

Peter A. Redpath

*With a Diamond in His Shoe:*  
**Reflections on Jorge J. E. Gracia’s  
Quest for Self-Perfection**

Jorge J. E. Gracia was born in Cuba in 1942. At age 19, he escaped Cuba by dressing as a Catholic seminarian. He arrived in the United States with some spare belongings, \$5.00; a golden watch with a leather band; his mother’s diamond ring secured in a hole in a shoe; and virtually no knowledge of English. In 2019, 58 years later, in a nation which, prior to his arrival in North America, had no major Latino cultural presence in higher education and philosophy, Gracia rose to hold the Samuel P. Capen Chair and State University of New York at Buffalo Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Literature. In this position, he became the leading figure to institutionalize Latin American philosophy in the U.S. academy and an internationally-renowned scholar in medieval philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

I have known Jorge J. E. Gracia for close to 50 years. Mine was the first doctoral thesis he directed. In no publication of his have I ever seen him ever mention the little-known, but highly-influential, psychological/metaphysical principle of virtual, or intensive, quantity (*quanti-*

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge J. E. Gracia, *With a Diamond in My Shoe: A Philosopher’s Search for Identity in America* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2019).

*tatis virtutis*, or *intensiva* [spiritual greatness]).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, I am convinced that, more than any other, this principle underlies Gracia's incredible career. Implicitly present in Plato's teaching, and explicitly mentioned by Aristotle, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Sts. Aurelius Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, in 1997, Fran O'Rourke resurrected this principle in his brilliant, groundbreaking, work *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*. On the back cover of its next printing, Alasdair MacIntyre calls this monograph, "One of the two or three most important books on Aquinas published in the last fifty years."<sup>3</sup>

More than any other classical philosopher, Aristotle has influenced Jorge Gracia's philosophical work. Chiefly through Francisco Suárez's writings, Aquinas has, also, heavily influenced him. Despite the fact that contemporary philosophers, including most *Thomists*, are unfamiliar with this metaphysical principle, it is one of, if not, the most influential metaphysical principles in Aristotle's and Aquinas's teachings.

As O'Rourke says in reference to Aquinas, "It is only *en passant* that Aquinas makes explicit the identity between 'virtual' and 'intensive' quantity."<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, O'Rourke claims a "wealth of texts exist by Aquinas on virtual quantity," as do said texts showing "the connection between *virtus*" (virtue/spiritual greatness) "and intensity."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of this principle, see Peter A. Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics: Written Hope of Ending the Centuries-Old Separation of Science between Philosophy and Science and Science and Wisdom*, vol. 2: *An Introduction to Ragamuffin Thomism* (St. Louis, Mo.: En Route Books & Media, 2016), 3, 30–34, 45, 56, 61, 66, 70, 99–101, 104–105, 108, 112–114, 118, 127–130, 135, 140, 152, 172–173, 181–183, 189–190, 194.

<sup>3</sup> Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

About *virtual quantity*, O'Rourke states, "One is tempted to speak" of it "as a qualitative quantity."<sup>6</sup> He adds that everyday language tends to confirm existence of this causal principle: extending something internally in qualitative greatness in being perfect.<sup>7</sup>

For example, "We commonly speak of intense heat or cold, we use the language of intensity to convey depths and degrees of light and colour"; analogously, we transfer the idea of intensity to emotions like pleasure and pain, and, while inner emotional and spiritual states like love and joy might not be "susceptible to numerical qualification," they "lend themselves to being described in terms of qualitative intensity."<sup>8</sup> Hence, he says, "Running through such usage is the connotation of an increase or decrease in quantity, distinct from the dimensive aspect of a physical kind."<sup>9</sup>

To O'Rourke, such linguistic usage: 1) "signifies an escalation of inner attainment, as distinct from outward extension or expansion" and 2) "indicates a heightening or gathering of concentration rather than a loss of external dissipation or dispersion. An individual increases in respect to a particular perfection or determination not by extending outwards but through an increase of inner achievement; not by expanding its power to more and more objects, but through an enrichment of its own actuality: it *is* more."<sup>10</sup>

As I will try to show in this paper, more than anything else, this principle of virtual quantity explains the philosophical and adult-personal life of Gracia as a philosophical quest driven by a highest desire: As intensely and perfectly as possible to understand and become Jorge J. E. Gracia!

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 166 and 186–187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–187.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

## **The Crucial Role that Tradition Plays in Gracia's Quest for Personal and Philosophical Greatness**

To make more intelligible the nature of the principles Gracia has applied to perfect his personal and philosophical life, need exists for me to provide an outline of, and brief commentary on, Gracia's summary discussion of the nature of tradition as he presents this in the last three chapters of his masterful, 2005 Marquette University "Aquinas Lecture," *Old Wine in New Wine Skins: The Role of Tradition in Communication, Knowledge, and Group Identity*.<sup>11</sup>

Therein, Gracia employs the metaphor he uses in the book's title (taken from verses of Luke 5:37, Matthew 9:17, and Mark 2:22) to explain that he understands this title "to mean that the present can incorporate the past and the future can incorporate both past and present without implying radical changes in either the present or the past."<sup>12</sup>

Despite repeated claims to the contrary, Gracia maintains that, in and of itself, writing cannot establish tradition because writing depends upon interpretation, and "interpretation is a function of culture" (of the way interpreters live). Without interpreters, communication agents trained in the liberal arts-Renaissance-humanist sort of educational skill /act of linguistic translation, who understand a tradition as a social re-enactment actively engaged in repeating some human action from one generation to the next, no human activity can be established, or endure, as a tradition. Tradition, in short, is always part of a trans-generational cultural relation and re-enactment of some activity: a social, cultural relation and activity that, for a culture to become established and survive,

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<sup>11</sup> Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Old Wine in New Wine Skins: The Role of Tradition in Communication, Knowledge, and Group Identity* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–123.

must be intentionally, historically, transmitted through social-cultural, trans-generational re-enactment.<sup>13</sup>

Considered as such, while Gracia does not put what he means in these terms, tradition is an essential part of a real, oral, trans-generational, educational-genus (a public philosophy of sorts, similar to that possessed by the ancient Greek theological poets) without which a culture cannot be established, much less endure. Hence, the import of how Gracia precisely defines tradition is nothing short of enormous: Destroy a culture's symbols and you destroy its traditions and history. Destroy its traditions and history, and you destroy the culture!

