in a people's struggle to achieve a sense of identity and self-respect in the face of that history and the perceptions formed by it.” Moreover, such a commitment can be understood as “a defensive reaction caused not only by scars and memories of Western colonial rule but by the failure of successive governments to break out of the models of development imposed on them by a dominating neocolonial presence of the superpowers through much of the cold war.”³

Whether or not this line of thought can account for the social function of Islam is, of course, a matter for empirical investigation by the social sciences. For the issue of concern here, however, let us note that Bilgrami's social functionalism is a philosophical doctrine suggesting how to go about determining the identity of Muslims. If sound, this doctrine can, *mutatis mutandis*, be put at the service of suggesting how to account for the collective identity of other ethnic groups. As far as I can tell, Bilgrami's proposal consists of *SF 1* above, together with the thesis that

SF 2: The identity of ethnic groups is determined by no criteria other than the fundamental commitments of their members.

Such identity-constituting commitments can be construed as inclinations and preferences underlying some choices of relationships, moral principles, values, and norms common to all members of an ethnic group. If we think of them in terms of related psychological attitudes, we may call such commitments “proattitudes” and take them to be very general psychological dispositions to accept certain relationships, principles, values, and norms. (Although fundamental commitments likewise underwrite the negative psychological attitudes of rejection toward certain relationships, principles, values, and norms, we shall for brevity's sake ignore these here.)⁴ Given social functionalism, proattitudes that count as fundamental commitments are identity-constituting for ethnic groups.

3. *Ibid.*, 209.

4. I would like to thank Gary Seay for discussions of the notion of a fundamental commitment.

For this reason, their loss is group-destructive, in the sense that it undermines the collective identity of the group they sustain. The notion of a fundamental commitment as being constitutive of the self-identity of each moral agent is, of course, Bernard Williams's.⁵ At the personal level, a fundamental commitment has a role similar to that suggested by Bilgrami for group-identity—namely, that of helping to establish a sense of our own selves as the sort of persons we are. But to put fundamental commitment at the service of accounting for the identity of Muslims as an ethnic group, Bilgrami gives a twist to Williams's notion while keeping its essential feature of being identity-constituting for the person.

We are now in a position to state *SFI*, the conception of ethnic-group identity presupposed by social functionalism:

SFI A group of people constitute an ethnic group if and only if,

- (a) Its members share at least some commitments which, though context dependent, are nevertheless fundamental in the sense that they establish who those people collectively are, and
- (b) Such fundamental commitments fulfill a historic social and/or cultural function for the people who have them.

Given condition (a), if any proattitudes that amount to the fundamental commitments of those who have them were lost, that would be identity-destructive for them (they would then cease to be who they are as a group). Given condition (b), the fundamental commitments of a people have cash value for the members of that ethnic group, since they fulfill a need of its members (even though their function is always contingent on that group's history and context).

Note, however, that any account of the collective identity of ethnic groups along these lines would have an objectionable epistemic consequence. For it would follow from that account that the members of an ethnic group must have some special awareness of, or privileged epistemic access to, the fundamental commitments constitutive of their collective identity. Any fundamental commitment is, after all, some person's mental state although it need not be a psychological attitude with full propositional content, such as a belief or a desire, it is nonetheless at least an inclination or preference leading to the acceptance of certain relationships, values, norms, and the like. Such fundamental commitments must then be either conscious states or at least dispositional states of individuals (i.e., states that, although in the "back" of a person's mind, are accessible on reflection). Either way, inclinations and preferences have a psychological reality, and must therefore be epistemically accessible in a special, first-person way

5. See Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

to those who have them. According to a long tradition in philosophy, each person has privileged epistemic access to her own mental states and events—a view that is weaker, and therefore more plausible, than the standard Cartesian conception of self-knowledge from which the tradition derives. Social functionalism, then, has the consequence that each person must have special epistemic access to the fundamental commitments she shares with other members of her ethnic group.

