





# Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

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Arleen L. F. Salles, Editor

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## FROM THE EDITOR

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**Arleen L. F. Salles**  
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Eduardo Rabossi, professor of philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina), died unexpectedly of a heart attack on November 11th, 2005, at the age of 75. He was in Cuzco, Perú, attending a conference.

Professor Rabossi was a vital member of the Argentine and Latin-American philosophical community for at least three decades, as well as an important influence on the development of analytic philosophy in Argentina, and a friend to many students he taught and mentored.

This issue of the Newsletter is partly devoted to paying tribute to Rabossi. The Newsletter includes three essays by three philosophers who were very close to him. They all testify to the energy, enthusiasm, and love for philosophy that he brought to them.

Cristina González, professor of philosophy at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, was a close collaborator of Rabossi's, sharing some teaching responsibilities and participating in Rabossi's research projects on philosophy of mind and psychology. Her opening essay provides a portrait of Rabossi as a teacher and as a colleague who instilled in others the importance of philosophical dialogue and intellectual curiosity.

Eduardo Rivera-López, professor of philosophy at the Law School of Universidad Torcuato DiTella in Buenos Aires, was a former student and friend of Rabossi's. Together they organized a number of seminars and colloquia at Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico (SADAF). In his article, Rivera-López engages in a dialogue with Rabossi's views, critically examining his account of the role that basic human needs play in creating duties to help. Rivera-López notes that understanding Rabossi's view on basic needs is important to fully comprehending his account of human rights. Contra Rabossi, Rivera-López argues that needs "cannot close the gap between facts and morality" and explores the role that philosophy as rational dialogue can play in the discussion of these issues.

Alicia Gianella is a professor of philosophy at Universidad de La Plata, who also teaches Methodology of the Social Sciences at the School of Economics (Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires). Gianella was a colleague and friend of Professor Rabossi's. In her essay, she provides an overview of Rabossi's interests in philosophy of mind and philosophy of language and a useful bibliography of his work.

On a personal note, I met Professor Rabossi in 1984 as an undergraduate at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. He was

teaching a seminar in applied philosophy, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Rabossi was an enthusiastic teacher who set high standards. I left the country after graduation, but we never lost touch. A few years ago, I approached him to discuss a project: a volume on the role of history in Latin American philosophy. Rabossi was unfailingly supportive and cooperative. He wrote an article for the anthology that Elizabeth Millán Zaibert and I later co-edited.

As a recent participant of an NEH summer institute on Latin American philosophy, I can attest to the pervasive influence of his views. On a number of occasions, when discussing issues such as whether there is a Latin American philosophy and how to understand it, the conversation turned to what Rabossi would say, and how he would respond to some of the comments and positions held by some of the participants of the Institute. Rabossi will be fondly remembered by generations of students and colleagues.

The second part of the Newsletter reproduces an interview with Dr. Mario Bunge, one of the most well-known Latin American intellectuals, conducted by Gregory Wilson. The issue concludes with two reviews. Elizabeth Greenwood has contributed her review of Benigno Trigo's *Foucault and Latin America*. Arleen L. F. Salles provides the review of *The Impact of Globalized Neoliberalism in Latin America: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Ricardo Gómez.

I would like to encourage our readers to send along papers, letters, announcements, and suggestions that might help toward creating a more diversified newsletter. We want to continue to offer issues filled with thought-provoking contributions, so please send us your work and thoughts. Articles that address recent developments in Hispanic/Latino thought and reflections on topics of interest to the philosophical community are welcome. Please submit two copies of essays. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy, send us a copy of your book. Consider volunteering a book review. All items and inquiries should be sent to Arleen L. F. Salles at Division of Humanities, College of Professional Studies, St. John's University, [arleensalles@att.net](mailto:arleensalles@att.net).

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## REPORT FROM THE CHAIR: 2005-2006

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**Susana Nuccetelli**

University of Texas–Pan American

In the academic year 2005-2006, the Committee on Hispanics continued to focus on promoting Latin American philosophy in the North American philosophical community and raising the profile of Hispanics in the profession. I am pleased to report that it also played an important part in planning for an NEH-funded Summer Institute on Latin American philosophy that brought together twenty-five nationally selected college and university professors at the State University of New York at Buffalo in June 2005. In helping to organize this event, the committee's aim was to make a long-lasting contribution to the field so that Latin American thought, broadly construed, would become available to those interested in incorporating it into their own college's philosophy curriculum. The Institute is sure to have an enduring legacy in the development of the discipline in the USA. Its fruitfulness is already evident in two other NEH-funded projects that are taking place this year. One, a series of workshops on "Humanities Perspectives on Latin American Philosophy," of which I am director, with Gary Seay as co-director, is being held at the University of Texas–Pan American. Another, a Summer Seminar on Latin American philosophy directed by Jorge Gracia, is being offered this summer at SUNY–Buffalo. We are hopeful that these programs will in turn encourage further conferences and seminars with the aim of serving our long-term goals: to establish Latino/a philosophers in the profession and to promote Latin American thought as a legitimate area of philosophy.

I would also like to congratulate Professor Gregory Pappas of Texas A & M University, who in December 2005 was named winner of the annual APA Prize for Best Essay in Latin American Thought. And I must thank members and friends of the committee for their hard work in helping to organize sessions offered at the three APA Divisional meetings. At the Central Division meeting, our session took up the topic of ethnic-group identity, demonstrating our commitment to bringing a variety of perspectives to philosophical discussion of controversial subjects. At the Eastern Division meeting, we sponsored a special session in which participants of our NEH Summer Institute spoke about their experiences there. Others in this session contributed insights on the experiences of Latino/a graduate students in philosophy in the United States. In this way, some perspectives less often heard at APA meetings were given a forum. I believe that the philosophical community at large stands to benefit greatly from programs of this sort. The upshot, of course, is that we are now vigorously enlarging our reach and bringing more voices into the discussion of issues important not only to Hispanic thinkers but to academic life in the United States.

I look forward to continuing to serve the APA in organizing worthwhile programs like these. I would, of course, welcome suggestions for panels, special sessions, and other events that the committee might sponsor at future Divisional meetings.

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## ARTICLES

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### *Eduardo Rabossi. A Personal Memory*

**María Cristina González**

Universidad de Buenos Aires

I met Eduardo Rabossi when I was a student at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in the mid-1960s. He had just come back from the United States where he received a Master of Arts degree at Duke University. We were both attending a seminar directed by the philosopher Gregorio Klimovsky. Those meetings were my first forays into philosophy of logic and language and, in general, into analytic philosophy.

I remember only a few specific topics discussed in those meetings; I cannot recall specific conclusions. Yet, I can easily evoke the keen, meticulous, and occasionally heated discussions about diverse theses and arguments. Most participants showed their analytical skills, rebuilding the arguments, asking sharp questions, and making insightful comments. The views and works of Russell, Quine, Strawson, and many other philosophers were carefully surveyed and rigorously examined. Each lecture was a treat, partly because of the enthusiasm everybody displayed.

Rabossi was a rigorous, insightful, accurate, and enthusiastic thinker; and he fostered these qualities in a large number of undergraduates, graduates, young researchers, and grant holders.

One of Rabossi's goals in classes and seminars, which I attended first as a student and later on as a colleague, was to settle the real philosophical discussion. In 1971, after his stay in Oxford, he was invited to give a lecture at the Buenos Aires Science Studies Center. On that occasion, he read a paper entitled *La filosofía analítica y la actividad filosófica*,<sup>1</sup> in which he presented his idea of "analytic philosophy." He argued that it is possible to identify four traits which (in his words) "deserve special attention: I - the tendency to make a more or less close connection between philosophy and language, II - the adoption of a careful attitude toward metaphysics, III - a positive attitude toward scientific knowledge, and IV - the overt or covert recognition that analysis is a necessary condition for philosophizing."<sup>2</sup>

According to him, these traits belong to the "family resemblance" (literally) of a very heterogeneous group of philosophers and can be found in classical philosophy as well. Yet, the originality of analytic philosophy lies in the shape that these features take when used as analytical tools in philosophical research. The novelty lies in how analytical philosophers highlight or emphasize one or some of them. Taking as a starting point this broad notion of analytic philosophy, Rabossi used analytical tools to examine the views of contemporary philosophers (Wittgenstein, Russell, Strawson, Davidson) and also classical authors (Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Stuart Mill).