For the reasons immediately given in the preceding two paragraphs, Gracia contends:

The significance of the re-enactment for the identity of the group and the awareness of it are also essential for tradition . . . Social groups . . . are tied through complex social relations that help unite them and establish their identity. Eliminate these relations and the group loses its unity as a group. This explains the significance of traditions and the importance of the awareness of such significance on the part of the members of the group.<sup>14</sup>

According to Gracia, behavioral actions, not written words, texts, are the chief cause of significance, meaning. Traditions are behavioral re-enactments that connect symbols and signs (communications media) to what they signify, communicate, mean.<sup>15</sup> Precisely considered as such, Gracia says traditional actions convey to us the meaning of signs, which we conventionally associate with the actions.<sup>16</sup> Hence:

Traditions are not semantic phenomena as are signs and symbols; they are not entities selected and organized to convey meaning. The flag is a symbol, whereas the action of saluting the flag on a

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

certain occasion is a tradition. The flag functions semantically, but the tradition does not. Rather, the tradition is the action that ties us (i.e., those who salute) with the symbol (i.e., the flag) in a certain context (e.g., such as a date that commemorates a particular occasion) and as a result with each other (i.e., the nation).<sup>17</sup>

Considered as signs we use in a specifically complex way (order), in specific contexts, words (texts) are the means through which we convey knowledge. When we socially, culturally, and historically unite these words (texts) as signs to a complex order of actions tied together in a particular context and way of living (a tradition), we give that tradition linguistic significance, meaning.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, traditions are not essentially (or first and foremost) linguistic acts. Linguistic acts are essentially (and first and foremost) traditional acts; and, as traditional acts, they are essentially social, cultural acts.<sup>19</sup>

Considered as such, language is a form of cultural life; cultural life is not a form of language. In time and nature, culture precedes, and proximately causes, language to exist. Once a language exists, and a tradition of linguistic usage is historically established, we can linguistically associate a complex order of words (textual formulas) with part of a cultural way of life (a traditional way of acting, expected behavior).<sup>20</sup>

Citing Norman Malcolm, Gracia rightly claims that only within the context of a cultural way of life, one in which we understand the cultural actions as a historical enterprise (a real cultural genus, or living tradition) do we “ask questions, carry out investigations and make judgments.”<sup>21</sup>

“I have to learn the way of life before I can understand the word,” he says. “Only someone acquainted with two ways of living (a human-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–113.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

istically, culturally-educated person!; someone who grasps a group's public philosophy, organizational psychology) can attempt to translate from one language to another, for learning a foreign language involves a perspective on one's previous worldview. Learning a language is nothing but learning a way of living (a culture's pre-professional, public philosophy [organizational psychology]: the way the parts of that cultural, organizational-whole incline to think, their organizational psychology).”<sup>22</sup>

To know the meaning of “eating” is precisely to be able to use the word appropriately in a community of English speakers. This is the force of the much discussed Wittgensteinian view that meaning is use.

In short, questions about what people mean and understand make sense only within a linguistic framework [real linguistic genus] that reflects a way of life [public philosophy/organizational psychology] and in the context of which such words are used. To take words out of that context creates an artificial situation which leads to unresolvable paradoxes . . . The reason is obvious: Outside the way of life [public philosophy/organizational psychology, the way groups incline to organize parts into wholes] within which these words are used effectively there are no criteria or rules that can be applied to them. The way of life, then, establishes the boundaries of human action and thus of speech.<sup>23</sup>

While Gracia maintains: 1) he intends his definition of *tradition* to be real, not nominal, and 2) understanding the truth about the way in which language, tradition, culture, and history essentially relate and function is not easy, this relation and function is essential to comprehend to make intelligible the nature of language and culture and Jorge Gracia's personal and professional autobiography—which comprises parts of this paper to which I will now turn my attention.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 114–116. My parenthetical addition.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 115–116. My parenthetical addition.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 90 and 123.

## **The Start of Gracia's Adult Personal and Philosophical Quest as a Refugee in America**

Even before I had read his intellectual and personal biography, I had understood that, by the term “Diamond” in his monograph’s title, Gracia chiefly meant *philosophy* understood in the ancient Greek sense of pursuit of wisdom (not a precious gem).

That this is so is evident from what Gracia says about this ring toward the start of his monograph: “It became a talisman that I always kept near as a source of strength in moments of doubts and fear. It was always there, quietly speaking to me about my past. And it is an object of beauty, something I needed after all the ugliness that the prior three years in Cuba had meant.”<sup>25</sup>

By “all the ugliness that the past three years in Cuba had meant,” he says he was referring, among other things, to: 1) the death at the age of twenty-two of his older brother Ignacio, who had been crushed and killed by a heavy weight at his family’s sugarcane plantation; 2) confiscation of his family’s plantation and wealth by the Castro regime; 3) financial and other hardships that had beset them because of loss of their prior fortune and social status; 4) and the sadness, danger, of his present situation: looking at his relatives “perched on” a pier at the entrance to Havana Harbor, trying to get a glimpse of him as his ferry departed at dusk: past the “forbidding, imposing” El Morro fortress (then serving as a prison), toward West Palm Beach, Florida—and a new, and uncertain, life awaiting him.<sup>26</sup>

“At this moment,” Gracia “remembered the diamond. With its beauty, light, and strength. Yes, this could be a light to guide me, the link between the old me and the new me. The diamond was a symbol of

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<sup>25</sup> Gracia, *With a Diamond in My Shoe*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

what I brought with me and what the revolutionary government could not take away—memories of the past, what I had learned from my family, the values that I carried with me everywhere, and a love of justice, beauty, and rationality.”<sup>27</sup>