It seems, therefore, that social functionalism now faces two objections: one metaphysical, the other epistemic. If compelling, these objections amount to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the doctrine. The metaphysical objection would be well supported if an examination of a representative number of ethnic groups revealed that no fundamental commitment of their members was either necessary or sufficient to the identity of a certain ethnic group. The epistemic objection follows from the metaphysical one: if it turned out that no fundamental commitment were needed for the collective identity of a people, then a fortiori they need have no epistemic access to such commitments. This would be consistent with the externalist view. In fact, as we shall see, if social externalism is correct, a people need have no epistemic access *at all* to crucial factors that determine their collective identity.

2.

The metaphysical objection to social functionalism is grounded on evidence from a representative selection of ethnic groups. Consider the case of Latin Americans and their descendants abroad, an ethnic group known in the United States as “Hispanics” (or “Latinos”). First, let’s not confuse this EGT with *hispanos*, a word used in Spanish to denote *anything or anyone fundamentally related to either Spain or its former overseas Empire*.⁶ In fact, not only the content but also the history of term *Hispanics* is quite different from that of its Spanish false cognate: although it existed before the mid 1970s, it acquired its present use in U.S. English then, when it began to occur instead of ‘Chicano’ in some contexts. The latter term was at the time increasingly employed by public officials to refer to *anyone of Latin American ancestry, whether or not the person was of Mexican descent*.⁷

6. Spanish dictionaries follow the Spanish Royal Academy in defining ‘hispano’ as “Spanish or of Spanish origins.” See, for example, Ramón M. Pidal and Manuel Gili Gaya, *Diccionario general de la lengua española* (Barcelona: Bibliograf, 1970), 896, and Julio Casares, *Diccionario ideológico de la lengua española* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1987), 450.

7. The word *Hispanic* figures in standard dictionaries dating before the 1970s—e.g., *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language* (Cleveland, OH: World, 1962). But such dictionaries attest that

Never entirely accepted by those to whom it was applied, ‘Hispanics’ nevertheless came into general usage, in spite of persistent attempts to replace it with ‘Latinos,’ a term that has caught on among some members of the group.

A close scrutiny of the content of ‘Hispanics,’ ‘Latinos,’ and other genuine EGTs will be seen to support the metaphysical objection against social functionalism, for it reveals that in fact no fundamental commitment of those denoted by each term is either necessary or sufficient for the collective identity of their group. For the record, note that social externalists and functionalists may both agree on what the semantic content of any genuine EGT is: namely, that any such term expresses a predicate and picks out a property, where the latter is understood in a broad sense according to which any meaningful predicate expresses a property. On this view, tokens of ‘Hispanic’ could be said to express the property of *having Hispanic ethnicity, being of Hispanic descent, or simply, being Hispanic*—and similarly for tokens of ‘Muslim,’ ‘African-American,’ ‘Inuit,’ ‘Maori,’ and so on.

Social externalists and functionalists may also agree in two further claims:

1. *A people’s instantiating any such a property need not depend on either genetics or race, since the property could instead be construed as a complex one grounded in deep-lying factors responsible for the group’s distinguishing collective identity.*
2. *To constitute an ethnic group, a people must (even when they are quite diverse) at least have one feature in common.*

On both doctrines, any loss of individuating properties is destructive for the identity of the ethnic group they sustain. Yet these doctrines offer competing accounts of the relevant properties. That is, a conflict arises between social functionalism and social externalism when it comes to determining the precise sort of deep-lying feature that all members of an ethnic group must have in common. As we’ve seen, given social functionalism, (a) those features are the fundamental commitments of members of an ethnic group, and (b) such commitments must be readily accessible to all group members. But (a) and (b) turn out to be false of a number of actual ethnic groups. For example, it is false of Hispanics—a group that therefore amounts to a counterexample to social functionalism. Since in their case, it can be shown that no fundamental commitment determines their collective identity, a fortiori, members of the group need have

the term was considered synonymous with ‘Spanish’ or ‘of Spanish origins.’ Nixon’s officials are often credited with introducing the current usage of the term, in response to concerns that the government was wrongly applying ‘Chicano’ to people who were not of Mexican descent (see, for example, P. Schmidt, “The Label ‘Hispanic’ Irks Some, but Also Unites,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 1, no. 14 (November 28, 2003):A9. Yet whether or not this is historically accurate does not affect my line of argument.

no access to such commitments. Doctrine (a), as a putative claim about what determines the identity of Hispanics, is in fact refuted by demographics: well-known evidence suggests that there is *no* religion, values, view of history, perception of the Other, moral norms, etc., common to all members of the group. Whether construed as attitudes or as proattitudes, there is nothing on such counts that all Hispanics have in common.