Not only that, Rabossi analyzed the teaching of philosophy. He identified three different models of teaching and learning philosophy in our universities environment<sup>3</sup>: the dogmatic, the eclectic, and the critical model. He defended the feasibility of the critical model. He used this model not only in classes but also in the meetings of his research teams. In this sense, his way of doing philosophy became paradigmatic for those of us who shared his view about philosophy and how to practice it.

His public performances in the governmental field are well known. He was an active member of CONADEP (Comisión Nacional de Desaparición de Personas) and sub-secretary of Human Rights from 1985 to 1989, but his activities as the chair of the Philosophy Department and the Institute of Philosophy (School of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad de Buenos Aires) through the same period are not sufficiently acknowledged. He was convinced that it was necessary to organize, develop, and strengthen all the institutions involved in educating and spreading philosophical practices. But such organization had to take as a starting point the pluralist framework that the critical model of teaching and learning philosophy makes possible. After all, he believed that at present it is in the universities where the profession of philosopher is validated. For Rabossi, philosophical activity could flourish exclusively inside institutions that offer the conditions appropriate for dialogue for, according to him, philosophy is dialogical. In 1972, together with other Argentine philosophers, Rabossi founded the Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico (SADAF), and he also chaired and became part of the executive committee of the organization. Furthermore, since 1981, he was editor-in-chief of *Análisis Filosófico*, official organ of SADAF, and one of the most important philosophical journals in Latin America.

I can recall several memorable and occasionally endless Saturday meetings that took place in SADAF, where members and invited philosophers alike were given the opportunity to discuss their work in progress. In addition to this, during the tragic period of military dictatorship, Rabossi created courses for a Master in Philosophy Degree in SADAF (1981-1982). His objective was to promote philosophical education for young students. Thus, while the national universities were closed to any possibility of a serious, committed, and critical education, SADAF became one of the institutions belonging to the “catacombs culture” (Santiago Kovadloff dixit) that promoted critical thinking and questioning.

Rabossi's concerns for philosophical institutions went beyond local boundaries. He was one of the Argentine philosophers who promoted the foundation of the Asociación Filosófica Argentina (AFRA) as a pluralistic environment for Argentine philosophers, independent from dogmas or factions. But he was also involved in promoting philosophy in Latin America, chairing and being an active member of the executive committee of Sociedad Interamericana de Filosofía (SIF). In all cases, he contributed by organizing conferences, colloquia, and similar events for philosophical dialogue.

This short memory has tried to portray Rabossi as a committed philosopher. I am sure that it does not do him justice. However, there is something else that I will just mention. In addition to his professionalism and love for philosophy, there was a human side to Eduardo that cannot be disregarded. He was a very perceptive and attentive person, attuned to the needs of others and always ready to listen and provide his support. These traits contributed to his being a loyal, generous, and noble friend to my family and me for almost forty years.

#### Endnotes

1. Rabossi, Eduardo A. “La filosofía analítica y la actividad filosófica,” *Cuadernos del Instituto de Lógica y Filosofía de las Ciencias* n° 5, La Plata, FAHCE, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 1972.
2. *Op. cit.*, 7-8
3. Rabossi, Eduardo A. “Enseñar filosofía y aprender a filosofar: nuevas reflexiones.” In *La filosofía y el filosofar: Problemas de su enseñanza*, edited by Obiol, G. A. and Rabossi, E. (Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de Americana Latina, 1993).

## *Rabossi on Human Needs and Ethical Naturalism*

Eduardo Rivera-López  
Universidad Torcuato DiTella

Eduardo Rabossi's importance for analytical philosophy in Argentina has been enormous. Rabossi's philosophical interest has been wide and diverse. He has done research and published on metaethics, political philosophy, philosophy of law, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, philosophy of language, and metaphysical problems. My focus here is his practical philosophy (ethics and political philosophy). In this area, he has contributed with excellent translations of many of the fundamental contemporary analytical moral philosophers: Moore (*Principia Ethica*), Stevenson (*Ethics and Language*), Hare (*The Language of Morals*), Harman (*The Nature of Morality*), and Austin (*How to Do Things with Words*). Moreover, he has written illuminating articles and books on moral relativism, naturalism, the naturalistic fallacy, basic needs, the justification of punishment, and, of course, human rights. All these topics were largely ignored in Argentina in the sixties and early seventies.

But this is not all. Rabossi has taught us to understand philosophy as a form of rational dialogue and discussion. Therefore, the best way to pay tribute to him is by rationally discussing his views and arguments. In this article, I focus on his account about ethics and human needs. This issue is especially worth discussing because it is at the basis of his naturalistic account of human rights, which is acknowledged as one of his most original philosophical contributions.<sup>1</sup>

### I

Rabossi did not try to build a unified ethical theory. He did not develop a comprehensive work intended to solve all problems of morality. Probably he thought (and rightly so) that there cannot be such a thing. His contributions to ethics are therefore fragmentary and programmatic. Nevertheless, in his articles we discover some basic concerns, which taken together may outline a coherent and unified program of a naturalistic, ethical theory.

The main features of this program are the following:

1. The rejection of arguments against metaethical naturalism, specifically, against Moore's famous “naturalistic fallacy” argument.
2. The development of a theory of morality as a social and contingent fact, understood primarily as a social instrument designed to overcome (in Rawls's terms) the circumstances of justice, that is, facts about human nature and its circumstances.
3. The idea that among the facts of human nature relevant to morality human needs play an especially important role. Propositions about basic needs are factual propositions (true or false) but, at the same time, have normative force. They can act as a bridge between the normative and the factual. They can even provide a useful criterion for the individualization of human rights.
4. The claim that the eminently empirical or social character of morality does not necessarily lead to ethical relativism, or at least not to ethical skepticism.

These are interesting theses that raise a number of issues. Here, I concentrate on only some aspects of theses 1 and 3. Concerning 1, the “naturalistic fallacy” issue, I argue, contra

Rabossi and the ethical naturalists, that the core, if not the form, of the Moorean argument is sound, and that this is the case even if we take into account more recent developments in metaethics. Regarding thesis 3, the role of basic needs in moral theory, I reject Rabossi's view that needs can work as a linkage between facts and morality. All this will enable me to suggest a view about progress in moral theory that, I hope, is consistent with some other ideas of Rabossi, not just about ethics but about philosophy as rational dialogue in general.

## II.

Rabossi's strategy against Moore's position in *Principia Ethica* is to claim that accusing naturalists of committing a "fallacy" is misleading and a case of *petitio*: Moore assumes what he is trying to prove. Rabossi follows here, with some variations, a classical article by William Frankena.<sup>2</sup> In brief, the structure of the dispute is the following

Let us focus first on Moore's argument. According to him, naturalists confuse a simple non-natural property, "good," with other natural properties, like "pleasant," "desired," etc. They believe there is one property with two names, when in fact there are two different properties. This mistaken identification leads naturalists to try to define "good" in terms of some natural properties. But in doing that, naturalists are committing a fallacy: the naturalistic fallacy.

Frankena and Rabossi respond the following: To call this move a fallacy is essentially misleading. The disagreement between intuitionists and naturalists is not a logical but a substantive one. Intuitionists say naturalists are blind because they do not see certain properties as different from natural properties, thus confusing them. But, by the same token, naturalists could accuse intuitionists of moral hallucination: of seeing moral properties where there are not. The dispute cannot be settled by saying that one of them commits a fallacy, since whether there are certain kinds of properties in the world or not is a substantive or ontological matter, not a logical one. In Rabossi's words:

The naturalistic fallacy would consist in postulating the identity of two properties, which are numerically and categorically different, and this postulation would imply a serious mistake, since 'pleasure and goodness are, in fact, different properties'. The force of this argument is weakened when we remember that this last point is one of the central issues that naturalists and non-naturalists need to clarify. It is not admissible, then, to use it as the basis for the refutation of one of the positions in conflict.<sup>3</sup>

It is certainly true that the term "fallacy" is not the best one to refer to the alleged mistake of the naturalists. To say that defining "good" in naturalistic terms is wrong because it is a fallacy certainly assumes what one tries to prove. But beyond the inadequacy of the term, I believe that this anti-Moore argument would be sound only if Moore had offered no argument to justify his position, if he had only said that defining "good" is wrong because "good" is a simple non-natural property. But he did offer arguments to support this premise. One of them is the famous "open question argument."

The open question argument (which I will not go into here) is not a logical argument. It seeks only to test our semantic intuitions. It is also, in my opinion, a non-conclusive argument: it does not prove that naturalism is wrong. It only shows that the naturalist has the burden of proving that there is some conceptual analysis of the property "good" in terms of natural properties. Each naturalistic attempt to provide such analysis will be subject to the open question test. Insofar as the test shows that the analysis does not exhaust the meaning

of "good," we will be justified in presuming that "good" is, in fact, irreducible.