Recalling the diamond and its *virtual quantity* (qualitative) properties (of spiritual greatness) as a symbol, Gracia describes slowly caressing the shoe where he had hidden the ring, apparently to reassure himself that he had not lost it: “Yes, it was there, and the hard consistency associated with diamonds suddenly seemed to give me strength. Yes, I would do the best I could to succeed, in spite of the many obstacles that I would surely face.”<sup>28</sup>

Gracia remarks that, before he had landed in Florida, he did so conscious he would be entering a circumstance he would never repeat, one that no traditional cultural supports could make precisely familiar to him.<sup>29</sup> His exit from Cuba had been prompted by his conviction that “we are social beings who prize and value company and fellowship,” a situation which, after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuba’s totalitarian government had made impossible, especially for economically- and socially-privileged elites, like Jorge (for whom they had coined the term “worms” [*gusanos*]).<sup>30</sup> Right then, he encountered a situation that would forever alter his life as he had traditionally, culturally, and historically known and lived it; redefine his existence, life, identity, in a radically new way: about which he knew nothing. In a sense, he was conscious of entering an entirely new, real, social, cultural, and personal genus (a whole new set of traditions) as a refugee in America:

Until that moment I had lived in my native land, but soon I would arrive at a country that would consider me a refugee, the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

lowest legal status in the country. Refugees have limited rights; they can be deported or confined to areas or camps. They are not citizens or legal immigrants; they are accepted under strict conditions. Often they are accepted but not sought. And in many cases, they are hated. Being a refugee is a temporary status granted as an act of kindness. But refugees not only feel, but are, at a disadvantage in the societies in which they live.<sup>31</sup>

Happily for him, after exiting and accompanying some seminarians from the ferry to a seminary in Miami, Gracia was able to contact a former classmate of his from the St. Thomas Military Academy in Cuba. He then traveled to a family farm belonging to his friend's parents in the countryside close to Jacksonville.

After living comfortably with this family for several weeks, Gracia decided that, to become self-reliant in his new situation, he should set out in his own. To do so, he contacted a woman named Kathleen (Karlin) in charge of a Cuban refugee center in Miami. She had been a missionary and pastor at an evangelical church in Cuba where his mother had been a parishioner. To his future good fortune, Karlin had two other qualifications that would prove quite helpful to him later; she was a: 1) Wheaton College alumna and, 2) longtime friend of its president.<sup>32</sup>

While Karlin could provide him no food, lodging, or money, not wanting to be financially dependent, Gracia was "grateful for her conditional help."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, while difficult, the time he spent in Miami, taught him "self-reliance, independence, and the value of economy and hard work," qualities that, previously, had not been expected of him as a youthful member of the Cuban upper class!<sup>34</sup>

Just how far his situation had fallen from its prior qualitative (virtual quantum) greatness most of his life in Cuba, Gracia quickly

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

realized once he secured residence in a Miami “rooming house that catered to starved-for-cash Cuban refugees.”<sup>35</sup> Often more than starved for cash, he was often starving for food. In this sense (as a virtual qualitative privation of qualitative strength), he remarks, “Hunger is a terrible thing . . . To say that feeling hungry is not a good feeling is a major understatement. It is characterized by an emptiness that weakens you. Walking streets filled with restaurants, take-out eateries, bakeries, and the scents that envelop the passerby are torture if you are hungry.”<sup>36</sup>

At such, alone and hungry, times, “I would take—as he thinks back—the ring with the diamond out and play with it in my hands. It was like having a talisman that could bring me luck. Its power and beauty mesmerized me and I remembered happy times.”<sup>37</sup>

However, Gracia was not always alone at the house. For example, one night a thief with a loaded gun had made the terrible mistake of entering it and running into its Cuban landlady Felina, a woman of “indomitable spirit, and uncompromising courage,” who, hearing the intruder, “got up from bed, yelled at him, and followed him out of the house beating him with a broom.”<sup>38</sup>

Gracia considered this kind of spiritual greatness to exemplify the character of Cuban professionals who had emigrated from Cuba during the 1960s. Since, at times, for one reason or another, they could not practice their traditional professions in America, “Physicians became employed as floor cleaners, lawyers washed dishes, dentists drove taxis, businessmen turned into bartenders or waiters, and so on with the rest of them,” including Gracia.

To have enough money to survive in Miami (until, in January 1962, his mother’s friend Karlin helped him enroll in Wheaton College

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

on a work-study program), he worked many odd jobs, including restaurant busboy, an ice cream salesman, and even gambling with other rooming house residents.

### **Wheaton College as Gracia's Gateway to, and Confrontation with, Real, Isolationistic America: Catholic Refugee in a Foreign Nation and Culture**

Until he had reached Wheaton College, Gracia says he “had not really been confronted with the real America.”<sup>39</sup> On the ferry from Cuba his thoughts had been about his life in Cuba and motives for leaving his homeland; in Miami, he says he lived in “a de facto Cuban ghetto”: “Nice and comfortable, but culturally isolated from the American mainstream.”<sup>40</sup>

While at university study in Cuba, Gracia had pursued architecture as a major. At Wheaton, Gracia chose mathematics as a major; and, because of the opportunity such a liberal arts college gives to students to sample different disciplines to determine whether they have a natural talent for this or that subject, he says, “The notion of a liberal arts education is perhaps the most important contribution of American education to world education.”<sup>41</sup>

While in his third year at Wheaton, Gracia was fortunate to move off campus and room in the home of a lady opera fan. There he expanded his liberal education through immersion in fine arts. Through her encouragement, he subscribed to the Lyric Opera of Chicago; and, periodically, traveled to the Chicago Art Institute to enjoy concerts and other cultural events.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–42.

