

Eduardo Rabossi: *In Memoriam*

On October 26th, 2006, in the city of Salvador de Bahia, Brasil, the Interamerican Society of Philosophy organized an Academic Homage in memory of Eduardo Rabossi. The homage took place in the context of the XII National Philosophical Meeting in Brazil, organized by the Associação Nacional de Pós-graduação em Filosofia (ANPOF), at which time also an Extraordinary Assembly of the Society took place. The texts we include in what follows were read at that Homage.

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I met Eduardo Rabossi at the XI Interamerican Congress in Guadalajara in 1985; he reaffirmed on that occasion the cordial predisposition I already had towards Argentinian colleagues due to a very special deferential gesture I had experienced four years earlier at the Congress in Tallahassee. I had finished my presentation at the General Assembly officializing the induction of Colombia into the Interamerican Society of Philosophy, when the illustrious professor Risieri Frondizi spoke. He said he believed that the time had come for the Executive Committee to begin to make room for a generational take-over that would allow the assimilation of the new impulses that animated philosophical work in the continent ; for that reason, he continued, he would give up his post so that the representative of Colombia would be able to form part of the Committee.

Rabossi had entered the philosophical arena during the "developmental stage " of Analytic Philosophy in Argentina, which sheltered the philosophy of right that would in due course produce significant contributions. By that time pioneer works like *Causality (Causalidad)* by Mario Bunge and *Logical Forms, Reality and Meaning (Formas lógicas, realidad y significado)* by Tomás Moro Simpson had already appeared. The young lawyer Rabossi took part in these proceedings with translations of the classical analytic authors, first Ryle then Stevenson, Hare and Austin. He took graduate

courses in Philosophy in the United States and was adjunct professor until 1966, when the military takeover of national universities forced the resignation of many professors. After a stay in Oxford, he entered the National Council of Scientific Research; with the return of Democracy, he went back in 1983 to the University of Buenos Aires as Director of Programs in Philosophy, which he revitalized and renewed.

The *élan* with which Rabossi would support any institutionalizing attempt in philosophical work, be it in the form of associations or journals, was well known. He had already been one of the founders of SADAF (the Argentinian Society of Philosophical Analysis), which was already renowned in the Continent. And he attended the Guadalajara Congress as Founding President of the recently created Philosophical Association of the Republic of Argentina (Asociación Filosófica de la República Argentina). Eduardo was, besides, very much liked by our Mexican colleagues due to his sojourns – because of the political situation in Argentina-- at the Institute of Philosophical Research at the UNAM. We argued practically during the whole week of the event in Guadalajara: it is amazing, really, how much one can do at philosophical meetings if one has the will and the desire and one finds someone with whom to do it. On the basis of his comments in the discussion that followed of a paper of mine on the critique of the concept of value in Heidegger, we had a long talk where a good sense of humor brought us close despite our standing on opposite shores.

What followed was an intense encounter with the legal positivist attempt to give expression to ethical convictions in legal institutions that would guarantee their availability for all.

Eduardo presented his critique of the foundational theories of Human Rights, since in his opinion, the problem with that foundation, if it ever existed, had finally been laid to rest with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations¹ – a thesis that earned him much opposition. Since the Declaration positively expresses a universal agreement of mankind, only problems of realization and protection remained, together with the philosophical task of articulating a new paradigm to serve as explanatory framework for political praxis. The matter was in any case no longer primarily philosophical, but also political and legal. In the Congress we had also a chance to participate in a Round Table on problems of teaching philosophy in Ibero-america. Evoking Kant's famous pas-

¹ Valdivia, Lourdes and Enrique Villanueva (eds.), *Filosofía del lenguaje, de la ciencia, de los derechos humanos, y problemas de su enseñanza*, México: UNAM, 1987, pp.147-156.

sage in his *Lessons on Logic*, where he starts by saying: "Nobody can be called a philosopher, who does not know how to philosophize; but one can only learn to philosophize through the exercise and the proper use of reason", Eduardo insisted on the activity-like character of philosophical work and on the instrumental role played by the history of philosophy on the learning of that activity --topic on which we again disagreed. We were also present, at that time, in the founding of SOPHIA, the short-lived Iberoamerican Philosophical Society (Sociedad Filosófica Iberoamericana), in the Directive Commission of which Marcelo Dascal and Joao Paulo Monteiro represented Brasil and Portugal.