In the last twenty years there have been many naturalistic attempts. Some of them are definitional: they look for a definition of "good," that is, an analytic statement of identity (identity of meaning). One of the more sophisticated attempts follows Ramsey's and Lewis's method of defining theoretical terms in epistemology.<sup>4</sup> Others try to find, instead, an a posteriori statement of identity, like the famous "water = H<sub>2</sub>O."<sup>5</sup>

I cannot enter into the details of these views here,<sup>6</sup> but I would like to stress a crucial point. All these attempts try to apply to metaethics methods from other fields of philosophy, especially epistemology and philosophy of mind. Naturalism is considered a cross-field theory. But, in my opinion, we should be careful in doing so. There is at least one important disanalogy between naturalism in metaethics and naturalism in, say, philosophy of mind. In philosophy of mind, naturalism has an ontological goal: it tries to show that some entities or properties (like beliefs, desires, mental representations, etc.) have no separate existence and are reducible to physical entities or properties.

In contrast, the main motivation of metaethical naturalism is not ontological but justificatory. For example, Mill's concern, in his famous naturalistic passage of *Utilitarianism*, is not ontological. He is not trying to show us that a discernible property "desirable" does not exist as different as the property "desired." He is trying to convince us that the desirable is the desired and not other possible things. In other words, he is trying to justify his substantive claim that something is morally good (or desirable) if (and only if) it is factually desired. So, even if authors like Michael Smith or Frank Jackson were successful in their naturalistic attempts, the outcome would be of no metaethical interest. They would have reduced the set of moral conviction of the so-called "folk morality" to a set of naturalistic statements, but they would have given absolutely no reason to believe in such moral convictions. And this is the central point of metaethical naturalism, as the case of Mill clearly shows. Smith and Jackson do exactly the opposite: they try to justify folk morality in some independent (and usually quite weak) way and only then they proceed to reduce it. That is why they speak about a "mature folk morality" or about "moral platitudes."<sup>7</sup>

## III.

There have been other naturalistic approaches in the last twenty or thirty years, which are more interesting precisely because they have some justificatory ambitions. Some even look for a natural objective basis for morality. Rabossi explored one of these approaches in a few articles. I will discuss Rabossi's approach somewhat more deeply.

In brief, the idea is the following

- Some human characteristics and circumstances are very relevant to human social interaction and shape some basic human interests (for example, the interest of survival). These facts were described by Hume and, more recently, by Hart and Rawls. Among them we find vulnerability, approximate equality in physical and mental powers, limited altruism, and moderate scarcity of resources.
- Some of these facts also have normative force. One of them is the fact that human beings have basic needs.
- Statements about basic needs are both factual and normative. They are true or false, but, at the same time, when true, they give us a moral reason for action.
- Therefore, the concept of basic need can function as a linkage between the normative and the factual

and, in this sense (in Rabossi's words): "explain how moral behavior is founded and justified on the basis of natural facts."<sup>8</sup>

This approach, unlike those mentioned above, does have a justificatory aim. Basic needs are objective and, as Rabossi states, "for a substantial set of statements of needs, there is a peculiar and noncontingent relationship between each member of the set and a correlative statement saying that what is needed ought to be produced or realized."<sup>9</sup>

When we speak about statement of needs in this context, we refer to what Rabossi calls "vital needs" and "basic needs." A relevant statement of needs would be "I need water to live," but not "I need a dictionary to write this paper."

Some of the aspects of the basic-need approach worthy of discussion are the distinction between basic and non-basic needs and the list of basic needs. These are probably Rabossi's main concerns. However, I will focus only on the question of the extent to which the notion of basic needs can serve a naturalistic project. Contrary to Rabossi's idea, I believe the project fails, except in a secondary and rather rhetorical way.

The thesis that the concept of basic needs can help to close the gap between facts and norms, at least in Rabossi's version, oscillates between two possible understandings. As often happens in philosophy, one is strong and interesting but, unfortunately, wrong, and the other is true, but weak and relatively trivial.

The strong thesis claims that the factual and normative elements of the concept of basic needs are, in some sense, two sides of the same coin. When I say that X is undernourished and, therefore, needs food, I am, in virtue of the very meaning of "needing food," saying that X has a claim on us to receive food. Or, alternatively, that someone has a duty to provide X with food. Or, at least, that there is a *prima facie* moral reason to provide X with food. In Rabossi's words: "If it is true that S needs shelter, then S has a *prima facie* reason to have it or to claim it."<sup>10</sup> This, to be sure, is plausible in our ordinary language: having an unfulfilled basic need seems to be a sufficient reason for generating a *prima facie* duty to help in others.

But is having an unfulfilled basic need really a sufficient reason for creating this kind of duty in others? It depends. If we inject into the meaning of "unfulfilled basic need" the idea that it should be fulfilled, the answer is positive. In this sense, the basic-needs approach is similar to those approaches that seek the bridge between the factual and normative in some "thick moral concepts" like courage, pride, or promise. I am not going to revive a forty-years-old discussion, but it is quite clear that, as Hare has pointed out,<sup>11</sup> the issue is not whether we can distinguish between normative and factual terms but between normative and factual meanings, which can be included in the same term or not.

In the case of basic needs, the distinction between the descriptive or natural element and the prescriptive element is clear and accepted by Rabossi. We can partially "reduce" basic-need statements to what Rabossi calls "functional needs" (like "I need a dictionary in order to write this paper"). For example, we can say that X needs food in order to survive. This statement is completely descriptive. All we are saying is that X will die if she does not receive food. Of course, we have a normative stance toward her survival. We positively value that X live and that she have a non-degrading life. Therefore, we conclude that we have a *prima facie* duty to produce this valuable state. But our moral attitude toward X's survival or quality of life is completely independent of her actual situation. It in no way arises from the fact that she is starving, nor from the general fact that people need food to survive.

As I have said, Rabossi accepts the distinction between the technical meaning of need (P is necessary for Q) and the normative underlying element (we value Q). He states:

There is nothing wrong with the existence of a norm or standard to evaluate 'F' ['F' is the goal; in my example, X's survival]...There is no reason to think that...vital and basic needs are not similar to functional needs. Concerning the evaluative decisions toward F (especially those presupposed when speaking of vital or basic needs), they are all but arbitrary. It seems to be contradictory to think that human nature and human beings do not seek a non-degrading existence and self-realization.<sup>12</sup>

I agree with Rabossi in that the values of a non-degrading life and of self-realization are not arbitrary. But note that, at this point, he is no longer defending what I have called the strong thesis. He is not saying that having an unfulfilled basic need is sufficient to create a *prima facie* reason to satisfy it. He is saying that the normative evaluation of the goal is not arbitrary because not to seek those goals seems contradictory. But contradictory to what? What does the term "contradictory" mean in this case? An adequate answer to this question is crucial to Rabossi's enterprise.

A first possibility would be that not to seek the goals of a non-degrading life and of self-realization is contradictory to human nature. But that is not possible within the framework of Rabossi's theory. Rabossi does not understand "human nature" in a metaphysical way. In an empirical understanding of "human nature," it cannot be contradictory not to seek some goal whatsoever.

"Contradictory" could perhaps mean that, just as other animal species seek survival and reproduction, human beings seek a non-degrading life and self-realization. These features would be, so to speak, empirically intrinsic to our species. Not to seek those goals would be not exactly contradictory but surely strange. Suppose that it were so. So what? Why should this fact create a reason for me to promote non-degradation or self-realization in others? A possible answer could be that human beings are intrinsically concerned with promoting these goals in others (through identification mechanisms, for example). Maybe this is also true. But there are many other features that may be intrinsic to human beings and yet do not serve as the basis for justifying norms or moral attitudes. Take, for example, human beings' tendencies to kill their enemies or to be selfish in many circumstances. We need a criterion to discriminate between those features relevant to morality and those that are not relevant or even opposite to morality. We need a criterion that enables us to justifiably say that helping people in need is better than killing enemies, even if both tendencies are, from the empirical perspective, equally intrinsic to our nature. And this can only be an evaluative criterion.

What Rabossi probably meant by "contradictory" is that basic needs are very relevant to the justification of some norms, obligations, and moral reasons. That would be the weak thesis and it is hardly controversial. Nobody would say that facts are irrelevant to moral evaluations or moral reasons. But they are not sufficient to provide us with moral reasons.

