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TWO MODELS OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRATIC MULTICULTURALISM: BENHABIB AND VILLORO

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I contrast two different models of deliberative democratic multiculturalism: one defended by Seyla Benhabib in *The Claims of Culture* (2002) and one proposed by Luis Villoro in *Estado Plural, Pluralidad de Culturas* (1998) and *Los Retos de la Sociedad por venir* (2007). Specifically, I contend that, despite the presence of similarities, both models exhibit important differences since Benhabib views the relations that obtain between different agents in a democratic multicultural society through an adversarial lens while Villoro views these relations through an educative and collaborative lens. I show that this difference can be traced back to different understandings that Benhabib and Villoro have of the notions of culture, identity and deliberation. Finally, I argue that Villoro's model is better than Benhabib's because Benhabib's model entails a progressive erosion of the trust required for the very institutions that mediate democratic deliberation in multicultural societies.

Keywords: Deliberation, Democracy, Muticulturalism, Seyla Benhabib, Luis Villoro

RESUMEN: En este artículo presento y contrasto dos modelos distintos de multiculturalismo democrático deliberativo: uno que es articulado y defendido por Seyla Benhabib en *Las Reivindicaciones de la Cultura* (2002) y el otro que es propuesto por Luis Villoro en *Estado Plural, Pluralidad de Culturas* (1998) y *Los Retos de la Sociedad por venir* (2007). De manera específica, arguyo que, a pesar de algunas semejanzas, ambos modelos exhiben diferencias importantes puesto que Benhabib percibe las relaciones que hay entre los distintos agentes en una sociedad multicultural democrática a través de un lente antagonista mientras que Villoro percibe estas relaciones a través de un lente educativo y colaborativo. Muestro que esta diferencia puede ser rastreada a las distintas maneras que Benhabib y Villoro tienen de entender las nociones de cultura, identidad y deliberación. Finalmente, sostengo que el modelo de Villoro es mejor que el de Benhabib en tanto que los supuestos mismos sobre los que descansa el modelo de Benhabib implican una erosión progresiva de la confianza requerida en las instituciones que, según la propia Benhabib, median la deliberación democrática en las sociedades multiculturales.

Palabras clave: Deliberación, Democracia, Multiculturalismo, Seyla Behabib, Luis Villoro

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1. Introduction

Since the publication of Charles Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition" (1992), philosophers have debated how contemporary democratic societies should proceed to accommodate the existence of minority groups that struggle to be recognized. While various philosophers in the 1990s and onward have subscribed to the idea that democratic societies should embrace multiculturalism, which can be understood broadly in terms of "an ideal in which members of minority groups can maintain their distinctive collective identities and practices" (Song 2020), there have been disagreements on how this ideal can be realized. For instance, while some theorists such as Chandran Kukathas (1992) have argued for the need to tolerate the existence of distinctive minority identities and the cultural practices associated to them in democratic societies, others such as William Kymlicka (1995) have claimed that mere toleration is insufficient and that, for minority groups to be able to thrive on an equal footing along with the dominant majority instead of merely surviving, it is important to offer them "group-differentiated rights" or positive accommodations.

In addition to engaging in discussions regarding how to implement the ideal of respect to cultural differences, political philosophers have also debated which specific models of deliberation democratic societies should implement to achieve the abovementioned aspiration of multiculturalism. Specifically, while some such as Seyla Benhabib (2002) have put forth a "dual-track" model of democratic deliberation (inspired by Habermas), others like Villoro (2007, 2012) have adopted a different model of deliberation (inspired by Aristotle) that emphasizes the importance of group consensus and of understanding the positions of others. In light of the existence of these models of democratic multiculturalism, a few questions arise. For instance, what are the shared assumptions that Benhabib and Villoro accept about the notions of culture, identity and deliberation that are employed in their models, and what are the differences between them? What are the main features that distinguish Benhabib's model from Villoro's? What are the reasons that account for the differences between both models? Are both models equally good for creating and maintaining multicultural democratic societies and, if that is not the case, which model is better and why?