Furthermore, Hispanics appear to share *no* relevant superficial features at all, as is evident from a closer look at their diverse racial backgrounds, cultural practices, and social preferences. Although some Hispanics have European ancestry (which may or may not be Spanish), others are entirely of Amerindian, African, Middle Eastern, or East Asian descent. Some speak European languages, mainly but not uniquely, Spanish, Portuguese, and English; others, Amerindian ones such as Quechua and Guaraní. Some have dark skin, others light; some listen to classical music, others to salsa, tango, or *chamamé*.

Must we then conclude that there is *no* property *at all* that Hispanics share and that determines their identity? No, for even though they share no superficial feature, deep-lying factors responsible for their ethnic identity are not difficult to find. Arguably, Hispanics share a wealth of communal experiences, including some very characteristic past events and states. There is now logical space to maintain that it is precisely these that constitute their identity and make them the people they are. There is, for instance, a common history Hispanics share, consisting in their quite idiosyncratic relations with other nations and with their physical environment. Although we would expect that a mature social science would provide a detailed account of these factors relevant to Hispanic identity, we may tentatively list among them the fateful encounter of Amerindian civilizations with Europeans in 1492, three centuries of Iberian colonial domination, the bloody nineteenth-century wars of independence, and some salient episodes in Latin America's perennially uneasy relationship with the United States and with other Western powers (including some notorious episodes of overt political, economic, and military interference by those nations).

On this account, it is a history of conditions and events connecting Hispanics to others and among themselves, as well as a certain relationship to their physical environment, that in part determines what it is *to have Hispanic ethnicity*, *to be of Hispanic descent*, or simply, *to be Hispanic*. An account of ethnic-group identity along these lines is externalist, for it understands 'being Hispanic' as a property of a people that presupposes the existence of others (i.e., those with whom Hispanics have historically been related in such-and-such ways).⁸ The same

8. It has become conventional to define external properties by contrast with those that are internal. While the latter do not presuppose the existence of anything other than that the thing that has them,

point can be made in a variety of equivalent ways. We may say that, on social externalist assumptions, being Hispanic supervenes on external factors, since it supervenes on a people's relations to things 'outside' that ethnic group. But we could also hold that being Hispanic is an external property because it does not preserve across internal replicas. However construed, these claims can be supported by a 'Twin-Earth' thought experiment, to which we now turn.

Imagine a possible world, w_2 , superficially identical to the actual world, w_1 . In w_2 , there is a continent referred to in vernacular as 'the Americas' that is partly inhabited by a people referred to as 'Hispanics.' These have superficial properties (nonintentionally described) indistinguishable from those of Hispanics in w_1 (including their physical, social, moral, cultural, religious, and practical features and preferences). We shall call that continent, 'Twin Americas,' and the people just described, 'Twin Hispanics.' Twin Americas differs, however, from the Americas in a number of ways relevant to the identity of Twin Hispanics. First, it is a continent of quite recent creation since it resulted from geological developments that took place, say, in the twelfth century. In addition, the people who inhabit it have had historical experiences that differ radically from those of Hispanics in the actual world. At this point, we may imagine that the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas never existed in Twin Americas, nor did the Spaniards and Portuguese ever arrive there. But suppose that conquerors of another national group did: say, the Chinese, who ruled for three centuries, imposing Confucianism instead of Scholasticism—so that the peoples called 'Hispanics' in w_2 have never stood in any relationship to Aristotle, Aquinas, the Fathers of the Church, or any of the other 'authorities' imposed on Hispanics during more than three centuries of Iberian rule.