Maybe the appeal of the basic-need approach lies in that it helps us to focus on some moral "platitudes," that is, moral statements that nobody could reasonably reject: for example, that a minimum of autonomy or dignity is morally valuable and, therefore, everybody has a right to it. But this moral claim cannot be founded on the fact that we need certain things (like water or food) to achieve this minimum.

## Conclusion

Although the concept of basic needs (or the statements of basic needs) is at the same time factual and normative, we can easily separate both elements with a simple semantic analysis. This very feature of statements about basic needs explains its strong rhetorical force: we are speaking about true facts (someone is starving, someone is in need) that also create some moral demand of us. But we, as philosophers, should be skeptical about rhetoric.

The discourse of basic needs cannot close the gap between facts and morality, but, as I suggested above, it can help us to see the reasonability of holding some basic values and having some duties. It can help us to be aware of some basic normative agreements among us. And this is extremely important. To explain why, I would like to close by quoting some of Rabossi's ideas about rational dialogue. As Rabossi rightly points out, in a rational (or critical) dialogue, "the arguments must include premises accepted or presupposed by the participants."<sup>13</sup> This means that no discussion can progress if the participants do not share at least some beliefs. If the basic-needs approach helps us to focus on some shared moral platitudes, then it can, at the same time, contribute to a rational moral discussion and, therefore, to moral progress.

## Endnotes

1. See Rabossi, 1990. His view on human rights has been adopted, for example, by Richard Rorty in 1993, pp. 115-16.
2. Frankena, 1939.
3. Rabossi, 1979, p. 93.
4. Jackson, 1998.
5. Railton, esp. pp. 157-58.
6. For an application of the open question argument to these new approaches, see Horgan/Timmons, 1992.
7. See Jackson's concept of "mature folk morality" in Jackson, 1998, pp. 131-34, and Smith's concept of "platitudes surrounding our moral concepts" in Smith, 1994, pp. 39-41.
8. Rabossi, 1983b, p. 219.
9. Rabossi, 1983a, p. 49.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Hare, 1972, p. 241.
12. Rabossi, 1983a, p. 48.
13. Rabossi, 2002, p. 359. Rabossi calls this condition "Co-acceptation cannon."

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## Eduardo Rabossi: Professor and Researcher

Alicia E. Gianella\*

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Eduardo Rabossi had multiple philosophical interests, as well as great analytic and critical acumen. Such skills enabled him to carry out valuable individual work and were also instrumental in leading those around him, disciples and colleagues alike, to philosophical reflection. Through long years of participation in Argentine and Iberoamerican philosophy institutions, until his passing, his natural ability for dialogue, respectful listening, and communication skills made the task look easy.

He was in charge of administrative and directorial roles for many years in several institutions, most notably the presidency of the Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico (SADAF), an institution that Rabossi founded together with a small group of philosophers. With the return of democracy to Argentina in 1983, he was made chair of the philosophy department at the Universidad de Buenos Aires's Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Rabossi was also dissertation advisor of numerous Ph.D. candidates and directed research projects in a variety of institutions. I had the luck and the privilege of being part of some of those projects, and I can attest to his great skill for the leading and promotion of philosophical activity.

He participated in the founding and development of the Asociación Filosófica Argentina (AFRA) and was also its president during the initial stages. He also presided at one time over the Interamerican Society of Philosophy and was a member of its Executive Committee. In addition to his constant effort for the local development of philosophy, Rabossi cultivated relationships with renowned philosophers from all over the world. Many of them, for example, A. Bilgrami, F. Broncano, N. Block, A. Coffa, D. Davidson, M. Fridman, J. Kim, M. Platt, J. Searle, E. Sosa, and J. Toribio, among others, came to Buenos Aires at Rabossi's invitation, or because of his work. He also participated in and organized numerous philosophy meetings, both in Argentina and abroad. He was an important Argentine and Latinoamerican referent for the international philosophical community, and he kept close ties with the Sociedad Española de Filosofía (SEFA). Rabossi also held visiting scholar positions in England, Italy, Australia, the United States, Germany, and Mexico.

## His Contribution to Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language

I will first review Rabossi's contribution to philosophy of mind, one of his main teaching and research interests. He focused on this subject during the last twenty years of his life, and he often integrated it with philosophy of psychology.

Like many other philosophers, he arrived at these topics through philosophy of language, another key philosophical issue he investigated that I will dwell upon later. Rabossi was also interested in ethics and human rights, as well as in metaphysical problems concerning the place of philosophy and its relationship to science, philosophy's historical development as a discipline and its professional and academic institutionalization, and teaching philosophy.

He taught numerous undergraduate and graduate seminars on philosophy of mind at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and

at many other national universities. He coordinated seminars on the subject at SADAF—most notably what was known as the “Tuesday Group,” which went on for more than ten years and until his passing. He mentored an outstanding group of young researchers, currently working at various local and international academic institutions. He was also the advisor for several of his students’ doctorate theses on the topic.

In his long and fruitful philosophy career, these are the main themes in philosophy of mind that Rabossi worked on:

I. He discussed virtually all of the issues revolving around the mind-body problem in numerous projects sponsored by the University of Buenos Aires, the Agencia Nacional de Investigaciones, as well as in his seminars, book chapters, and articles. He analyzed the different versions of dualism, the theory of psycho-physic identity in “La tesis de la identidad mente-cuerpo” (1995b), and functionalism. He considered the problems of reductionism in general, and particularly on the topic mind-body and mind-brain in its different variations: ontological, conceptual, theoretical, and explicative. Even if he rejected dualism and was in favor of monism, he did not fail to recognize the shortcomings of both positions. As the good philosopher he was, Rabossi focused his interest in the proposed justifications.

He analyzed various theories on the nature of the mental, covering such different positions as those of Ryle—he translated the important and influential volume *The Concept of Mind*—Quine, Wittgenstein, Fodor, and Kim, as well as the more recent takes on the subject by Dennett and Clark. Davidson’s anomalous monism also became the object of Rabossi’s critical study.

Rabossi questioned the legitimacy of what is known as “the problem of consciousness” and the so-called “problem of the qualia.” He considered those “problems” to be the fruit of conceptual confusion and of an aprioristic methodology.

In his articles and seminars, Rabossi considered topics such as mental causation, physicalism, supervenience, and multiple realizability. He was particularly interested in the arguments in favor of this last thesis. Rabossi’s interest in Wittgenstein’s thought led him to conduct excellent seminars on the topic, analyzing its various periods, the affinities and differences between those periods, and Wittgenstein’s peculiar conception of mind and of language.

In his seminars, he also analyzed Brentano’s intentionality and its legacy for contemporary philosophy, and the various positions of psychologism in philosophy, criticizing some and agreeing with those akin to naturalism.

II) One of Rabossi’s constant interests was folk psychology. He examined the topic in several articles such as “Por qué el sentido común importa a la filosofía” (1979) and “La filosofía de sentido común y la teoría de la teoría. Algunas reflexiones críticas” (2000). Rabossi discussed the controversies on the explanations given by the Theory of Theory (TT) and Theory of Simulation (TS). He supported the existence of a nucleus of irremovable basic convictions, against the revisable and disposable character that would follow from the thesis that folk psychology is a theory. He also stressed the role of certain practices over the role played by (or attributed to) theory.

Rabossi examined the heterogeneous composition of the mental components of folk psychology, as well as the advantages and problems introduced by the Theory of Simulation. Finally, in a naturalized frame, he reflected on the contribution of developmental psychology and evolutionism to the discussion. Rabossi supported the thesis of incorporating relative consideration to the various folk areas, such as folk physics and folk biology.

III) Another of Rabossi’s interests was the birth and development of cognitive science, and the role of philosophy in a complex system of contributions featuring disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience. He teamed up with cognitive psychologists and interacted with neuroscientists, discussing issues such as the role of language in thought and the role of concepts. He considered the debate on the role of representation and metarepresentation.

Rabossi also analyzed the Artificial Intelligence (AI) hard program and the explicative advantages of connectionism. He also stressed the importance of taking emotions and the role of the body into consideration. This is something that the Cognitive Sciences were initially reluctant to do.

IV) Throughout his career, Rabossi showed an interest in the notion of rationality and the debate around its various forms and modes, as well as in irrationality and the problem posed by the explanation of phenomena such as wishful thinking, self-deception, and akrasia, for instance in his 1984 article “Video migliore proboque: pero...Notas sobre el problema de la incontinenencia.” Besides being about phenomena that are interesting per se, these topics are also interesting because they put general theories on mind structure to the test.

Rabossi supported a naturalized position for philosophy, which he conceived as a field of common work, a science-philosophy continuity, the compatibility between philosophy and science, and the existence of interfaces between both domains.