This served him as a good break from his: 1) sixteen hours of work during the fall and spring semesters when he “swept, mopped, threw out garbage, put classroom chairs in proper order, wipe black boards, made sure there was an ample supply of crayons in class, and did all the maintenance required”; and 2) the summers when he worked daily for about twelve hours.<sup>43</sup>

Gracia remarks that, perhaps, his greatest challenge about his Wheaton experience was the cultural, American-Midwestern provincialism. While he finds American provincialism not exclusively Midwestern, he says it is “particularly true of the Midwest.”<sup>44</sup>

To help defend himself, and keep afloat, against a tide of cultural, American provincialism, at Wheaton College especially (where students and faculty knew little about essential parts of Gracia’s identity: Spanish history, culture, Catholicism), he concentrated on: 1) learning English and adapting himself to American culture; 2) at least for a short time, distancing himself from every obstacle to his becoming culturally Americanized, including from becoming part of a ghetto of other Latin American students; 3) learning to answer the key question of his identity: “What defines me?”; 4) investigating and appreciating the great achievements his native culture had produced; and 5) avoiding what he calls the two, great, counterproductive “temptations” with which exiles, immigrants, and refugees have to reckon: *nostalgia* (“wrapping the country of origin in a veil of approval, reimagining it as a golden land where one had been happy but that, for economic or political reasons, had to be abandoned”; while considering the present land where they actually live to be full of faults and “an object of resentment”) or *for-*

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

*getfulness* (forgetting all the actually good things about their native homelands).<sup>45</sup>

As a defense against: 1) the temptations of nostalgia and forgetfulness and 2) drowning from the overpowering impact of American culture, Gracia decided he needed to understand the “entire edifice of Hispanic and Latino history and culture.” Gradually adapting to becoming culturally Americanized, he first had to transform himself “from Cuban into Hispanic and Latino.”<sup>46</sup> He had to enter into a real, transitional cultural genus while moving from one national-cultural species (Cuban) into another national-cultural species (American): “Precisely the opposite of what those who succumb to the temptations of nostalgia or forgetfulness do.”<sup>47</sup>

Before he could make this transition in self-understanding from a Cuban national to an American national, Gracia had to take seriously the admonition Socrates gave to philosophers that the most fundamental, and perhaps the most difficult, task of a philosopher is self-knowledge: “to discover who we are and how we fit into the world that surrounds us. Indeed, finding a path, career, profession, or vacation . . . is one of the most significant, difficult and agonizing decisions we are expected to make in our lives.”<sup>48</sup>

Human beings always engage in conversation with ourselves and others only in relation to some, numerically-one, real genus (organizational whole) to which, as participants in the same conversation, we essentially belong. To converse intelligibly, productively, about anything, we must be chiefly talking about the numerically-one, same genus, species, or individual (and, if we are talking about a species or individual, we must be talking about some genus [organizational whole]), in more

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–52.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

or less the same way (be engaged, at least generically, in using the same human habit [your habit and mine must be, at least, generically identical]).

For example, if we converse about geometry, we have to talk about figured bodies using geometrical intellectual habits; and not talk about immigration issues using intellectual habits involving medical or political expertise. If we know nothing about that about which we are conversing, or the chief habit we are using to discuss it, we cannot belong to the same conversational genus; and our conversation cannot be, in the slightest degree, intelligible or productive!

Unhappily for Gracia at the time, the Cuban educational tradition from which he had come and his then-current one he had entered at Wheaton had not adequately prepared him to engage in this task of proper self-understanding as an American national. The Cuban educational program he had left was too narrowly focused to give students sufficient exposure to make intelligent choices about such crucial matters. There, and places with similar programs, Gracia says, are full of “disgruntled people,” imprisoned in professions they hate—“a personal tragedy of enormous proportions that affects them and their families for life,” in which “a small minority is satisfied with that choice” and the majority, undecided about who they are and what they should do,” spend their lives in miserable desperation, “trying to escape it while they find passing relief in vacations, hobbies, and often alcohol or drugs.”<sup>49</sup>

Before he could transition himself to become Jorge J. E. Gracia American national, as a wavering, or “roaming Catholic,” as he sometimes refers to himself (and someone who was not, and had no inclination ever to be, an evangelical Christian), Gracia first had to have a

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

wider and deeper understanding of himself as a refugee Spanish, “roaming Catholic” at evangelical Protestant, Christian, Wheaton College.<sup>50</sup>

According to Gracia, his entry into the genus of “roaming Catholic” had started before Wheaton (at age thirteen, during his first year at a Marist high school in Cuba). For different reasons, at the time, he reports he had considered being doctrinally religious to be rationally incoherent.

While he states that he has never been an atheist, he has certainly experienced periods in his life when he has “been an agnostic and other periods when” he has been “anti-Catholic, faithfully Catholic, and existentially Catholic. Even at times,” he continues, “when I did not consider myself Catholic, I never adhered to other faiths. I have always thought that if one is going to be religious, being Catholic makes the most sense from a theological standpoint.”<sup>51</sup>

While at Wheaton, while 1) reading Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky (authors who left a strong impression about religion on him), and 2) studying with his favorite teacher, Arthur Holmes, he says he had such an existential period. He goes so far as to state that Holmes: 1) appeared to have such an existential religious view and 2) was probably unknowingly responsible for enticing Gracia into adopting it, although Gracia admits he has “always had problems with (doctrinal) orthodoxy, of whatever kind.”<sup>52</sup>

While he maintains that: 1) “The religious tenor of Wheaton enticed students to think seriously about religion”; 2) “serious discussions were everywhere—at the cafeteria, during work, and of course in the classroom”; 3) he “never felt unwelcome at Wheaton because of” his “religious opinions”; 4) he opposed the religious tenor of Wheaton not because he was Catholic, but because he found it rationally, behavior-

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*. My parenthetical addition.

ally, incoherent with its mission “to be perceived by the community of scientists as a place of rigorous scientific research, up-to-date in the latest scientific theories.”<sup>53</sup>

Saying that he found this rational incoherence to have helped his intellectual development, he gives four examples of it: “the theory of evolution, the doctrine of the literal interpretation of the Bible, the doctrine of the inerrancy of biblical texts, and the view that races should not mix.”<sup>54</sup>