Often, in discussions of what determines the identity of natural and biological kinds, we come to the point where we must test our metaphysical intuitions and try to determine what we should say in the counterfactual scenario. In a similar way, we must now test our metaphysical intuitions by asking what we should say about the identity of those peoples? Are they Hispanics? Should we call them 'Hispanics'? Were we to answer (as I think we should) that it is *not* possible for them to be Hispanics, and that it is not possible to use the EGT 'Hispanics' in either speech or thought involving them, our intuition would then be

the former do. (For instance, the property of *being west of Central Park* is relational or external by definition: whether an object has it depends on how that object is geographically related to Central Park.) Similarly, external properties differ from internal ones in that the former may *not* preserve across internal replicas. Thus, the external property of *being west of Central Park* does not preserve across internal duplicates: when I am at the Museum of Natural History, I have it, while any possible replica of mine who is at the Metropolitan Museum, lacks it. Either way, these are the possible construals of 'external properties' I am invoking here.

supporting social externalism of the sort underlined above. For the intuition underwriting our answers is that, given those peoples' interactions with others and with their environment, even though everything else remains the same, it is simply not possible, in the metaphysical sense, that they should be Hispanics. If this thought experiment is compelling, then so is the following principle of group identity for Hispanics:

HGI. For every possible world and for every person in a possible world, a person is Hispanic if and only if she is a member of an ethnic group individuated by the same factors that individuate the group of Hispanics in the actual world.

The Twin Earth case suggests that, in w_2 , the people superficially identical to the Hispanics in w_1 lack the property of being Hispanic. Since, by hypothesis, the two groups differ only in their histories of communal relations to others and to the physical environment, it follows that these are the deep-lying factors that determine the collective identity of the group.

Similarly, the Twin Earth thought experiment entails that the ethnicity of a group does not supervene on some internal properties of the group—an externalist thesis that may be expressed as

E. Necessarily, two groups of people x (in any possible world) and y (in any possible world) could have the same superficial properties but differ in their ethnicity.

That would be the case whenever x 's and y 's histories of interaction with others and with the environment differ substantially—which amounts to saying that the property of having a certain ethnic identity may not preserve across groups that are internal replicas. In short, any such property is relational—in other words, it supervenes on external factors. I submit that a closer look at what determines membership of the group of Hispanics supports each of these conclusions, which can be summarized in this way

H. The ethnicity of a people supervenes on their history of relations with others and with the environment.

That individuals identified as Hispanics do share a heritage marked by past acts and events in the way suggested above is, however, completely independent of whether or not those individuals themselves have explicit knowledge of the historical experiences of their group. This provides another reason for rejecting social functionalism in light of the epistemic consequences of that view noted above.

3.

Externalist intuitions also appear plausible for other ethnic groups. Consider the property picked out by ‘Eskimo’ and ‘Inuit,’ both EGTs conventionally used to talk and think about the people of a large traditional culture in the arctic regions of North America, Asia, and Greenland. The term *Eskimo* (in vernacular, *eaters of raw meat*) was introduced by Algonkian Indians to refer disparagingly to certain people whom they encountered as neighbors. That EGT was never accepted by some members of the denoted group, and there was, in the late 1970s, an attempt to replace it with ‘Inuit,’ a term that seems to have caught on among certain communities in Canada and Greenland. Were we to ask, to what, if anything, ‘Eskimo’ applies, the best candidates would, again, be a property: that of *having Eskimo ethnicity, being of Eskimo descent, or simply, being an Eskimo*. Either way, there is no denying that the members of this ethnic group, despite their diversity, share an ethnic identity that distinguishes them from other Northern peoples. Although it would be a nonstarter to make that property depend on either genetics or race, we may construe it as an external property along the externalist lines suggested above. Our account, in that case, would begin by noting that for the Eskimo too, deep-lying factors seem responsible for their being who they are. Although we shall in the end look to social science for a detailed account of such factors, we can in the meantime run a Twin Earth case to isolate the putative factors scientists should look at. Once again the thought experiment will point to the history of the ethnic group and its relations to the environment: the Eskimo interactions with others (including the Algonkians) in the arctic regions of the world are the factors that have made possible their being who they are, with their characteristic seminomadic culture, their art, their ways of life, and their language (Eskimo, a major branch of the Eskimo-Aleut family). Salient in that history are, of course, their being the descendants of indigenous peoples of the far north, and also their contacts with seagoing Norsemen in the thirteenth century, and finally their causal commerce with an especially severe physical context in the arctic regions of North America, Asia, and Greenland.