My goal in this paper is to tackle these questions and to provide some tentative answers. I proceed in the following way. In section 2, I provide a brief account of Benhabib's and Villoro's notions of culture, identity, and deliberation. Specifically, I show that, while Benhabib and Villoro agree in general about these three notions, they have also slightly different views regarding them, which are reflected on the structure of the models of democratic multiculturalism that they respectively present. In section 3, after distinguishing in some detail the two models proposed by Benhabib and Villoro, I argue that one of the central differences between them is

that, while Benhabib's model is far more agonistic in virtue of her conception of deliberation, Villoro's model is, in contrast, centered on the importance of consensus building through the active understanding of other people's positions. Having distinguished these two models, I move in section 4 to offer a tentative account of why both models differ in these respects and I argue that the main reason is that Benhabib conceives democratic deliberation in a multicultural setting as a process that is primarily mediated by certain political and social institutions such as legislatures, courts and political parties whereas Villoro's model of democratic deliberation in multicultural setting rejects these institutions -in particular, political parties- and emphasizes the ideal of a direct communitarian democracy. Subsequently, in section 5, I contend that Villoro's model is better than Benhabib's model given that Benhabib's model involves, because of the assumptions that she makes, a progressive erosion of the trust required by the very social and political institutions that mediate democratic deliberation, while Villoro's model allows a better handling of the internal tensions that exist in multicultural democratic societies. Finally, in section 6, I conclude by some offering certain remarks that point to a couple of lines for future inquiry.

2.   Culture, identity and deliberation for Benhabib and Villoro

To understand the models of democratic multiculturalism proposed by Benhabib and Villoro, it is important to be clear about how they view certain central notions, especially culture, identity and deliberation. Though Benhabib (2002: 189n4) remarks that the notion of culture is notoriously difficult to define, she offers a rough approximation when she writes that "what we call 'culture' is the horizon formed by these evaluative stances, through which the infinite chain of space-time sequences is demarcated into 'good' and 'bad', 'holy' and 'profane' and 'pure' and 'impure' Cultures are formed through binaries because human beings live in an evaluative universe" (2002: 7). Villoro, in partial contrast to Benhabib, offers the following characterization of the notion of culture: "a culture is continuity: the weight of past events in the present, tradition. But it is also a project: the choice of ends and values that give sense to collective action. This involves the adhesion to shared collective ends" (2012: 15). As we can appreciate, there are various common elements in the two characterizations of culture: both emphasize the key importance of certain values (or evaluative stances) which ground cultures and shape what Benhabib refers to as an "horizon" and Villoro dubs a "project" and both stress as well that cultures are continuous through time given that Benhabib talks about them in terms of "infinite chain(s) of space-time sequences" and Villoro in terms of "continuity." But one difference that emerges between those characterizations is that, while Benhabib highlights the role of binaries in the creation of the evaluative stances that form cultures (binaries that are very often deployed in exclusionary ways to create

boundaries between insiders and outsiders),[1] Villoro underscores the unifying character of shared collective ends in the creation and maintenance of cultures.

With respect to identity, Benhabib notices that it has often been taken a synonym for culture given that it functions primarily as a "marker and differentiator" (1992: 1). Thus, for Benhabib, identity appears to be the characteristic or the set of characteristics that marks an individual (or a group, in the case of group identity) as different from other individuals (or from other groups). For Benhabib, human identities are typically constituted through webs of interlocution, which is a view that she adopts from Charles Taylor (1989). Because of this, she embraces a conception of group identity where the focus is "less on what the group is but more on what the political leaders of such groups demand in the political sphere" (2002: 18). For Villoro, the concept of identity is polysemous, so he distinguishes different meanings of it. In one sense, as he puts it, "the 'identity' of an object is constituted by the features that singularize it from other objects and that remain in it as long as it is the same object" (2012: 73). In a second sense, which applies to individual human beings and groups, for Villoro "'identity' refers to a representation that the subject has. It means, for now, that which the subject self-identifies with" (2012: 74). When this second meaning is applied to groups, Villoro points out that the identity of a group consists in "an inter-subjective representation, shared by a majority of the members of a same people, that would constitute a collective 'self'" (2012: 76). And he further adds that "it is constituted by a system of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are communicated to every member of the group through its membership in it" (*ibid.*). As we can see, just as in the case of the notion of culture, there are shared elements in how Benhabib and Villoro view the notion of identity. For both, identity (and, more specifically, the identity of a group) works as a feature (or set of features) that differentiates a group from others, and it is constituted in relation to other people *via* webs of interlocution or communication. What sets their views slightly apart is that, while Benhabib emphasizes the fact that identity is constituted via the demands of a group in the political sphere, Villoro stresses instead that identity is constituted by "a representation where every member of this [people] can recognize himself and which integrates the multiplicity of contraposed images" (2012: 77). Consequently, while Benhabib underscores the role of identity as a tool of revindication, Villoro highlights the role of identity as a tool for integration.