Gracia reports, “The fundamentalism of the branch of Christianity advocated at Wheaton, with its anti-rationalist bias, eventually turned me off and made me appreciative of the Catholic tradition, in which, despite some unfortunate deviations, there has generally been a profound respect for reason. That tradition pointed me toward the scholastics, particularly Thomas Aquinas.”<sup>55</sup>

Immediately, he adds, he has “never been a disciple of Aquinas or an apologist for his views.” He “became interested in him at Wheaton because if one looks at the history of Christian thought there are very few authors who reach Aquinas’s stature, his rationality, and his clear thinking.”<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Gracia admits that, as early as the fifth grade, “embracing Catholicism was not enough for” him.<sup>57</sup> He was becoming increasingly agnostic. By the time he was thirteen, partly because of clerical corruption and apparent doctrinally rational incoherence, Gracia had decided, “the Catholic Church was a sham.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–59.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

At the same time, he admits to being psychologically conflicted, saying, “But would giving up belief in Catholic doctrine that appeared to me to be nonsense require I give up all sense of spirituality? The choice was difficult because when I went to church I was often deeply moved. Procession of the Host on Holy Thursday, the singing of Thomas Aquinas’s magnificent hymn, the *Pange lingua*, together with the incense and the ritual, produced in me experiences that were deep and seemed genuine.”<sup>59</sup>

And what was he to make of all the holy people he knew, “who had selflessly devoted their lives to Christ and to the welfare of others? Were they a complete farce too, or were they just stupid?”<sup>60</sup> How could he “reject the legitimacy of St. John of the Cross’s *Spiritual Canticle* or Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*,”<sup>61</sup> or the wisdom of the Eastern sages whom he had started to read which he had deeply felt and “further complicated his situation”?<sup>62</sup>

While cracks that had begun to exist in the edifice of his religious faith continued to grow, while he no longer could precisely identify, define, the real religious genus to which he psychologically belonged, Gracia had recognized he had entered into a new, transitional (crossover) genus. “Rationally,” he “had become an agnostic.”<sup>63</sup>

He reports, “I could not believe what the Catholic Church taught. Nor could I accept the views that my mother tried to press upon me, the evangelical version of Christianity she had adopted after the tragic death of my brother at twenty-two.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–65.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Gracia adds that, from this time onward, he has always experienced a conflict between a strong sense of spirituality “always followed by periods in which agnosticism fought for supremacy.”<sup>65</sup>

He reports that, at Wheaton, he “had to take a stand,” decide what he “did and did not believe” and unite this with his “professional and personal goals.”<sup>66</sup> That is, he had to decide precisely who he was, define himself, determine the precise, psychological, religious, professional, and personal genus to which he then belonged!<sup>67</sup>

Decisively helping him along with this intellectual struggle, then, giving him “the key to” his “predicament,” were his reading of: 1) Protestant and Catholic existentialist theologians, and 2) Dostoyevsky’s book, *The Brothers Karamazov*—“a story of conflict among three different views of life and faith. The hero is Alyosha, whose approach to faith is portrayed as authentic and non-doctrinaire. He is a symbol of the Christ that is revealed in the scriptures.”<sup>68</sup>

Instead of “trying to justify the inconsistencies of Christian doctrine, whether in Protestantism or Catholicism,” Gracia decided he “should embrace the actions and rituals of a traditional living faith, for faith was not about holding onto propositions, many of which made no rational sense, but about living a life based on the Christian commandment to love everyone.”<sup>69</sup>

Gracia, then, reports, “years later,” he “used these ideas in the short book” he “wrote about tradition, *How Can We Know What God Means?*,” in which he argued “that tradition is not a matter of propositions but of actions.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

### **After Wheaton: Gracia's Implicit Quest to Become a Great Organizational Leader**

Toward the end of his opusculum about tradition to which I referred toward the start of this paper, Gracia states he wanted to “make clear that his concern” in this work had “not been focused on the psychology of tradition, that is with the way tradition functions in, and affects, the human psyche, even if some things I have said have implications for this kind of investigation.”<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, I contend that the only way precisely to understand Gracia's personal and philosophical life is to grasp this life as one of an organizational psychologist pursuing perfect self-realization in action and understanding: someone chiefly interested in intellectually grasping precisely how organizational wholes (including his own psyche): 1) become united and divided; and 2) operate when so united and divided.

That what I am saying about Gracia is true is easy to prove. All someone needs to recognize about him is that, more than anything else in his personal and philosophical life, Gracia has always wanted to be a philosopher, who had been influenced by Aquinas, in the tradition of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle: all four of whom identified philosophy with an intellectual virtue, a psychological habit, *virtus* (intensive quantity) of the human soul chiefly interested in wondering about, and finally understanding, the proximate causes of the existence, unity, and action of organizational wholes.

Each chiefly, really, not nominally, defined, understood, philosophy to be born of wonder (a habit of wondering) about the principles and causes of the behavior of composite-whole-organizations (*substances*, in the language of the medieval Scholastics). All agreed that the job of someone wise is to: 1) know and cause order;<sup>72</sup> and 2) under-

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<sup>71</sup> Gracia, *Old Wine in New Wine Skins*, 123.

<sup>72</sup> Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 144–145.

stand how the order of organizational wholes (organizationally-unified, acting things: substances and their essential properties), like language, traditions, culture affect the faculties of the human soul (human psychology) and how the organization of the operational faculties of the human soul (human psychology) affect the order of organizationally-unified, acting beings, natures, substances. In short, all were great organizational leaders who understood perfection in organizational leadership to consist in a form of organizational psychology.

While, because of his natural tendency toward humility, I do not think Gracia has ever explicitly considered his life-pursuit to be chiefly one of becoming a great organizational leader and psychologist, to some extent, starting with the identity-crisis he experienced as a refugee in America at Wheaton College and the psychological self-examination he needed, as perfectly as possible, to understand himself as a philosopher (someone wise: the psychological quality of the greatest human leaders), implicitly, Gracia had started psychologically to experience a need to become as perfect as possible as an individual human being, scholar, and teacher. No wonder, then, that he entitles the chapter in his book that caused him, at Wheaton, to turn toward pursuit of philosophy “Knowing Myself.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, therein he explicitly states that one of the proximate causes, first principles, of his decision at Wheaton to pursue philosophy had been driven by a psychological need, and experiences, he had during one literature course and his general exposure to the teaching skill of Arthur Holmes.

