

Vale: Gustavo Bueno in memoriam (1924-2016)

On August 7 the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno passed away at the age of 91 in his house in Niembro in the asturian region of Spain. Even at such a respectable age, there is no doubt that this loss will be profoundly mourned by his family and friends, especially taking into account the unfortunate fact that Bueno's death came only one day after that of his beloved wife, Carmen Sánchez.



A coincidence that, tragic as it undeniably is for all who loved Professor Bueno and his spouse, should certainly remind us all now of how deeply embedded the lives of a couple may be at times and the moving extent to which such an interlacement can be made evident when those lives reach their unavoidable end.

His death however, will be also felt inevitably by the various generations of philosophers and scholars who, both in Spain and the Americas, benefited from his magistry over the last five decades. What we owe to Bueno is impossible to pay, or even to determine with any precisión, and so it would be pretentious on my part to try to compensate with this obituary a debt which is simply enormous. This brief note nevertheless, represents an attempt to recognize the enormity of the debt as well as a tribute to the very many accomplishments Bueno undertook during his long and productive career .

Born in 1924 in the medieval town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada in La Rioja where he would be buried almost 92 years later, Gustavo Bueno studied Philosophy in Zaragoza and earned a PhD in Madrid with a thesis on Philosophy of Religion. His initial research interests as a promising young scholar with the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) in Madrid were in Symbolic Logic. In Spain in the 1940s this was a most novel area of expertise, and it captured the interest of many. Gustavo Bueno would never shy entirely away from this starting point of his intellectual development as the common recourse to logic in his later publications demonstrates.

Soon however Professor Bueno found a variety of other avenues to explore with equal academic rigour within different arenas in Philosophy. In the years to come during the 1940s and the 1950s, Bueno wrote extensively about core questions in epistemology and phenomenology as well as aesthetics and the philosophy of the arts while at the same time studying in systematic detail the intricacies of philosophies so apart from each other as those of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Marx. In the midst of Francoism the majority thought that Bueno was a marxist. But one of a very peculiar class, namely: the sort of a Marxist who never refuses to acknowledge whatever philosophical import conveyed by other lines of thought, even those irremediably idealistic . Not, of course, that *everyone is right (and hence anything goes and probably nothing is worth a damn thing)* as many social-constructivist and proponents of the postmodernity would have it. On the contrary , the moral here is all about *dialectics* (in the classical Socratic and Platonic sense of the term): it is simply the case that

trying to prove your views right is something that cannot be done without taking seriously what others say, even if your goal is to refute their position with cogent arguments

From the outset of the 1960s, Bueno moved to the city of Oviedo in the north-west part of Spain taking a professorship in Philosophy at the local university. It is in such geographical milieu that Gustavo Bueno put forwards most of his contributions to virtually all the various areas of Philosophy; and additionally it is also there that he put together a group of scholars and



professors who had great impact in recent history of Spanish philosophy.

In a period reluctant to recognizing the value of tradition in the history of thought, Bueno's philosophy vindicates the classical notion of a philosophical system while addressing with indefatigable subtlety a stunningly ample array of issues given rise to by the scientific disciplines, the technologies, the politics and the religious developments of the day. Gustavo Bueno in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, as well as the beginning of the 21st century constructed in stages a coherent philosophical system. It is a system which Bueno named *Philosophical Materialism* and includes an ontology, a philosophy of science, an ethical doctrine, an anthropological theory as well as a theory of the state and a theory of religion. All those aspects alongside with many other perhaps apparently "minor" issues (ranging from the idea of sport to the philosophy of television or music) were brought to Bueno's insatiable attention to be analyzed with endless vigour in an infinity of book and papers.

His books include: *Ensayos materialistas* (1972), *La metafísica presocrática* (1974), *Ensayo sobre las categorías de la economía política* (1972), *El animal divino. Ensayo materialista de filosofía de la religión* (1986), *Primer ensayo sobre las categorías de las ciencias políticas* (1991), *El mito de la cultura* (1997), *España frente a Europa* (1999), *Televisión. Apariencia y verdad* (2000), *El mito de la izquierda* (2003) and *El ego trascendental* (2016) - to name just a few of the most salient ones.

Perhaps Gustavo Bueno's contribution to the Philosophy of Science represents one of the most interesting aspects within his philosophical system for the readers of the HPS&ST Note. Published in the form of five volumes (out of a monumental project of 15 which will now not be completed), Bueno's *Theory of Categorical Closure* takes roots in the systematic discussion of the ideas of a plurality of other philosophers (from Aristotle to Feyerabend) to sustain that far from reducing itself to networks of propositions to be empirically contrasted, the true nature of scientific fields and practices lays out the construction of essential parts of our world (from objects to landscapes) which clearly would have never come to being without the development of science and technology. In this respect, and much as Ian Hacking has classically emphasized in his celebrated 1983 book, science is about *intervening in the reality outside* at least every bit as much as it is about *representing it*.

This is a point Bueno had independently entertained before the outset of the new experimentalist conception of science in the English speaking world. It is also one that should not go unnoticed by those working in the area of science education as it is way too easy (unfortunately) to leave the students in the classroom with the misleading impression that there is no more to science than propositions, theories and models to be assessed against the background of the evidence available at hand. This view implies a drastic oversimplification of science and a distorted account of what scientists really do. As Bueno sustains with so much argument and historical erudition, scientific fields are constructions and involve physical operations with tools, instruments and technologies.

This is not to admit however, as more than one constructivist (and undoubtedly many a deconstructivist *à la Derrida*) would be for sure tempted to conclude in too quick a manner, that there is no specific difference between a scientific theory and any other socially institutionalized practise. It can be granted that science is a social construction, but such a contention is conceptually flimsy and almost sounds tautological (for indeed *everything* that people do within a social and political milieu is a social construction). What really distinguishes science from other (admittedly social) kinds of construction is the fact that the operations involved give rise to parts of our reality (from nuclear energy to electricity, from anti-biotics to GPS or chemical weapons) that for better or for worse we all need to live with. There is no denial that science meets the reality of our world outside and this is exactly where social relativism goes astray.

After all, a philosophically informed scientific education need not jump from the debunking of an idealistic view of science to the sort of relativism that ignores the connexion between the ideas of science and truth. That would be too simple a dichotomy (albeit perhaps a tempting one somehow). Gustavo Bueno's *Theory of Categorical Closure* constitutes one of the most ambitious attempts to explain why this is so.

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