Finally, consider the notion of deliberation. In an article prior to *The Claims of Culture*, Benhabib characterizes deliberation as a "procedure to be informed" (1996: 71) and maintains further that, within the deliberative model of democracy, deliberation "proceeds not only from a conflict of values but also from a conflict of

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[1] On this issue, Benhabib (2002: 7) notes: "To possess the culture means to be an insider. Not to be accultured in the appropriate way is to be an outsider."

interests in social life" (1996: 73). In contrast, Villoro characterizes deliberation somewhat differently. For him, deliberation is tantamount to argumentation to the extent that he writes: "after 'arguing' (or 'deliberating' as Aristotle said) to justify the value of an action or of a final state of affairs, the desire to realize it arises" (2007: 34-35). Subsequently, he further characterizes deliberation as the source or the origin of moral behavior to the extent that he maintains that "moral behavior implies the deliberation between opposed reasons" (2007: 214). In virtue of this, we can realize that there are certain similarities between Benhabib and Villoro's views on deliberation. Indeed, both seem to agree on the fact that deliberation is a communicative process where different reasons are presented and weighed, either in conversation with ourselves or with other people. However, there is a significant difference: while Benhabib characterizes the communicative process of deliberation as occurring within a context that is driven by a "conflict of interests in social life," Villoro characterizes this communicative process as based merely upon "the contraposition of reasons adduced by different subjects, within a given communication context" (2007: 218). This contraposition of reasons is presented in Villoro's model not in adversarial terms, but as an edifying process that, in Villoro's words, "would open for each one the possibility to see oneself and society through the eyes of others and to identify partially one's position with that of others" (2007: 184).

Considering this evidence, we can ascertain that, while Benhabib views the notions of culture, identity and deliberation in adversarial terms, since they are characterized by appealing to certain evaluative stances structured by binaries or to a conflict of interests in social life, Villoro view these notions in more conciliatory terms to the extent that they are characterized in terms of adhesion to collective ends or to a mere contraposition of reasons. Because of this, these three notions yield, in the case of Benhabib, a model that is more centered around the role of disputes or clashes. In contrast, in the case of Villoro, the notions produce a model that is more centered around the role of adhesion or integration. To appreciate this difference, let me consider in more detail the models in the next section.

3. Distinguishing Benhabib's Model of Multiculturalism from Villoro's

My goal in this section is to present in some detail the two models of democratic multiculturalism of Benhabib and Villoro to highlight their similarities, but also their differences. In terms of their similarities, both Benhabib and Villoro articulate models that make certain assumptions about the necessary conditions to engage in dialogue. In the case of Benhabib, the core assumption, which derives from the discourse ethics articulated by Habermas (1990), consists in the fact that "moral and political dialogues begin with the presumption of respect, equality and reciprocity between the participants" (2002: 11). For Villoro, the core assumption is that there

are certain minimal values or conditions that must be presupposed to be able to engage in dialogue, which "include the respect to the life, the autonomy of agents and to their equality in relation to their negotiation position" (2012: 178),.

Based on these assumptions, both Benhabib and Villoro articulate models in which the relationships between the different elements of a multicultural society are shaped through discourses *via* the articulation and the negotiation of norms of action and interaction. On this subject, Benhabib is explicit since she openly subscribes to "the view of discourses as deliberative practices that center not only on norms of action and interaction, but also on negotiating situationally shared understandings across multicultural divides" (2002: 16). Villoro maintains a similar position, holding that it is through discourses that we can establish some basic conditions which enable us, within every culture, "to measure whether its beliefs are adequate to fulfill its functions. They accordingly provide a common basis to debate between different cultures" (2012: 171). But one important difference is that, while Benhabib considers the process of discourse through an adversarial lens where the participants are viewed as antagonists or disputants, Villoro views the process of discourse through an integrationist lens in which the participants are viewed as conversational partners.