Regarding the first he reports that he had never before appreciated poetry as much as he did after reading of John Milton’s masterpiece, *Paradise Lost*. His “exposure to English” had already: 1) “sensitized him to the sounds of language,” and Milton’s “long poem satisfied in” him “a longing for a greater variety of sounds organized in magnifi-

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<sup>73</sup> Gracia, *With a Diamond in My Shoe*, 69.

cent verses about a thrilling hero. This was psychology at its best; the psychology of good and evil.” Gracia continues, “The epic character of Satan, who is without a doubt the tragic hero of the poem, is unequaled in the world of literature.”<sup>74</sup>

After this, he immediately refers to Sophocles’s great *Oedipus Rex*: “the tale of the magic life of a hero who paid a dear price for his inquisitiveness,” immediately adding:

I have always had a thirst for knowledge, and I found in Oedipus a kindred spirit and a warning of what could happen to me if I followed in his footsteps.

Would my own search for knowledge and meaning end in tragedy as well? And what is the role that destiny plays in our lives? After all, I had already seen how a strange combination of will and chance had affected the course of my life in unexpected ways. The course became more than just an accumulation of literary facts; it turned into an odyssey of sorts in which I was the traveler and my destiny was a mystery known only to the gods.<sup>75</sup>

A major psychological impact this course had on Gracia was to call to his attention his need to master English as a means to becoming as perfect as he could be. To solve this problem, he: 1) “took every opportunity to talk with other students”; 2) “read every printed page” he could get; and 3) made “the dictionary” his “constant and faithful companion.”<sup>76</sup> Within a short time his mastery of English became so proficient that he was able to take honors courses and seminars, and he decided to change his major from mathematics to mathematics and English literature.<sup>77</sup>

He followed this by taking another life-changing course, “in philosophy with the legendary Arthur Holmes,” whom he describes thus:

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

He was a great actor in the classroom, teaching virtuoso, and the way he presented himself and the texts that we read were enticing. More significant perhaps was that he squeezed out of texts a content that should have been obvious but that students missed. He also related authors and texts in such a way that we could see the history of human thought developing in front of our eyes. The difference between what the instructors of literature courses did and what Holmes did was enormous, and I wanted more of what he did.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to Holmes, Gracia reports that what literature teachers seem to do “is to function like bad philosophers.”<sup>79</sup> They talk about texts, but cannot communicate precisely what causes the organization of a text to be a great piece of literature that could cause a *great* psychological affect on someone.<sup>80</sup>

According to Gracia (evidently following Aristotle), “Being oblivious to the general answers to these questions has to do in part with the form a work takes. It is the form, the sounds, the vocabulary and how these are woven into a tapestry (organizational unity/whole) that make a work unique and invite an audience to think in unique ways.”<sup>81</sup>

While Gracia admits that a particular thought is part of what makes a literary work great, a literary work is not primarily great because of the particular thought it conveys. It is chiefly great because of: 1) the thought it conveys and 2) the organizational way of uniting some multitude of texts into a coherent whole in and through which a particular thought is conveyed: the literary work’s form, qualitative unity as an organizational whole.<sup>82</sup>

Realization of this fact proved to be a *Eureka!* moment in Gracia’s intellectual life: “When I took Holmes’s course I realized that,

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 73–74.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

although I would continue to be interested in the form and hermeneutics of literary texts, a major part of what interested me was, paradoxically, the thought they conveyed, and yet in order to get at the thought, one needed a philosopher, not a literary critic. And that did it: this is why I dropped mathematics from my double major and instead became a philosophy and English literature major.”<sup>83</sup>

In a sense, prior to this moment, at this fundamentalistic, Christian college, apparently, Gracia had not psychologically recognized the analogous similarity he now saw between most of the courses he had taken at Wheaton and Cuban higher education: In a way, both tended to be fundamentalistic, nominalistic! Moreover, this realization came to him mainly under the influence of a professor at an evangelical Christian college in the United States!

While “Cuba has produced some extraordinary poets and essayists,” he remarks, it has produced “very few philosophers of note. Discussion and dialogue have clearly been essential to philosophy from the very beginning of the discipline. But if one is a philosopher, what can one do in a country (or college, university) where there are so few others with whom one can engage in a discussion of ideas?”<sup>84</sup> The United States, in contrast, “had what Cuba lacked, an abundance of well-trained philosophers who addressed the main problems that had been explored in the discipline throughout the ages—and it had a well-established community devoted to it.”<sup>85</sup>

Knowingly or not, when he experienced this realization, the Cuban Jorge Gracia at an evangelical Christian college was describing the often, currently-maligned, American Great Books educational program chiefly started by Mortimer J. Adler at the University of Chicago and the Canadian, classically-oriented one initiated by the Frenchman É-

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

tienne Gilson at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (PIMS), University of Toronto: Two great universities at which he would eventually study and obtain advanced degrees, which treated philosophy chiefly as a social, historical, enterprise, not as a Cartesian form of solitary musings.