The new winds of democracy that blew in Argentina inspired much philosophical activity. In September 1987 the Extraordinary International Congress of Philosophers met in the city of Córdoba. I remember that when Donald Davidson started his presentation, he remarked with friendly irony that he had not realized until that moment that "my friends were running the country"; President Alfonsín's Inaugural welcome, which he was unable to deliver, had been read a few minutes before by Eduardo in his capacity of Subsecretary of Human Rights. In Guadalajara it had been agreed that the next Interamerican Congress would take place in Bogotá; but the Argentinian colleagues, with enthusiasm and the proper institutional support requested the site for Buenos Aires, an idea that I supported without reservation. However, before the XII Interamerican Congress met at the University of Buenos Aires, the currency suffered an astronomical devaluation that made the \$ 80.000 dollars, originally assigned as budget for the event, barely enough for the purchase of the air-tickets for some few guests. The building of the University of Buenos Aires, where we met, did not have at that time a heating system. Eduardo's and his colleagues' efforts overcame the circumstances and pulled the meeting off. I can still see Eduardo at the Interamerican Congress I later organized in Bogotá, in 1994 –in which, I should also mention, Brazil's philosophical work was also well represented by "classical" colleagues like Marilena Chaui, Newton da Costa, Zelkjo Loparic, and by "young" colleagues such as Maria Clara Dias and Plinio Smith–, walking on the stage of the auditorium of the University of los Andes to discuss enthusiastically, almost physically, with Rorty and Vattimo. We met later in symposia and colloquia in Mexico and Spain – some fortunate times in the company of Elsa and Margarita. In a talk in Berlin, when he was fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg, we confirmed with fraternal complicity that the real talent we both shared was that of mediators in the tribal conflicts that are bound to occur between the groups and subgroups that

make up the philosophical unions at the national level. The year before last, at the XV Congress, I heard him talk about one of his favorite subjects, the rights of peoples, and in November last, during the World Day of Philosophy, also in the Peruvian capital, taking part in a colloquium on the justification of just wars.

After evoking the personal ties between two philosophical unionists, allow me to emphasize the political dimension of Eduardo's analytical commitment. It is good to remember that it was in the decade of the seventies – in the midst of political violence and instability, of economic crisis and the irruption of extreme fanaticisms of both right and left–, that what Eduardo called "the settlement stage" of Analytic Philosophy took place in Argentina, in the context of the pugnacious criticisms and the closed opposition of "the Philosophy of the Faculties" of the time. Eduardo himself tells us, in the book he edited with Jorge Gracia, Enrique Villanueva and Marcelo Dascal on *Philosophical Analysis in Latin America*, what it was that persuaded him not just to divulge this type of philosophy but to open up to the contemporary discussion and to go beyond parochialism through philosophical dialogue: "To do Analytic Philosophy in today's Argentina", he wrote in 1985, "is inevitably associated with the feeling that, apart from doing philosophy seriously, one is part of an enlightenment crusade, one is offering models of a rational structure for progressive thought, one is showing how conceptual analysis is an indispensable requirement of all attempts to understand and modify reality".² A complete program for what I then dared to call "analytical patriotism", the movilization of a philosophical option to transform the whole of society. That same analytical Eduardo knew, it is clear, how to deal with my tiresome hermeneutical pranks and to lavish dythirambes on the loftiness of Boca Juniors.

In the intervening years, the analytico-political militancy became more flexible and conciliatory. At the end of one of his last essays, published in 2003, on Richard Rorty, whom he knew very closely, Eduardo sketches a "localist interpretation" of his work, since what was above all interesting in Argentina was the "local advantage" of the polemic provoked by the Northamerican philosopher in the United States and in Europe. Such a local advantage, according to him, would "take us to reflect on the virtues and defects of our philosophical practices", on "our unstoppable importing vocation" and on "the irruption of philosophical analysis in a me-

² Rabossi, Eduardo, "El análisis filosófico en Argentina", in: Gracia, Jorge, Eduardo Rabossi, Enrique Villanueva, Marcelo Dascal (eds.), *El análisis filosófico en América Latina*, México: FCE, 1985, p. 32.