In “Filosofía de la Mente y Filosofía de la Psicología. La agenda, la práctica, el dominio,” from 2002, he favors a metaphilosophical naturalism, opposed to a canonical conception—in philosophy in general, and philosophy of mind in particular—that is characteristically aprioristic and based on conceptual elucidation. Against this traditional approach to philosophy of mind, Rabossi preferred to align himself with the “second” Wittgenstein, and with Dennett’s naturalism.

His metaphilosophical naturalism led him to interact with scientists of the mind: psychologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and linguists. He was invited to attend numerous meetings with professionals and scholars from these disciplines. This interaction eventually led to some of his published work, such as “La mente, el cuerpo y la concepción freudiana de lo psíquico” in 1982 and “Psicólogos, filósofos e interfaces” in 2003.

As mentioned before, Eduardo Rabossi developed an interest in philosophy of mind and psychology from issues pertaining to philosophy of language, a discipline that he enthusiastically taught and researched for many years. We will now briefly summarize his contribution to this field. Rabossi was a full-time professor of philosophy of language in the philosophy department of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. He led an important group of disciples in the discipline, and for many years he conducted a seminar on Philosophy of Language at the Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico. He also taught courses on the discipline in other Argentine and Latinoamerican universities. He was mainly interested in the pragmatic line; speech acts doctrine was one of his preferred topics. Together with Genaro Carrió, he translated into Spanish and wrote a preface for J. L. Austin’s *How to do Things with Words*, one of the most influential works in this line of thought. In 1972 Rabossi published in *Crítica* an article on “Locuciones e ilocuciones: Searle y Austin,” in 1979 published *Teoría del significado y actos lingüísticos* for the University of Carabobo (Venezuela), and discussed the controversy surrounding Strawson’s theoretical model of language, and that of Davidson, in a 1988 article for *Manuscrito* “¿Verdad y significado o significado y verdad?” Rabossi not only studied speech acts theory, as well as F. De



Saussure's and N. Chomsky's theories of language, but Sapir-Worf's linguistic relativism was also part of his seminars and courses. His translation into Spanish of Ian Hacking's book *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* highlights Rabossi's interest in diverse views on language. He also analyzed the classical texts, but always from a contemporary perspective. In "Lenguaje, pensamiento y realidad," *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofía*, JL 82, he considered from a modern point of view the Aristotelian model of *Peri Hermeneías*. He also wrote an article on Hobbes's philosophy of language (*Manuscritos IV*, 1980). In "Ideas abstractas y términos generales" Rabossi presented and discussed the famous dispute between Locke, Berkeley, and Hume on abstract ideas in *Ensayos actuales sobre Adam Smith y David Hume* (Ed., Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, septiembre 1978, Buenos Aires).

Both in this field and in philosophy of mind, Eduardo Rabossi displayed a brilliant analytical intelligence paired with a remarkable expository ability, which became evident in his teaching, his participation in countless conferences and other academic events, and in his writing.

His trademark approach to each one of these issues could be described as follows: first, he would begin with a careful analysis of the state of the question, which he introduced with the utmost clarity and precision. Then, he would present all of the objections raised, listing all of the possible solutions, and, finally, he would identify the assumptions involved and their implications. He has left us with fond memories, but also with the challenge to continue his work with the same level of quality and exigency that he set for himself and his disciples.

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2002.c.- "Mental Causation: Anatomy of a Problem," *Manuscrito*, 285-304.

2003- "Psicólogos, filósofos e interfaces," in *Psicología Cognitiva y Filosofía de la Mente*, edited by A. Duarte and E. Rabossi, Buenos Aires-Madrid: Alianza Editora.

2004- "La Psicología del Sentido Común y los Modelos de Atribución Mental," in *La Mente y sus Problemas*, edited by E. Rabossi, Buenos Aires: Catálogos.

\*Professor Nora Stigol collaborated in the writing of this review, particularly on Rabossi's involvement with philosophy of language.

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## INTERVIEW

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### ***The Project of Exact Philosophy: An Interview with Mario Bunge, Frothingham Chair of Logic and Metaphysics, McGill University, Montreal, Canada***

**Interviewer: Gregory D. Gilson**  
University of Texas-Pan American

Mario Augusto Bunge was born on September 21, 1919, in Buenos Aires. His first Ph.D. is in physico-mathematical sciences from the Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Bunge was professor of Theoretical Physics and Philosophy at the Universidad de Buenos Aires for a decade. He has been at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, since 1966 where he currently holds the Frothingham Chair of Logic and Metaphysics. Bunge has been granted nine honorary doctorates and four honorary professorships. He has published eighty-one books and 366 articles in virtually every area of contemporary philosophy. His work has been translated into Russian, Portuguese, French, Italian, and Japanese.

Bunge's most comprehensive work is his eight-volume "Treatise on Basic Philosophy," published by Riedel Publishing

Company between 1974 and 1989. The work represents a monumental contribution to the project of exact philosophy as conceived by C. S. Peirce. He has written extensively on the philosophy of science, causality, the mind-body problem, the philosophy of the social sciences, and the philosophy of law. Most recently he has published *Chasing Reality: Strife over Realism* (University of Toronto Press, 2006). In this and his earlier *Philosophy in Crisis*, Bunge laments the current trend in philosophy to move away from exactness toward less scientific approaches. At the same time, he denies the possibility of a purely materialistic conception of the philosophy of science.

Comprehensive studies of Bunge's work include Raul Serroni-Copello, *Encuentros con Mario Bunge* (Asociación de Investigaciones en Psicología, 1989); Paul Weingartner and Georg Dorn, Eds.; *Studies on Bunge's Treatise* (Rodopi, 1990); Laurent-Michel Vacher, *Entretiens avec Mario Bunge* (Liber, 1993); and *Systems and Mechanisms: A Symposium on Mario Bunge's Philosophy of Social Science, Philosophy of the Social Science*, vol. 34, Nos. 2 and 3, 2004.

**Gilson:** How did you become interested in philosophy? Your early Ph.D. at the Universidad de La Plata was in physico-mathematical sciences, but your work quickly branched out to include the philosophy of science and, very soon after that, the entire nucleus of contemporary philosophy. Can you say why your work took this direction?

**Bunge:** Actually, I did not go from physics to philosophy but in the opposite sense. Indeed, I became fascinated by philosophy while still in high school. I read a lot of stuff that was really above my head and gave my first public lectures on philosophy (which were published in the magazine *Conferencias*) at age twenty. (They must have been awful because the public, rather large, was left speechless; and the political policeman who covered the events reported that people left whistling the tango "Misterio.") What had most excited my imagination at the time were two best-sellers in the 1930s, one by Sir Arthur Eddington and the other by Sir James Jeans, both famous astrophysicists. Eddington was a subjective idealist close to Kant, whereas Jeans was an objective idealist like Plato. I suspected that both authors were misinterpreting the physics of the day but, of course, I could not prove them wrong. So, I decided to study physics with the explicit and only goal of refuting them. Luckily, both had been forgotten by the time I graduated. But some of their ideas, in particular Eddington's, were still rather popular in books and papers on quantum mechanics (my research field) and its philosophy. Ironically, I adopted them for a while. In any case, the long and the short of the matter is that I studied philosophy on my own, and discussed philosophical problems with a number of friends, most of whom were not philosophers. I even founded a philosophical journal, *Minerva*, that lasted only six issues. And between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s I belonged to a philosophical circle where we discussed a number of interesting philosophical problems, such as those of causality and chance. However, I did not become a professional philosopher until 1957, when I won the philosophy of science chair at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. (The jury that chose me over ten other contenders was composed by Rodolfo Mondolfo, the historian of ancient philosophy; Beppo Levi, the mathematician; and José Juan Bruera, the legal philosopher.) Still, I continued to teach physics, first in Argentina, and later in the U.S., until 1965.

**Gilson:** Why did you leave Argentina?

**Bunge:** I left Argentina because I foresaw, right after a bloody battle between two army factions, another military dictatorship. Moreover, there had already been a sort of bloodless coup: the president was forced to resign, reportedly because he refused to break diplomatic relations with Cuba, and his vice president

had started to repress the opposition.

**Gilson:** In the proceedings of the 1971 Symposium on Exact Science you wholeheartedly endorsed the goal to transform exact philosophy (philosophy done with the explicit help of mathematical logic and mathematics) from an attitude into a full blown discipline. To what degree has this goal been realized?