Paradoxically, a Cuban refugee coming out of a largely narrow, politically conservative educational tradition started to feel most at home and liberated as a human being and a philosopher in a tradition of philosophy and a contemporary educational movement (*Great Books*) that has often been criticized for building a canon based largely on white males and embraced by conservative political forces!<sup>86</sup>

At this moment, Gracia became explicitly sure that: 1) he wanted to become a philosopher; 2) the means he sought to become a philosopher would essentially involve study at a university that would immerse him in the historical discussion of great ideas; and 3) his “prime motivating factor” in his doing so at the time “was the (psychological) impact that learning English was having on” him: he “wanted to know more about how language works and how we communicate effectively through the medium of language.”<sup>87</sup>

Regarding his struggles with learning English and his dissatisfaction with the way literature was taught, he concludes his chapter about knowing himself with the following observation:

This was one of the reasons why I became attracted to logic and eventually Wittgenstein and other philosophers who favored a linguistic approach, including an emphasis on ordinary language. Indeed, to this day, in my philosophical writing I avoid philosophical jargon as much as possible and try to philosophize using ordinary language and ordinary examples. At Wheaton, this interest was decisive and moving me in the direction of the history of philosophy in the Middle Ages. But to get there was not easy

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<sup>86</sup> I thank Rod Nicholls for pointing out this incredible paradox to my attention.

<sup>87</sup> Gracia, *With a Diamond in My Shoe*, 74–75. My parenthetical addition.

by any means. First I had to go to graduate school, and that meant going to Chicago.<sup>88</sup>

### **Moving on to Chicago: All the Rest is History—and Philosophy!**

Aside from going to Chicago because of the Great Ideas, discussion-type education the University could provide him, Gracia did so as a means to begin study of the Middle Ages; and he desired to study the Middle Ages because he “wanted to know more about how language works and how we communicate effectively through the medium of language.”<sup>89</sup>

While such a move might sound strange to many people, it makes perfect sense considered in itself and in the way it appeared to Gracia at the time: “The Middle Ages was the period of history in the West when modern languages were formed, when the first treatises and discussions of how these fundamental concepts that relate to each other came into existence.”<sup>90</sup>

Such being the case, Gracia became convinced that, to do what he had chiefly from-then-on wanted to do (philosophy) the way the ancient Greeks had done (as a historical, cultural, enterprise [living tradition] essentially involved in the love, pursuit, of wisdom, and as more than a historian), he would have to get there by going back through the Middle Ages “to discover the origin of the philosophical concepts we use today.”<sup>91</sup>

As a fairly new refugee in America, going directly to Toronto to study was not readily available to him. Happily, he was accepted into the University of Chicago with a financial package enabling him to en-

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

ter their philosophy program in 1966. He was especially pleased by this event because a main reason he had wanted to go to Chicago, not some other American university, was the presence on the faculty there of the “the great (Richard) McKeon,” the legendary mediaevalist who had studied for a while in Toronto with the celebrated Gilson.<sup>92</sup>

As a result of many difficulties, including personal and financial, Gracia only spent a year of study at the University of Chicago, moving on to Toronto by securing Canadian residency to enable him to go there in 1966.<sup>93</sup>

Since my focus in this chapter is chiefly on: 1) the life of Gracia the philosopher and 2) explicating the principles he uses, and has used for decades as part of his mature, intellectual development as an organizational psychologist pursuing psychological greatness, in what follows, I will omit the rest of his amazing personal life story and, instead, for the rest of this paper, concentrate on some things Gracia says about philosophy’s nature considered in itself and in relation to history.

The first is that “philosophy is a vocation,” a psychological calling for which a person has to have the proper psychological disposition. “The core of that vocation is not just passing down views one from another” (like rote memorization of what texts say, report); but exchanging ideas that will serve as a corrective to ideas developed in solitude. Consider,” Gracia remarks, “how easily Descartes deviated from truth and common sense in his purposeful isolation.”<sup>94</sup>

In the tradition of Adler, Gracia clearly understands philosophy to be part of a great historical-cultural conversation, enterprise, living tradition, in which historical awareness and dialogue are essential elements. Hence, he states:

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80. My parenthetical addition.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 82–89.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. My parenthetical addition.

Dialogue is essential in our discipline, and although this kind of exchange can exist and be profitable with others, it is more fruitful between teachers and students because of the mutual devotion to one another. The bond between student and teacher is one of the strongest that humans can experience.

In part because of the strong belief that philosophy is to a great extent a discipline in which the role of students is as significant as that of the teachers, many philosophers have thought of philosophy as a vocation rather than a profession. Indeed Socrates's famous words, "Philosophy is the love of wisdom," is a calling to follow a master in the pursuit of wisdom, which in some ways is like art. Unfortunately, a lack of resources in our contemporary world in particular has forced us to act as if philosophy were a profession or a career rather than a vocation.

There is an important difference between being a philosopher and practicing philosophy as a profession, that is, entering the community of philosophers who are living by teaching philosophy for a fee, which is approximately what the sophists did in ancient Greece and which Socrates criticized so sharply.<sup>95</sup>

As Gracia recognizes further, for philosophy to take root in individuals and a culture, more is needed than simply having the ability to mentor students in philosophy and having students capable of being philosophically mentored: Existence of 1) trans-generational "leaders who can serve as examples and mentors to younger generations"; 2) "the strong commitment and the existence of leaders (like Gracia and his undergraduate mentor Holmes) who will encourage and inspire new generations of . . . philosophers to continue the practice of the discipline" (a philosophical tradition). As a cultural enterprise, philosophy needs academic leaders: intellectuals who recognize that the activity of philosophy as a cultural habit cannot exist and survive without people who call themselves *philosophers* eventually realizing that 1) their activity is an essentially historical, cultural, trans-generational tradition, re-enactment, and 2) to be as effective as they can possibly be in what

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

they do, in the well-known spirit and tradition of St. Bernard of Chartres, philosophers must stand on the shoulders of philosophical, psychological, giants!<sup>96</sup>

No wonder should exist, then, that, in the latter part of his autobiography, we find Gracia telling us that, during the 1980s, he had started “to examine critically what I had been doing all along, for until then I had a question the validity of the *enterprise* in which I was engaged and its effectiveness.”<sup>97</sup> As a result, he wrote a book entitled *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography*.<sup>98</sup>

Gracia, however, would do more than this. He would go on to master an understanding of the essential connection between history and philosophy and recognize, because philosophy’s short- and long-term survival depends upon the ability of students and teachers to work together generationally and trans-generationally, a chief reason philosophy must be done historically is essentially because (to accomplish this goal of generational and trans-generational survival) the students and their mentors involved in its practice must have, at least six essential psychological qualities enabling them effectively to co-operate, work as a trans-generational-team: wisdom, understanding, prudence, temperance, justice, courage, and love. And he would become one of, if not the, most successful student(s) that the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto ever produced; and one of the greatest Thomistic and Christian philosophers of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

In making this last remark, I realize, at least in part, I am contradicting what, over the years, Gracia has consistently said about himself and his relation to the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas: that he does

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. Italics is my addition.