As a result, the models that Benhabib and Villoro propose are distinct in the sense that they propose rather different internal dynamics performing distinct regulative roles within democratic multicultural societies. To be specific, Benhabib's model, which she characterizes as a "dual-track" model, is characterized in my view by having an intrinsic agonistic dimension where the participants are considered as clashing with each other as the following passage reveals:

> The deliberative democratic model is a two-track one: it accepts both legal regulation and intervention through direct and indirect methods in multicultural *disputes*, and it views normative dialogue and *contestation* in the civil public sphere as essential for a multicultural democratic polity. There is *no presumption* that moral and political dialogues will produce *a normative consensus*, yet it is assumed that even when they fail to do so and we must resort to law to redraw the boundaries of coexistence, societies in which such multicultural dialogues take place in the public sphere will articulate a civic point of view and a civic perspective of 'enlarged mentality'. (Benhabib, 2002: 115. My emphasis)

As we can see, the agonistic dynamic is, for Benhabib, a key component not only in the characterization of the differences that arise in multicultural settings, which she describes in terms of *disputes*, but also in the characterization of the ways to assuage these differences given that she holds that dialogue and *contestation* are key

for a multicultural democratic polity. Moreover, the agonistic facet of her "dual-track" model is further highlighted by the fact that she clearly acknowledges that, within the model, there is no presumption that moral and political dialogues will produce a normative consensus. Thus, though social consensus remains a possibility for Benhabib, its eventual achievement does not eliminate contestation, which, as much as dialogue itself, is a central element of a multicultural democratic society.

Now, in clear contrast to Benhabib's position, the model of democratic multiculturalism propounded by Villoro underscores the importance of concurrence or consensus as the central discursive process of a multicultural democratic society, rather than dispute or contestation, by focusing on the decision-making practices of Indigenous communities in Mexico:

> The organization of autonomy [in a multicultural democratic polity] would acknowledge the political rights of peoples, limited to the communal or regional territory of their corresponding autonomy. In many Indigenous communities, decisions are taken by consensus. (2012: 125)

It is important to stress what Villoro says here does not entail that agonistic or conflictual circumstances do not occur within democratic multicultural societies. He does acknowledge the real possibility of conflict cases and, to address them, he advocates for the existence of a legal regime that establishes when conflicts exist and appoints judicial authorities that solve them when he writes: "However, regardless of how circumscribed distinct jurisdictions might be, there may always be cases of conflict. There must be, then, a law for disputes, with judicial authorities that determine when conflicts exist and how to settle them" (2012: 125). But, in clear contrast with the emphasis on dispute or contestation that we find in Benhabib's model, Villoro stresses that the core element of a democratic multicultural society should be equity, which he characterizes in terms of "equality of opportunities and consensus between all the communities and all the individuals that compose the nation" (2012: 184). Because of this, we can clearly see that the model of democratic multiculturalism that Villoro presents is more consensus-oriented than the one articulated by Benhabib. Having presented the main difference between the two models, I turn in the next section to examine the source of their difference.

4. The Differences between both Models of Democratic Multiculturalism
As I argued in the previous section, the main difference between Benhabib's "dual-track" model of Benhabib and the one presented by Villoro is that, while Benhabib's model appears to have a very prominent agonistic dimension where participants are characterized as being antagonists, Villoro's model is much more consensus-oriented, with participants being viewed as partners. Given this key difference, a

question that naturally arises is the following: why are the models distinct in this regard? In this section, I want to provide a tentative answer to this question based on the previous sections. To be specific, my contention is that Benhabib's "dual-track" model has this agonistic dimension because of how Benhabib views culture, identity, and deliberation. Indeed, given that Benhabib views group identity in terms of the demands made by the leaders of distinct groups within the public sphere and deliberation as a discursive process that is driven by a conflict of values and interests in social life, it is unsurprising that she views discourses as being mediated primarily (though not exclusively) by certain formal political and social actors and institutions such as political parties, unions, legislatures, and courts. To see the importance that these formal institutions have in Benhabib's "dual-track" model to generate the agonistic dimension that she underscores, consider the following passage:

> Very often, it is social movements that, through their *oppositional* activities on behalf of women and gay people, the disabled and the abused, expand the meaning of equal rights and render what seemed merely private concerns matters of collective concern. The deliberative democratic approach focuses on this vital interaction between the *formal institutions* of liberal democracies like the legislatures, the courts and the bureaucracy, and the *unofficial processes* of civil society as articulated through the media and social movements and associations. (Benhabib 2002: 121. My emphasis)

It is clear that the agonistic dimension of the multicultural democratic model that Benhabib proposes is based on the interaction between the formal institutions (i.e., political parties, unions, courts, legislatures, etc.) and the informal movements or processes in society. In contrast, the model of deliberative democratic multiculturalism that Villoro proposes, which is centered around convergence of opinions and consensus-building, rejects the involvement of these formal institutions given that they are perceived as hindrances or obstacles to the functioning of a multicultural democratic society. Specifically, considering that identity is a representation where every member of a group can recognize himself and that deliberation is a communicative process through which one intends not merely to articulate and weigh one's own reasons but also to understand and assess the reasons of others according to Villoro, any institutions that are perceived as distorting that representation or as blocking or altering one's access to the reasons of others are rejected. This is why, as Villoro remarks, indigenous communities "consider that the involvement of political parties breaks the unity of the group and prevents agreement" (1998: 125). Moreover, the rejection of political parties and of other formal institutions such as unions, courts and legislatures in Villoro's model is also due to the fact he subscribes to the ideal of a direct communal democracy, as

opposed to indirect or representative democracies, which are prone to devolve into factionalism or partisan politics.[2]

The impulse to sideline these formal institutions within the model Villoro proposes also arises from his study and engagement with Mexican politics. Indeed, throughout the history of Mexican politics in the 20th century, membership into state-controlled agrarian leagues or unions (e.g., the Confederación Nacional Campesina or the Confederación de Trabajadores de México) was often used as an instrument to co-opt Indigenous votes and maintain political control in exchange for state patronage. Because of this, the model of democratic multiculturalism that Villoro proposes differs from Benhabib's in virtue of the fact that it eschews the various formal institutions such as political parties, courts, unions, and legislatures that Benhabib emphasizes. And it precisely eschews these various formal institutions because Villoro understands the notions of culture, identity and deliberation in a way that is quite different from Benhabib's. Indeed, considering that Villoro views culture as a project that integrates various individuals who share some collective ends and that he considers deliberation as a process that aims to open the possibility to identify our positions partially with those of others by inviting us to see through their eyes, it is clear that the presence of the abovementioned formal institutions in his model could potentially interfere with or distort the goals of culture and deliberation in a democratic multicultural society by introducing an adversarial or antagonistic framework. After offering an account of how and why the two models of democratic multiculturalism differ in this section, I turn in the following section to argue that Villoro's model is better than Benhabib's to the extent that the assumptions that Benhabib makes entail the progressive erosion of the formal institutions that her model relies upon.

5. The Superiority of Villoro's Model of Democratic Multiculturalism

I have argued in the prior sections that the models of democratic multiculturalism articulated by Benhabib and Villoro are not only different in some of their key features (specifically, Benhabib views the relations holding between the many components of the society through an adversarial lens whereas Villoro views them through a collaborative lens), but also that this difference can be explained by the fact that Benhabib and Villoro have different understandings of the notions of culture, identity and deliberation. Because of this, Benhabib's model appeals to formal institutions such as political parties, legislatures, courts, and unions, in contrast to Villoro's. What I wish to argue now is that, because of this, Villoro's model is better than Benhabib's since the assumptions upon which Benhabib's

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[2] Villoro (2012: 125-126): "Aunque estas prácticas estén a menudo corrompidas por intereses particulares y den lugar a cacicazgos, se mantiene el ideal de una democracia comunitaria directa."

model rests entail a progressive erosion of the trust needed to maintain the very institutions that, according to her, mediate democratic deliberation in multicultural societies.