dium where the *establishment* unilaterally sanctified philosophies of German or French extraction".³ From the philosophical working situation in Argentina, Rabossi does not hesitate in affirming three theses "dogmatically": 1) that a neopragmatism (whether Rortyan or not), sufficiently remodelled and elaborated, can serve our way of doing philosophy; 2) that without *failing to emphasize what is positive in the practice of analytical philosophical analysis it is important to avoid its propensity to scholasticism*; and 3) that associating philosophy with real communal problems is an aim we cannot fail to consider. Eduardo perceived a promising light for his thesis in the horizon; he believed that in the broad and varied world of philosophy, Argentina would be in a privileged place to integrate the positions which the ethnocentrism that unavoidably accompanies philosophical practice still appear to make incommensurable. Such promising light, let us add, was also seen in other latinamerican countries throughout the XX Century. Rabossi grounds his clear horizon in Rorty's reference to the lack of communication that prevails inside contemporary Western Philosophy, between the realms of the English, French and German languages –a deplorable fact if one thinks that the most interesting work being done in the analytical side "in great measure" overlaps the work done on the continental European side.⁴

With these few lines I have wanted to talk to you of the quality of the friend who, five days before his death, knowing that I would return to Bogota very early from Lima, left me a message urging me to call his room, regardless of the time of my return to the hotel, so that we could, in his own words, "bid farewell as decent people do". We did so, in an embrace.

³ Rabossi, Eduardo, "El caso Rorty, un modelo para armar", in: Nudler, Oscar y Francisco Naishtat (eds.), *El filosofar hoy*, Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2003, p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

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Eduardo Rabossi died on November 10th, 2005 in the city of Cusco, Perú. It was on a Thursday at 9:30 in the morning. A few minutes earlier we had been having breakfast together, with him, his wife Elsa, Javier Sádaba and some Peruvian friends in the courtyard of a cozy colonial hostel next to the beautiful Square of the Nazarenes. As in all those days, Cusco showed that morning a shining, luminous sun and a blue sky with very white passing clouds. Eduardo felt a sudden heartburn, which he attributed to indigestion and excused himself, to go get some rest. He went to his room, lied down in bed, placidly crossed his arms and legs and in a few minutes ceased to exist ... During the previous days we had participated in the National Philosophical Congress of Perú, enjoying the enchantment and mystery of the city of Cusco, and walking down the magnificent Sacred Valley of the Incas. Nothing would have made us suspect that Eduardo would leave us so suddenly; on the contrary, he looked enthusiastic and full of energy, with the curiosity of someone passionate about a city he had always wanted to visit and gratified, as he commented frequently to Elsa, that he had finally gotten to know it. The shock that his death produced in us was magnified by the horror of the surprise that hit us. It came upon us as thunder. And it left us dumbfounded and suffering, as it did so many other colleagues and friends when they heard the news.

You will forgive me if I labor over these and other very personal details of that last encounter with Eduardo Rabossi, but I cannot stop connecting his memory to the dear memory of the days I spent with him just before his departure. They were not few. For Fate had it so that, of the last two months of his life, I spent practically a whole month with him, between congresses and trips, with many breaks so that friendship could be nourished with unexpected graces, personal stories and dreams more than projects. In mid September we were in Colombia, in Medellín, thanks to the hospitality of such great friends and efficient organizers as are our colleagues from the University of Antioquia, arguing about matters of global justice and human rights, topics on which Eduardo Rabossi was an indisputable and suggestive authority. We continued then our trip to Lima, to a similar colloquium, but this time in the context of the work of the Truth Commission of Peru. Rabossi, as is well known, had been a member of the Sabato Commission in Argentina, and he enjoyed a great esteem in Peruvian public opinion for his trajectory and his good judgement in matters of reconstruct-

ing national political memory in a Latin American country. He was very sought after by the press, by the students, by the philosophers in Peru. At the beginning of November he returned to Lima for a Meeting of the Interamerican Society of Philosophy, society of which he had been president himself for several years. That meeting brings together the presidents of the national Associations of philosophy in the continent. We had intense days of discussion in Lima, about the ways in which to restructure and reactivate the Society, where Eduardo Rabossi's presence, as well as Carlos Gutiérrez's, was celebrated by all, with respect and with irony, as the presence of the "old" or "wise" men of the tribe, to whose experience one can appeal to guide and calibrate the initiatives of its members. On the eve of our departure to Cusco, we dined together at the limenian restaurant "Las Brujas de Cachiche" (the Witches of Cachiche), thus named in honor of the sorceresses from a city in southern Perú, a symbolic place and ideal occasion to share amicably, alluding to the prudent and insightful support that people like Eduardo Rabossi could give the future of American philosophy.