<sup>98</sup> See Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991).

not consider himself to be a disciple of St. Thomas and he is no “Thomist.”<sup>99</sup> Plus, his humility would incline him to deny he is a Christian philosopher at all, and even if he were, he would certainly not be a good, or great, one.

Nonetheless, I stand firmly by this claim. Étienne Gilson, too, repeatedly asserted that he was not a disciple of Aquinas (maintaining, instead, he was a *student* of St. Thomas, and so should be his students). And, while our mutual friend John N. Deely repeatedly made the same claim about not being a Thomist, I disagree with him, too. One day, being puzzled by, and asking John about, his refusal to describe himself as a *Thomist*, he replied to me in a way that made perfect sense to me: “Because I am not good enough!”

John’s response made so much sense to me that, from then on, I refused to apply that designation to myself (restricting myself to calling myself a *student* of St. Thomas, instead of a *Thomist*), until one day I learned Aquinas had maintained that the philosopher’s genus is not the logician’s genus and that, while logicians predicate terms chiefly univocally, according to equal definitional reference (Socrates and Plato are *equally* men), philosophers predicate terms chiefly analogously (Derek Jeter [life-time batting average: .310; home runs: 260; runs batted in: 1,311] and Bob Uecker [life-time batting average: .200; home runs: 14; runs batted in: 74] were *unequally* baseball players: Jeter was a qualitatively better baseball player than was Uecker).<sup>100</sup>

In my opinion, like Deely, Gracia is a qualitatively better, more perfect, student of St. Thomas and better Christian philosopher, than are ninety-nine percent of the students of Aquinas who call themselves *Thomists* or refer to themselves as *Christian philosophers*. According to Aquinas, following Aristotle, the maximum in a real genus is “the meas-

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<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Gracia, *With a Diamond in My Shoe*, 62, 76, 149.

<sup>100</sup> Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 30–57.

ure” of everything else (other species and individuals) in the genus.<sup>101</sup> If that is true (and I am sure that Gracia would agree with me it is), then he ranks among the best of Thomists and Christian philosophers because (to put my claim in a term he often used), Gracia “instantiates” with maximum qualitative perfection the definition (generic, specific, and individual nature) of being a Thomist and Christian philosopher, one of whom his teachers Holmes and Gilson would be most proud!

The chief reason Gracia has refused to call himself a *Thomist* has nothing to do with Gracia not comprehending Aquinas’s philosophical principles and, for the most part, appropriately applying them to put wonder to rest when confronted by apparent contradictions. It is because so many people who call themselves *Thomists* tend to be fools, fundamentalistic systematic logicians, Jansenists, who incline to reduce the very complicated teachings of Aquinas to a nominalistic logic that students are taught passively, like infants or parrots, rotely to memorize. By nature and philosophical, cultural, and historical experience, Gracia recoils at becoming mis-identified as being a member of such a genus. I do, too!

For this reason, a few years ago, I started to call myself a *Ragamuffin Thomist*, a designation given to me by a student/colleague of mine (Arthur William [“Bill”] McVey). Definition: “The *outsider* from the main circles of much Thomistic philosophy. The Ragamuffin is somewhat of an academic misfit, a street-smart Thomist who does not long to wear the fine garments of the academic Thomists: a shabbily-clad, existential, metaphysical waif who wanders about looking for other ragamuffins to share in a common purpose—to develop and teach a

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 162–166.

personalist Thomism that has been largely lost since the death of St. Thomas.”<sup>102</sup>

In closing this paper to my mentor and friend (one of the greatest goods that has befallen me in this life), I give a final reason I insist calling Gracia a *Ragamuffin Thomist* and, as such, a *Christian philosopher*, is because the principles I have used in this paper to analyze his philosophical nature I have taken from the teachings of St. Thomas about philosophy’s nature as a *virtus*: virtual quantity. I leave it to the readers of this paper who have known Gracia for many years to judge whether he or I has better designated how, philosophically, most precisely to define him.



***With a Diamond in His Shoe:*  
Reflections on Jorge J. E. Gracia’s Quest for Self-Perfection**

SUMMARY

Jorge J. E. Gracia, was born in Cuba in 1942. At age 19, he escaped Cuba and arrived in the United States. In 2019, 58 years later, in a nation which, prior to his arrival in North America, had no major Latino cultural presence in higher education and philosophy, Gracia rose to hold the Samuel P. Capen Chair and State University of New York at Buffalo Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Literature. In this position, he became the leading figure to institutionalize Latin American philosophy in the U.S. academy and an internationally-renowned scholar in medieval philosophy. Jorge J. E. Gracia died in the United States on July 13, 2021.

In this paper the author shows that what properly explains the philosophical and adult-personal life of Gracia is the Thomistic principle of virtual quantity. He contends that the only way to understand Gracia’s personal and philosophical life is to grasp this life as one of an organizational psychologist pursuing perfect self-realization in action and understanding: someone chiefly interested in intellectually grasping precisely how

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<sup>102</sup> Arthur W. McVey, “Foreword,” in Peter A. Redpath, *The Moral Psychology of St. Thomas Aquinas: An Introduction to Ragamuffin Ethics* (St. Louis, Mo.: En Route Books & Media, 2017), 3.

organizational wholes (including his own psyche) become united and divided, and operate when so united and divided.

#### KEYWORDS

Jorge J. E. Gracia, philosophy, comparative literature, Thomism, virtual quantity, self-perfection, tradition, identity, Catholicism, religious faith, organizational psychology, ragamuffin Thomist.

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