But externalist intuitions along these lines are not evoked exclusively by the cases of the Hispanics and the Eskimo. As yet another instructive example, consider the Romani. In their case, an externalist account of their ethnic identity appears the *only* sound option available. As before, the account first considers the content of the EGT commonly used in speech and thought involving this ethnic group: namely, ‘Gypsy,’ which resulted from a mutation of a misapplied French term for Egyptians. This EGT plainly testifies to the misconception of Westerners about the group’s origins, wrongly believed to be in Egypt. Even to-

day, a number of biased connotations such as those of *wanderers* and *fortune tellers* are still associated with this and other EGTs for the Romani, such as 'Travelers,' the term preferred in Britain (which clearly connotes a way of life that is simply false of many members of the group).⁹

In any case, to account for the collective identity of the Romani, we may construe the property of being Romani as an external one, provided we have a sound intuition that some external deep-lying factors appear responsible for their being who they are. And again we shall be tentative in our conclusions, since it is up to the social sciences to produce the final account of such factors. As with previous examples, we may run a Twin Earth thought experiment to support our intuitions, holding constant the superficial properties of the Romani in the counterfactual situation while varying the history of causal interactions of the group with others and the environment. If it is, then, only those variations that determine our different judgments about the identity of the group, we may confidently confirm the presumption that it is indeed something external that is responsible for the collective identity of the group. I expect that salient among such external factors would be the Romani's diaspora from India to Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, their development of a characteristic nomadic culture with particular folkways and language (Romany), and their ability to maintain a migratory way of life, chiefly in Europe and America, for centuries.

Again in this case, it could be held that the members of this ethnic group, despite their diversity, share a property that distinguishes them from other peoples of the world—which need not depend on either genetics or race. As in the cases of being Hispanic or being Eskimo, the property of being Romani is a complex one, grounded in some past states and events of their common experiences with others and with the environment. If I am right about this, it follows that it is not a fundamental commitment accessible to all Romani, but rather their history of relations with others and with the environment that determines their collective identity.

If the above accounts of Hispanic, Eskimo, and Romani identity are plausible, then the thesis of constitutive social externalism (CSE) also is, since it maintains

CSE. It is a people's history of interactions with others and with the environment that determines their identity as an ethnic group.

9. In "The Time of the Gypsies: A 'People without History' in the Narratives of the West," in *Identities*, ed. Appiah and Gates, Jr., 338–79, Katie Trumpener reports that the designated peoples themselves prefer tribal EGTs, such as 'Sinti' and 'Roma' in Germany and 'Vlax' in the Balkans.

In other words, such relations determine the type of ethnicity a group instantiates. The explanatory counterpart of this thesis, explanatory social externalism (ESE), is the claim that

ESE. Any correct account of the identity of an ethnic group must consider its history of relations with others and with the environment.

That is, any correct account of the identity of an ethnic group must consider relational properties of that group. Further support for each of these externalist theses is provided by a well-supported account of the semantic features of ETGs, to which we now turn.

4.

Among important questions about ethnic-group words are not only what counts as a proper use of such terms but also how to account for their meaning and denotation. In popular discourse, the proper use of ethnic-group terms is often the central issue.¹⁰ Philosophers have shown some interest in both the proper-use and the semantic question. The former is principally addressed by those who write on political and social philosophy and often also involves discussions of other group terms, such as racial-group terms and nationality terms. For example, Ofelia Schutte attempts an answer to the proper-use question in the course of discussing whether the use of EGTs undermines or contributes to the struggle of minority groups for their rights in the United States.¹¹ But the semantic question is, of the two, the most relevant to my interest here. Unfortunately, the literature addressing it is by no means abundant. Frege has written on the role of ‘Turk’ in sentences such as ‘The Turk besieged Vienna.’¹² Yet his remarks are limited to logical form, urging that the semantic contribution of an EGT to the propositions in which it occurs is that of a general term—without providing sufficient support this claim.¹³