I am moved to mention the group trip we made to the Valley of Urubamba. We spent the day in Cusco, rented a van and then visited the villages and fortresses built by the incas on the hillsides around the valley, that offer a beautiful and touching spectacle. In one of our stops, in Pisac, we visited on foot the ruins of the citadel built atop the mountain, from where one can see the immensity and majesty of the valley. We were all fascinated by the landscape, and in some way also moved by its solemn proportions. Eduardo was literally captivated by the surroundings, and seemed moved to loquaciously express his satisfaction. I had never before heard him refer with such enthusiasm to his three passions: tangoes, Borges's work and Boca Juniors. During the long stretches of the trip down the valley highways, he sang tangoes and commented on their lyrics; he quoted from memory many passages, especially witty passages from Borges; and he told about how much pleasure it gave him to go frequently to the Boca Junior games with his grandchildren, to partake of the profane and tribal choir of the sports rituals, challenging the stiffness and incomprehension of some of his philosopher friends.

A few days earlier, I have already mentioned, we had had a general meeting of the Interamerican Society, in which his presence had been crucial and fundamental. This was no exception, although perhaps the high degree of authority he had achieved was, since for decades Eduardo Rabossi has greatly contributed, not just to renew philosophical research in Latin America, but also to strengthen the institutions that congregate the

philosophers of the region. Very early on he promoted research in Analytic Philosophy, founded in Buenos Aires the Argentinian Society of Philosophical Analysis, but never succumbed to the intrigues between factions and knew always how to build bridges between philosophical traditions. He organized in Buenos Aires an Interamerican Congress of Philosophy and served as president of the Interamerican Society for several years. In all this time he proved to be a builder, a generator of consensus, a man with a positive and constructive attitude who walked on the bridges he built, without ever failing to speak his mind clearly or defend his own ideas. This constructive attitude was, undoubtedly, a trait of his character in the sense that Aristotle understands this expression, that is, it was in him an habitual way of conducting himself, a *hexis* that he knew how to cultivate throughout his life and that corresponded perfectly to the style of philosophy he had set out to practice.

Because Eduardo Rabossi was, in the strict sense of the word, a *phrónimos*, a wise and prudent man that managed to harmonize his philosophical convictions with his way of life. He brought with him the best of the pragmatist tradition and of the analytic school, and so he used to participate in the discussions with subtleness, rigour and a healthy skepticism. More than an inventor of systematic castles, he was a severe critic of dogma or of the appearances of truth, and applied skepticism to his relativization, convinced that he was contributing in that way to the practice, and certainly also to the theory, of tolerance. He was, also, a refined and cultivated man, elegant in his manners and ideas, sober in his expression, discreet in his attitudes, affable and always good-humored. He wrote relatively little, in accordance with his frugal style, but what he wrote had a decisive influence in the field where he applied himself. Everyone will remember the example of his essay on "The Naturalist Foundation of Human Rights", which caused such enthusiasm in Richard Rorty and served this thinker as a basis for his pragmatist and sentimental strategy in defense of human rights. Aware that many of his writings were scattered or that some had not even appeared in Spanish, and perhaps anticipating that time might play a trick on him, Rabossi had just recently decided to prepare a manuscript that brought together the best and most genuine of his philosophical work: the definition itself of the meaning of philosophy and the analysis of the models employed to put it into practice. A real exercise of philosophical tolerance and a personal meditation on the work that he had carried out throughout his life. I know that he had been in dealings with more than one publisher to coordinate its publication, and Rorty himself

had encouraged him to materialize the project, expressing his wish to see it appear also in English. Let us hope that the project continues to move ahead and that we may be able to have the work which he himself decided to bequeath us.

It is surprising how intense and how vast the grief has been in the Latinamerican Philosophical community for the death of Eduardo Rabossi. The fact that we are here today giving homage to him is a sign of it, and similar signs have been happening, and will so continue, in other American philosophical events. We realize, give life, in this way, to a ritual that is part of the very essence of philosophical *areté*. Because we don't just recognize his intellectual virtuosity, his wisdom or his permanent contribution to the life of philosophy in Latin America, but also we come together here to celebrate and strengthen our vocation and our profession as philosophers, on the basis of the traces of his presence amongst us. Eduardo Rabossi, original philosopher, wise man, loving friend, would have understood if, thinking about him, we found ourselves "feeling / that life is but a breath/ that twenty years is nothing / that feverishly our gaze/ wandering amongst the shadows/ seeks for you and names you./ To live/ with our soul fixed/ on a sweet remembrance/ for which I once again weep".

(Translated from Spanish by Victor J. Krebs)