**Bunge:** The goal of constructing exact philosophical theories was first stated by the great American philosopher Charles S. Peirce. I first got into this while writing my *Scientific Research* (2 volumes, 1967), and later on while crafting my semantics. But the idea of writing a whole treatise in this vein came to me only in 1972, while vacationing in Southern Spain. This work comprises nine volumes, published between 1974 and 1989. But only the first four of them (*Semantics and Ontology*) are bristling with logical and mathematical symbols. By 1980 I had become discouraged, not because exact philosophy is impossible, but because by that time exactness was going out of fashion in philosophy: hermeneutics, critical theory, phenomenology, existentialism, constructivism, relativism, and other antiscientific trends were becoming dominant. Ever fewer students were willing to make an effort to think rigorously. So, exact philosophy is still at the project stage, nearly as it was in Peirce's time. I hope that eventually, when postmodernism runs its course, and science recovers its lost prestige, exact philosophy will be revived. After all, even the intuitionist Henri Bergson believed that "clarity is the philosopher's courtesy." Learned obscurity, unlike that of the redneck, can be rude, antisocial, or—as in the case of Heidegger—a mark of dishonesty.

**Gilson:** In *The Philosophy of Psychology* you represent behaviorism as the epistemological component of the metaphysical thesis of positivism. How much did the failure of behaviorism in the 1950s influence your early rejection of logical positivism in general?

**Bunge:** Behaviorism matches positivism, which has always been descriptivist. But my rejection of behaviorism has a scientific root in addition to the philosophical one: the ultimate goal of scientific research is to understand the world, not just to describe it. In particular, the deep psychologist will want to understand the mechanisms that make people behave, feel, and think the way they do. And these mechanisms are neural—and still largely unknown.

**Gilson:** Could you explain the primary dispute between your emergent monism and Karl Popper's interactionist dualism? Can you explain the significance of this dispute to the *Philosophy of Mind*?

**Bunge:** The conflict between monists and dualists in the philosophy of mind has ancient roots, and it has an important ideological component. Indeed, the idea that the mind or soul is immaterial is found not only in Plato, Descartes, Popper, and Putnam, but also in most, if not all, religions. (It is absent from original Buddhism, which was atheistic and therefore does not really qualify as a religion.) How else can priests promise us eternal life after life, if not by postulating that the soul is immaterial? Interestingly, psycho-neural dualism was never part of medical psychology since Hippocrates. Only theologians and philosophers have clung to it despite the lack of empirical evidence. Psycho-neural monism, the postulate that everything mental is neural, is not one more metaphysical fantasy: it is no less than the driving principle of contemporary cognitive neuroscience. It was placed at the forefront of experimental psychology by Donald Hebb's influential book *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory* (1949). Popper and Eccles did not give it proper credit in their popular *The Self and Its Brain* because neither of them were up to date in psychology.

**Gilson:** In *The Philosophy of Psychology* you advocate an emergentist reduction of all mental processes to neural processes. Does this still seem to you to be a plausible ontological position?

**Bunge:** What holds for psychology should also hold for any science-friendly ontology. An up-to-date ontology can no more accept psycho-neural dualism than it can admit the mechanistic worldview that prevailed between ca. 1650 and ca. 1850. However, the ontological reduction of the mental to the neural does not entail that neuroscience can dispense with all the psychological concepts and techniques. This is why cognitive neuroscience is the fusion or merger of the two sciences rather than the reduction of one of them to the other. I deal with this problem in my book *Emergence and Convergence* (2003).

**Gilson:** *Causality: The Place of the Causal Principle in Modern Science* is generally credited with expanding the types of causality to be recognized in the philosophy of science. How can this expanded view of causality be beneficial to current *Philosophy of Mind* or cognitive science?

**Bunge:** My book *Causality* may contribute to the current debates on the mind problem in at least one respect: it shows that the popular idea that the brain causes the mind is just as wrong as the idea that a body causes movement, or that an atom causes light. Movement is just what bodies do, and light is emitted when an atom or a molecule jumps from one energy level to a lower one. Likewise, by definition, the causal relation holds only between events. Thus, a neural event, such as a decision to move a finger, which is taken by the prefrontal cortex, causes the motor stripe to activate the neural circuit that ends up in the movement of the finger.

**Gilson:** In your 1959 *Causality: The Place of the Causal Principle in Modern Science*, you claim that the confusion of cause and reason has led to numerous philosophic mistakes, tracing its havoc from Aristotle to Kepler's asking "Why are there six planets?" What are the implications of this distinction for the possibility of a causal theory of practical reason? What do you think are the prospects for a causal theory of practical reason?

**Bunge:** Traditional action theory has erected a wall between causes and reasons. In a materialist perspective like mine, reasons for acting are neural events (or rather processes) that cause other events either in the same body or in something else. This does not entail that action theory can become part of neuroscience. It cannot, because neuroscience knows only of laws, not of norms or rules. Incidentally, my book *Social Science Under Debate* contains a long and rather technical chapter on action theory, as an introduction to the socio-technologies, such as the law and management science.

**Gilson:** Do you have any thoughts about the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy?

**Bunge:** I don't like the name "continental philosophy" any more than "insular philosophy" or "peninsular philosophy." Both kinds of philosophy, rationalist and irrationalist, are being cultivated on all continents. It is possible that nowadays there are more "continental" philosophers in the U.S. than in Germany. I prefer philosophical qualifiers, such as "rigorous" and "sloppy," "rationalist" and "irrationalist," "enlightened" and "obscurantist," "skeptical" and "dogmatic," and so on.

**Gilson:** What do you think about the claim that Latin American Philosophy constitutes a distinct area of philosophy?

**Bunge:** For the above reason, I don't think that Latin America constitutes a distinct area of philosophy. Latin America is philosophically just as pluralistic as North America, Western Europe, India, or Japan. But what may be true is that the Latin American philosophical communities is that they, like

the remaining social groups of the same area, are poor in many respects: starving salaries, miserable libraries, and rare original findings. Typically, the Latin American philosopher is overworked by teaching duties, has no access to foreign (hence expensive) books and journals, enjoys few opportunities to travel, and has been educated in a tradition that has placed more value on learning than on original work. Remember Francisco Romero's three stages of philosophical evolution: applauding, commenting, and creating. We are still mostly at the first two stages. Worse, a philosophical good (or bad) bearing a seal such as "Oxford," "Paris," or "Cambridge, MA," will sell among us far better than any other. Ours is still a colonial culture.

**Gilson:** In your recent book, *Philosophy in Crisis*, you argue that it is necessary to reconstruct philosophy so as to make it relevant to the real-world problems of everyday people. What role can we reasonably expect philosophy to play in society?

**Bunge:** Philosophers can expect to play an active role in society by grappling with some social issues. For example, by denouncing the largely dependent (colonial) nature of the humanistic, scientific, and technological cultures of the developing countries. By shifting the attention of moral philosophy from micro-problems and pseudo-problems, such as those of suicide and gay marriage, to big problems such as those posed by poverty, inequality, oppression, and "neo-liberal" (actually reactionary) government policies. By promoting the study of enlightened philosophies, such as those of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, as an antidote to the Counter-Enlightenment, from German Romanticism to Dilthey and Husserl. By pointing out the close links between philosophical obscurantism and political reaction, as in the cases of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. By puncturing the balloon of the totally useless philosophies, such as possible-worlds metaphysics and semantics. By working harder on the philosophy of technology. And, above all, by working rigorously on important but neglected philosophical problems, such as the justification of values and norms.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### *Foucault and Latin America*

Benigno Trigo, ed. (New York: Routledge Press, 2002).

**Reviewed by Elizabeth Greenwood**  
Lehman College

A kitchen table, a clearing in the jungle, an archive of secrets. These spaces of discourse and dialogue, of resistance and revelry are the unassuming places where Foucauldian analysis speaks. A heap of broken images, a mythic city. The surreal, dynamic texture of Latin America breathes and seethes history, madness, protest, and, above all, stories: the unexpected narrative of bodies and souls that Michel Foucault sought to extricate from the auspices of power. The elite and the campesinos, the Spanish and the indigenous, and in the endless dance of discovery and re-discovery, Latin America engages with Foucault more distinctly than his home, France, but does so with impassioned urgency. Between the ciudad letrada of Ángel Rama and the tiny, daily struggles of Julia Alvarez, power twists and turns, knowledge ebbs and flows. But from all angles,

Foucault seeps into the Latin American conversation with its past and present, with its ghosts and their keepers.