Jorge Gracia (2000) has made a current attempt to answer the semantic question. After offering some pragmatic reasons in order to justify the use of ethnic

10. For instance, see discussion on the adequate terms for the peoples of traditional societies in P. Keal, *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Moral Backwardness of International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

11. Ofelia Schutte, “Negotiating Latina Identities,” in *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Pablo De Greiff (New York: Routledge, 2000), 61–76.

12. Gottlob Frege, “On Concept and Object,” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. P. Geach and M. Black (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 42–55.

13. Nuccetelli, “Reference and Ethnic-Group Terms,” *Inquiry* 6 (2004): 528–44.

groups terms, he looks at the semantic properties of “ethnic *names*.” His account of such properties is rooted in Wittgenstein’s family of resemblance approach to the meaning of words, which amounts to a cluster theory of meaning. On this theory of EGTs, there is a cluster of different meanings speakers associate with those terms and such meanings determine their denotation. Yet since the cluster theory of EGTs can be shown to be a variant of Fregean semantics, it is also vulnerable to objections that undermine the latter. Call ‘descriptivism’ a semantic account of EGTs that is either Fregeanism or the cluster theory. In “Reference and Ethnic-Group Terms,” I have offered a number of objections to descriptivism. I shall rehearse neither the objection nor commentaries on the literature connected with this theory of EGTs semantic properties.¹⁴ It is sufficient to note that, of the two major semantic accounts of the content of EGTs, descriptivism and the causal theory, it is only the latter that avoids some puzzles that arise from certain scenarios involving communication by means of such terms.¹⁵ Semantic descriptivism takes the property picked out by tokens of an EGT to be the speakers’ *nondemonstrative* conception/s of an ethnic group. This has the implausible consequence that, whenever the speakers’ only conception of the property denoted by an EGT is true, not of all and only the members of the intended group, but of the members of some *other* group, then the extension of the speaker’s tokens of that term would be the property of belonging to that other group. Furthermore, as we’ve seen in the cases of ‘Hispanic,’ ‘Eskimo,’ and ‘Gypsy,’ although speakers may have erroneous and sometimes even opposite ways of thinking about the property of belonging to a given ethnic group, they may still succeed by conventional linguistic means in expressing propositional attitudes involving that group.

14. In “Race Culture, and Identity: Misunderstood Connections,” in *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, ed. K. A. Appiah and A. Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Anthony Appiah looks closely at both the direct-reference and the descriptivist semantic account of racial-group terms. Although he remains neutral between these accounts, on his view any such term would turn out to be empty under either account. For in the case of racial-group terms, he contends, neither essences nor descriptions are plausible candidates that might contribute to the grounding of their extension. Yet, on Appiah’s view, racial-group terms do have a role to play in explanation and prediction of action, no less than ‘witchcraft,’ ‘phlogiston,’ and other empty words. A number of reasons, however, precludes Appiah’s discussion for being of any help for the topic of concern here. First, his arguments attempt to undermine each of the two best semantic accounts for the case of racial-group terms without proposing an alternative theory. Furthermore, his appeal to a racial-term’s role in explanation and prediction of behavior is a pragmatic move that falls short of addressing the semantic question. In addition, neither his rejection of Fregean semantics and the direct-reference theory nor his conclusion about the role of racial-group terms in folk-psychology can apply to EGTs’ case of unless it is shown that these and racial-group terms are relevantly analogous.

15. In Nuccetelli, “‘Hispanics,’ ‘Latinos,’ and ‘Iberoamericans’: Naming or Describing?” I proposed a version of referentialism about ethnic-group terms that is stronger than the causal theory I now favor. For more on the latter, see Nuccetelli, “Reference and Ethnic-Group Term.”