To appreciate this, it is first important to observe that, given Benhabib's view according to which deliberation is driven by a conflict of values and interests between different actors, it is not surprising that she views multicultural societies as being structured by internal conflict and tensions. In fact, when she examines the nation-building process that shaped modern European states, she points out that these European nation-states were historically developed with an internal tension or struggle at their core:

> There is a constitutive dilemma in the attempt of modern nation-states to justify the legitimacy through recourse to universality moral principles of human rights, which then get particularistically circumscribed. The tension between the universalistic scope of the principles that legitimize the social contract of the modern nation and the claim of this nation to define itself as a closed community plays out itself in the history of reforms and revolutions of the last two centuries. (Benhabib, 2002: 176)

Because of this internal tension or struggle, European nation-states have created liberal democracies that attempt to resolve this struggle by proclaiming the central role of individual liberty and moral equality vis-à-vis the law as universal principles while also promoting the creation of the formal institutions mentioned by Benhabib (i.e., political parties, legislatures, courts and unions) as vehicles for individuals to organize into groups and to make demands in the public sphere. This is because, as Benhabib herself acknowledges, "these very proclamations, articulated in the name of universal truth of nature, reason, or God, also define and delimit boundaries, create exclusions within the sovereign people as well as without" (2002: 175). Thus, part of the role of these formal institutions is to allow the contestation of boundaries and the rectification of exclusions.

But, given the adversarial lens that that Benhabib deploys in the elaboration of her model of democratic multiculturalism, the interplay between these different formal institutions very often leads to a progressive erosion of trust within a multicultural society of individuals vis-à-vis each other and of individuals vis-à-vis these formal institutions. Indeed, as several authors have pointed out, when other people around you are perceived as enemies or adversaries, trust in them tends to erode over time.[3] And, as it also has been argued, trust in other people is paramount

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[3] For an excellent discussion of how within contemporary democratic assemblies the perception of others as adversaries erodes trust in them, see Mansbridge (1980).

for a democracy to function.[4] Thus, in a model where others are perceived as adversaries or antagonists rather than as conversational partners, maintaining the levels of trust necessary for democracy to work over long periods of time is quite difficult, which is why Benhabib's model is more problematic.

In contrast, Villoro's model of democratic multiculturalism is based upon a consensus-building dynamic, seeking to understand and partially identify with other people. Thus, his model is not marked by the struggle that Benhabib stresses at the core of modern European nation-states, but rather by the efforts of communities (in Latin America and Africa) to maintain and preserve their communal structures. This explains, according to Villoro, why attempts to create liberal democracies that are based on European nation states in Africa or Latin America have usually foundered:

> Liberal democracy [in Africa or Latin America] has not been able to function, not only by the lack of interest of the population, but also because it establishes the competition and division wherein traditionally unity and collaboration in communal life have prevailed. (Villoro 2007: 120)

Thus, we can conclude that the "dual-track" model of democratic multiculturalism that Benhabib proposes is more problematic than that of Villoro given that her model involves, given the assumptions that she makes regarding about the adversarial relations between people and various formal institutions, a progressive erosion of the trust that is required for democracy to work.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that the models of democratic multiculturalism developed by Benhabib and Villoro are different in terms of their core characteristics, and I have offered an account of their differences in terms of how Benhabib and Villoro view culture, identity, and deliberation. I have also argued that Villoro's model is superior to Benhabib's to the extent that the assumptions she makes ultimately undermine the trust required by democracy to work. If what I have argued is correct, at least two lines of inquiry emerge: (i) should we dispense Benhabib's model given its shortcomings, or are there elements of it that we can integrate into Villoro's model and (ii) are the current challenges to traditional nation-states (e.g., Spain, Canada and the UK) by separatist movements in Catalonia, Scotland and Quebec further evidence that Villoro's model is better? I intend to address these questions in future work.[5]

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[4] For a discussion of this point, see Inglehart (1999) and Warren (1999).

[5] A version of this paper was presented in November 2022 at the conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Luis Villoro at the Insituto de Investigaciones Filósoficas in Mexico City. I

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