Benigno Trigo, SUNY-Stony Brook professor of Hispanic Languages and Literature, edits this dense yet provocative volume. He aims to create an intellectual space where "... students of Latin American critical thought can turn to find the landmark appropriations and deployments of Foucault's theories, a representative gathering of original essays likewise informed, as well as essays that reflect on those very appropriations" (Trigo xxi). This grievous gap between Foucault's analysis and its application in Latin America is indeed an exigent space to fill, and Trigo assembles some of Latin American academia's finest minds to write on the topics of Discourse, Government, Subjectivity, and Sexuality in the four parts of the book. The anthology mirrors the diverse and paradoxical landscape of Latin American culture and politics in its inconsistencies: some of the articles are quite illuminating, accessible, and maverick in their approach, while others are laden with esoteric language and vague or strained connections to Foucault's philosophy. In broad strokes, this work is not for the Sunday afternoon reader of Foucault, as it synthesizes nuanced subtleties of the philosopher's analysis in the oftentimes ephemeral, "magically realistic" context of Latin American criticism. Five essays (two from Discourse and one each from the other sections) especially encapsulate this project in light of the principal thematic images of the book—writing and space—with both its strengths and weaknesses.

While the collected essays touch upon various themes in Foucault's theories, they all inevitably lead back to issues of writing (or discourse and language) and space (conceived symbolically as agency or physically in domain). Both of these themes cut to the heart of all of Foucault's writings, as well as the arguments of his critics. Ángel Rama's leading essay in the section on Discourse, "The Ordered City," from the groundbreaking book *La ciudad letrada*, frames the entire book in these tensions of "organic" versus "ordered." Rama employs the severe shift away from the magical, sensory, and traditionally indigenous (or the organic) cities of pre-Conquest Latin America to their constructed and monitored mutations (the ordered). Rama describes this transformation, exemplified by Tenochtitlán to modern day Mexico City, writing in language straight out of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*: "... they [the Spanish] adapted themselves to a frankly rationalizing vision of an urban future, one that ordained a planned and repetitive urban landscape and also required that its inhabitants be organized to increasingly stringent requirements of colonization, administration, commerce and defense" (Rama 4). The stones of colonization sought to divide and to order.

While Foucault examines European (in *Discipline and Punish*) Panopticism as a uniquely eighteenth-century innovation, we see parallel surveillance and power/knowledge relationships emerge in colonial Latin America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Conquest required docile bodies, record keeping, and examination. But less overt than the grooming malleable bodies to become subjects of the sovereign, Rama argues that the physical layout of cities and the elite interpreters who populated them created the "order of signs" along with surveillance. In other words, urban organization provided the arena in which preferred symbolic communicators could form the new episteme: knowledge became codified (Rama 7-9). Indeed, the repercussions of designing the public language of prestige are far-reaching. As Rama explains, "The capacity of the order of signs to configure the future was complemented symmetrically by an ability to erase the past" (Rama 9). Not only do signs normalize and create a determinant hierarchy among the lettered and the

unlettered, writing these signs steamrolls vestiges of the organic past. Urbanization raises the stakes in the Latin American game of "discovery" to new heights. Marginalization or confinement is not an option, as in Foucault's European case studies, but instead we see unbridled obliteration of history.

Rama's essay provides the touchstone for the entire project of the book in that it refocuses Foucauldian theories to their very essence. The letter is the confinement of discourse, which defines the inherent lack of agency available in the power/knowledge dynamic. Through the writing of the Latin American city, knowledge is simultaneously destroyed and created, and discourse and space realize their most pure amalgamation. In a puzzlingly complex article by Roberto González Echevarría, "A Clearing in the Jungle: From Santa Mónica to Macondo," the empowerment and oppression of writing is further developed in terms of the Latin American archive novel, focusing a great deal on Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. As González Echevarría echoes, "Writing begins in the city with the need to order society and to discipline in the punitive sense... writing is bound to the founding of cities and to punishment" (González Echevarría 47). And, moreover, "Latin America... was created in the archive" (69). In stolen, shadowy moments, the Latin American novelist finds serenity and surrender in the very place Foucault himself did as well.

The archive is the site where myth, history, and narrative converge to create a "new history" (49). Just as Foucault immersed himself in the dusty, forgotten stories of madmen and libertines, Latin American novelists speak to the past to write history sensually, as Foucault describes the "...fictional discourse to induce effects of truth" (Foucault 193) in *Power/Knowledge*. González Echevarría wants to advocate the fictive as an outgrowth of the archive even further, describing it eschatologically, "...the chronicle of death foretold" (66). A new truth of life is realized through an illusory death. By dressing the archive in clothes of reckoning and Armageddon, the author attempts to pull his reader into the self-reflective world of the writer. The archive plays a central role to the landmark novels of Latin America, González Echevarría argues, because of the secrecy, power, and possibility for new discursivity in this obscured corner. The archive keeps secrets and the writer is the catalyst to question the power that constrains knowledge, and vice versa. But, like Foucault's thoughts on sexuality, this shadowy knowledge is at its intellectual climax when the secret interacts only between the page and the reader. What results from the archive is a fresh entity, a new history, all unto its self. González Echevarría's grandiose, layered style can easily bewilder, but the ensemble he projects in the archive of history/culture/legality and bureaucracy tied in with the myths that define and re-create history are ideas made possible only by the work of Foucault. The dusty secrets of the two writers meld and dazzle across the page.

A marked (but admittedly welcome) departure from González Echevarría's lush prose comes from University of California-Santa Cruz Spanish professor Juan Poblete. In his article from "Government" entitled "Governmentality and the Social Question: National Formation and Discipline," Poblete discusses the terminology utilized by the Chilean state on how the unorganized masses should be governed. We see, then, an analysis that applies Foucault's broad theory of power to the state sphere. Yet Poblete demonstrates the way in which this state-sanctioned normalizing power trickled down to the micro-scale of the family in Chile in the late eighteenth century. While this theoretically sounds like an intriguing case study of the transference and dispersal of power into a new arena, Poblete's examples feel strained and weak in the shadow of the Foucauldian theories he quotes at great length. Jumping

from examples of church to school to market economies to the domestic sphere with very little transition, while making ambiguous references to other scholars simultaneously, the author forces the reader to make connections solitarily.

However, Poblete does illuminate Foucault's power theorems quite effectively in a few places, including his discussion of the role of the police and the semantic significance carried with it. The poor are watched in terms of security and planning, while normalization inevitably results. He extends the same metaphor in describing the Christian school as well: "Insofar as the goal of its educational effort was not the transformation of the social order but its efficient and controlled reproduction, the state could afford, specially at the beginning to delegate the task of primary education to the Church. Thus is allowed at that level a great degree of continuity and republican educational traditions" (Poblete 142). The author unearths an imperative ramification of pastoral education by viewing the phenomenon through a Foucauldian lens. But this article, and indeed the Governmentality section on the whole, are lackluster in comparison to the rest of the book. Perhaps this is because of the paradoxical tendency to apply the power relations that function tangibly on the micro-level to the great scale of governmentality. For in the minute, and in the unassuming, power battles of grandeur are fought.

Editor Benigno Trigo examines horizontal, small-scale dominance in his essay from *Subjectivity on "Thinking Subjectivity in Latin American Criticism."* Theories of subjectivity ironically stem from the foundation of writing and space previously discussed; yet modern Latin American critics tend to acquiesce to the traditional delimited conceptions of power as solely oppressive, and the subject as perpetually oppressed. Breaking out of this mentality, Trigo argues, is necessary in order to formulate a more dynamic and positive blue print for resistance. Similar to Judith Butler's emphasis on a recentering of the subject as intimately bound up with the object, Trigo wants to depart from the binary.

One definition of this binary that Trigo discusses comes directly from thinkers discussed earlier, Angé Rama and Roberto González Echevarría. Referencing again primordial elements and their realization in space, the two critics construct their binary, as Trigo explains, "...between an organic object/Other that contains and its origin of an inorganic subject/self that paradoxically gives birth to itself" (Trigo 176). Fully grasping this concept proves challenging in the article, as Trigo glosses over a number of subjectivity theories, but this dichotomy is the most compelling. Rooted in the language of self-reflexive biology, Rama and González Echevarría formulate a binary that is simultaneously divided yet enmeshed in its opposition, and recapitulates to form new power/resistance dynamics out of the same, recycled clay. Yet while these two thinkers speak in a language alluding to biopower, they apparently "...do not seem aware that their oppositions are based on unexamined notions of sexual difference" (Trigo 176). Trigo cites well-known feminist theorists in Latin American criticism who emphasize the consequence of bodily drives and desires of the subject in contrast to the "performative" and socialized aspects of what ultimately becomes gender, echoing Butler's seminal ideas.