These arguments support a causal theory of EGTs. At the same time, they also provide reasons for construing the property of belonging to an ethnic group in the externalist way suggested above. For instance, in the case of the Eskimo, the causal theorist may hold that when the Algonkians dubbed their neighbors ‘Eskimo,’ they had causal contact with a group of individuals constituted by a certain property cashed out along externalist lines. Our deference to a referential usage going back to the Algonkians’ interaction with those people (whose eating habits they disdained) is what grounds the content of that EGT for us.

One difficulty with my proposal, however, is that it appears to imply that a person belongs to an ethnic group or groups “no matter what.” That is, I seem committed to holding that someone who has no sense of belonging to a certain group is nonetheless a member of the group provided there is an historical chain, however remote, linking that person with a group individuated along the lines suggested above. But I can meet this objection. For when it comes to ascribing ethnicity to *individuals*, externalism is consistent with a plausible principle such as

AEI. Any individual belongs to a certain ethnic group if and only if her sensing membership of that group figures in at least some intentional description of that individual,

where the latter includes ascriptions of beliefs, desires, fears, hopes, and the like. For the purpose of concern here, the intentional description that matters involves attitudes presupposing the *empathy* of those who have them with an ethnic group they sense to be their own. Such attitudes often underlie some of their actions and must therefore be invoked in any folk explanations or predictions of them—as when we explain why some Armenian Americans boycott Turkish-made products or Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of the bus. By contrast, other actions are explained and predicted in terms of attitudes that presuppose the rejection of a certain ethnic group, which is sensed as antagonistic. They can only be explained or predicted by invoking a person’s *antipathy* toward a certain ethnic group—as when we explain Le Pen’s reactions to Muslims in France, or the use of ‘Sudaca’ as a derogatory nickname for Latin Americans in Spain.

Attitudes of both types are ordinarily invoked in intentional description, which is crucial to ordinary folk-psychological explanations and predictions of behavior. It is not uncommon to link a commonsense explanation of someone’s action to her membership of a certain ethnic group. For example, an explanation of why Phong went out of his way to show the Carnegie Hall to some tourists may very well invoke his being East Asian, and his discovering that the tourists were from South Korea. Similarly, after learning that I’m Argentinian,

the gym clerk from Honduras told me I need not worry if I forgot my ID. Why did she believe then that I could be an exception to the rule? A plausible answer here would consist in intentional description that invokes ethnicity. Yet neither Phong nor the gym clerk need be aware of (let alone have special epistemic access to) the deep-lying factors responsible for ethnic identity in either case. After all, the issue at stake is metaphysical, not epistemic.

Finally, let's consider the following case: a South American ambassador to the Organization of American States in Washington brought his two daughters with him to the United States.¹⁶ These young women then grew up in Washington, developing *no* psychological attitude at all presupposing empathy to Hispanics—but had instead some attitudes that presuppose either total indifference or antipathy to them (such as the belief that they do not belong to that ethnic group, the hope that they would not be mistakenly taken for a member of the group, and the desire to avoid interaction with anyone whose ethnicity was Hispanic). Given AEI, since no intentional description in this case need invoke the daughters' sensing their being Hispanic at all, it seems to follow that these young women cannot be said to have that property.

Yet social externalism can accommodate scenarios of this sort, in which individuals drop out of an ethnic group. It can also make room for the fact that membership of ethnic groups is a matter of degree. Moreover, it is clearly consistent with the evidence that members of an ethnic group often lack reflective knowledge of either their membership of it, or of the deep-lying factors that determine the identity of their group, or of both. At the same time, social functionalism has been shown implausible. For although fundamental commitments and historical recollection are often important elements for communities and find their expression in a great variety of symbolisms, the counterexamples proposed here show that they cannot determine the identity of ethnic groups. In addition, social functionalism was found to have unacceptable epistemic consequences, and this result amounts to indirect support for social externalism. Ethnic identity, then, has much to do with a people's legacy from the past. It is the history of their interaction with others and their environment that makes them who they are, and it is in this way that they are constituted as a people.

16. This anecdote is based on a real-life case. I would like to thank Bill Cooper and Gary Seay for their input on this example.