Trigo's overview of Latin American thinking on the role of the subject in resistance is informative and sweeping but challenging to follow in all its digressions and oppositional directions, as is the nature of subjectivity studies in general. One of the main problems in determining the precarious role of the subject seems to be the tendency to universalize. To determine the position, or lack thereof, of the subject in mapping plans of social resistance, context should be key. That said, perhaps subjectivity should be looked at more subjectively. In the case

of the gender hierarchy in Latin America, denying the subject of the woman (who has been with comparatively much less voice and agency than women in North America or Europe), diminishing the unique character of the woman herself seems to negate the cause in this particular circumstance. Similarly, the struggle of indigenous peoples throughout Latin America clings on to a sense of subjectivity in the manifestation of a collective identity, as this is a return to their historical cultural roots. Theoretical subjectivity, then, should coalesce to the impossibility of establishing a universal rule for the nature of struggle, and can then adapt itself to the needs of particular communities.

SUNY-Stony Brook philosopher Kelly Oliver brilliantly clarifies the everyday struggles and more latent subjectivity aspects of race, class, and gender in the novels of Dominican writer Julia Alvarez. Oliver's essay "One Nail Takes Out Another: Power, Gender, and Revolution Julia Alvarez's Novels" examines and extends Foucauldian theories, explaining "...[Alvarez's novels] at once demonstrates Foucault's thesis that resistance must take localized forms and at the same time makes all the more striking the Foucauldian blind spot of sexual difference in relation to power" (Oliver 236).

The realistic poignancy of Alvarez's stories usually centers on the family as a locus to illuminate greater political and social issues. In the *Time of the Butterflies*, for example, tells the story of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and its eventual revolutionary demise through the alternating voices of the three Mirabal sisters. By focusing on the small, familial scale, Oliver argues that Alvarez expands Foucault's theories of the micro-functioning of power to a feminine, domestic sphere; the dinner table debates between fathers and daughters, the memories and secrets revealed over afternoon coffee. Alvarez unearths a subjugated knowledge, the marginalized epistemology of the Latin American matriarchy, and thus produces a counter-knowledge that carries with it the legacy of resistance that brews below the surface, a resistance that is as discreet as the power it challenges.

Oliver connects Foucault's contention that "'local, specific struggles' against local forms of power and resistance on all levels can affect change" (Oliver 237) to the small yet intentional and calculated resistances of Alvarez's characters. The Mirabal sisters act not only against the tyrannical Trujillo but also against their father who controls them. Oliver explains, "Alvarez suggests that revolution is a matter of 'constant skirmishes' on an everyday, mundane level.... This comparison [Trujillo/patriarchy] itself suggests that revolution happens continually through everyday resistances rather than 'global' overthrow" (Oliver 241). With this and many other examples of "mundane" rebellion in Alvarez's writings, Oliver demonstrates the positive, effective convergence of writing and space to produce tenable change in the face of power. By the Mirabal sisters and other women struggling in their own homes and in spite of patriarchal power, their goals of liberation are more complete in the microscopic than that of universal feminism. Foucauldian struggle is a function of small acts in small spaces, and Oliver's article stands as a shining, literary example that is not only inspiring but also feasible.

The work of Foucault has often been described as incomplete. His power/knowledge relationship can be paradoxical, and his murder of the subject perhaps dies without sufficient mourning. But because of the wonderful dramatic irony and shadowy ambiguities of the Foucauldian project, new ideas and great intellectual strides can recapitulate outward toward the gasp, the whisper of freedom in the distance. Foucault and Latin America mirrors its muse. While the bulk of the essays in the volume rivet the imagination and provoke

further inquiry, it is an incomplete project. The elitism of the Latin American left resounds throughout the book, in the sense that theory is championed unabashedly over practice. This is most evident in the lack of papers on indigenous struggle, namely, the Zapatistas. Lauded by critics and journalists internationally as the first “postmodern” revolution, there is not one mention of the Chiapan rebel group that captured the attention of the world in their refusal of power and elimination of the subject through the facelessness of the ski mask.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the next volume may want to address the feminist movements in Latin America in their own section, rather than keeping this discourse relegated to the chapter on “Subjectivity.” But the importance of Foucault’s project to Latin American thought is undeniable and helps us appreciate the philosopher in a new light. Hopefully, Foucault in Latin America serves as the point of departure to illuminate the contemporary struggles of Latin America that define our modern moment.

#### Endnotes

1. See Grassroots Postmodernism by Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (Zed Books, 1998) and Specters of Liberation by Martín Matustik (SUNY Press, 1998) for discussion of the EZLN and subjectivity.

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### *The Impact of Globalized Neoliberalism in Latin America: Philosophical Perspectives*

Ricardo Gómez, ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Hansen Publishing 2004).

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Few issues are as complex as globalization. In the first place, as one author in this anthology points out, there is a terminological quandary: globalization is understood in many different ways. The term globalization is often used as meaning globality or “world system” and in that sense it refers to the phenomenon of living in a politically and culturally interconnected world. The term globalization is also used to refer to a particular ideology: neo-liberalism and its consequences. Finally, the term globalization is frequently used to denote the political, economic, cultural, and technological aspects that shape the role and relationships of governments, corporations, and individual human beings and their quality of life.

But the issue of how to use the term is only the start of the problem. Globalization and the implementation of neo-liberal policies in different countries raise a number of key issues, many of them highly divisive. Is globalization desirable? Are increasing global connections conducive to a more just and equal world? Are social welfare and equality promoted if foreign investment is encouraged, government regulations of wages and working conditions are kept to a minimum, and public services are privatized? For some, the answer is positive. For others, globalization and neo-liberalism promote cultural destruction, financial instability, an increase of the gap between the world’s wealthy and the poor, unhealthy labor conditions, and North American and European cultural, technological, and economic hegemony in the world.

Given the controversial character of these issues and the diverse worldviews and ideologies underlying the arguments for and against neo-liberal globalization, in general, it is not easy to find consensus. Yet, this is what we find in Ricardo J. Gómez’s *The Impact of Globalized Neoliberalism in Latin America: Philosophical Perspectives*. The volume presents six essays

written by Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Rabossi, Arturo Andrés Roig, Lia Berisso, Carlos Paladines, and Ricardo J. Gómez, and a DVD with interviews with four of the authors. According to the editor, the main aim of the volume is “to present a plurality of perspectives about the impact of Neo-liberalism upon Latin American philosophy” (7). But even if the papers are written from different perspectives, they have something in common: they show the authors’ disenchantment with the consequences of globalization, their frustration with the view that globalized neo-liberalism is an unavoidable and natural fact, and their increasing hostility to neo-liberalism.

A second, and timely, theme running throughout the book, and to a great extent the focus of the interviews (conducted by Gómez), is the role that Latin American intellectuals can and should play in shaping a society that appears to be too eager to imitate foreign models. The essays and the interviews thus weave together the issue of globalization, its practical consequences, and the possibility of a critical Latin American philosophy rooted in a genuine Latin American experience, in a globalized world.

The book opens with Dussel’s examination of the historical roots of globalization and his call for a critical attitude toward it. In the following essay, Roig emphasizes the extent to which globalized neo-liberalism undermines the moral basis of society. He sharply criticizes what he takes to be the very passive attitude of Latin American thinkers who, far from rejecting globalization and neo-liberalism, have shown a tendency to accept them. His essay is followed by the articles by Berisso, who concentrates on how globalized neoliberalism has negatively affected workers and their relationship to labor in Uruguay, and by Paladines, who focuses on the negative impact that neo-liberal policies have had on education in Ecuador. Rabossi gives a helpful, if brief, analysis of the interrelation between human rights and the phenomenon of globalization, and Gómez attempts to show that among the negative consequences of globalized neo-liberalism are the increasing poverty and inequality of the already marginalized, and the distortion of crucial moral concepts such as humanity and liberty. The issues raised by the authors are important and worthy of discussion.

Yet the volume has some weaknesses. First, as with any collection, the quality of the selections is mixed. Some authors rehearse arguments available in more developed form elsewhere or fail to examine possible objections to the theses they discuss. At times, political biases appear to replace careful reflection on the issues. More editing would have improved the volume. A second weakness is that the volume lacks a substantive introduction providing context and illustrating how the papers fit together.

Having said this, it is worth noting that the book would make a useful addition to reading lists from classes on Latin American thought. With the necessary context and perspective, it can be a good beginner’s guide to some of the lines of thought and problems that concern Latin Americans.