

THE IMPACT OF JUSTUS BUCHLER: AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AT STONY BROOK

The Department of Philosophy at Stony Brook University convened a conference in honor of its Ph.D. program and graduates ("Celebrating Thirty Years of Stony Brook Philosophy Doctorates") held October 8-11, 2003. At the request of conference organizer, Hugh J. Silverman, Richard Hart and James Campbell organized a panel focused on American philosophy at Stony Brook. The decision was taken to look specifically at the work of Justus Buchler, the leading figure in American philosophy at Stony Brook. Contributions were solicited from individuals who studied with Buchler. Each was to be a remembrance, while also addressing the impact Buchler had on the person's work in philosophy, inclusive of research and publication, teaching, and professional service. The following collection of essays represents the presentations by panelists. They are offered in tribute to Buchler, and in gratitude to the Department of Philosophy at Stony Brook University.

Richard E. Hart and James Campbell

"Justus Buchler's Impact on My Approach to Philosophy."

Robert Kent Bunch, Bloomfield College

There are those of us who are philosophers in the true sense. We philosophize. And there are those of us who are students of philosophy. For while we study philosophy, critically investigate philosophies and even study the lives of philosophers, we do not philosophize--we do not create new philosophies. Then, there are those of us who are students of philosophy and philosophers. We study philosophy and we philosophize. Justus Buchler is a philosopher in the true sense as well as in the sense of being a student of philosophy. Buchler rigorously studied others' philosophies and identified their pitfalls before setting out his own philosophy. He then philosophized--he asserted his own system of philosophy.

I regard Justus Buchler as one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. He taught me while I was a graduate student at SUNY Stony Brook--he spoke only edited text. I attended a mid 1970's Fairfield University Conference devoted to Buchler's work. There I observed Buchler magnificently presenting, clarifying, and defending his perspective. It was far more exciting than watching Bruce Lee perform his Kung fu. I have studied Buchler's *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* and made it the ontological foundation of my own approach to philosophy; it frames ontological inquiry, identifies the ontological problems of philosophical perspectives, and resolves the ontological problems of those who preceded him. To wit, Descartes is usually presented as an ontological dualist, but within Buchler's frame of reference, Descartes is more importantly and more clearly understood as an ontological priorist--or more particularly, as an Idealist.

Those of Buchler's writings which have most influenced me are his *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* (I have two editions in use and two still shrink-wrapped, just in case), *The Concept of Method*, and *Nature and Judgment*. From *Nature and Judgment*, I have taken Buchler's basic concept of judgment and his three identifiable modes of judgment (assertive, active, and exhibitivive judgment). These, along with founding my approach to inquiry on Buchler's "ordinal naturalism" (as Beth Singer calls it) have stood me well in my inquiries and queries into the nature and kinds of theories and into just what are the constituents and relations among constituents of theories. In passing, I should note that I use Buchler's book, *The Concept of Method*, as a general guide for my own research and writing. In this work, he carefully deliberates not only the concept of "method" but also those of "inquiry" and "query" and provides what I have found to be excellent discussions and conceptions of each.

By starting with Buchler's understanding of natural complexes, I am able to take an ontologically neutral approach to the study of the theories put forth by other philosophers and scientists. The key concepts and principles that I use are Buchler's understandings: (1) that "whatever is in whatever way is a natural complex"; (2) that every complex is a constituent of some order; (3) that every complex is an order that includes other complexes as its constituents or traits; (4) that every complex has boundaries, an integrity, an identity, scope

(comprehensiveness and pervasiveness), a structure, and contours; (5) that a complex may prevail (admit no new traits) or alesce (admit new traits); (6) that no one complex is any more or less real than another (Buchler's *Principle of Ontological Parity*); (7) that whatever is, is; and (8) that one cannot both name a complex and say that it does not exist without contradiction (for instance, one cannot say without contradiction that "God does not exist.")

I not only founded my dissertation, *What Is a Theory*, mainly on Buchler's perspective, but continue to use his perspective as modified in my dissertation to pursue and resolve some fundamental problems of logic. Foremost among these problems are answering the questions: What is a sentence? What is a statement? What is a proposition? What is a term? What is a construct? What is a sign? What is a letter? What is a mark? What is a premise? What is a conclusion? What is an argument? How are these constituents of theories related to each other and what are their kinds?

I have been able to find the ways in which propositions can be related and the ways in which statement can be related. And I have been able to ask whether conjuncts, disjuncts, or conditionals are sufficient conditions of relatedness between or among two statements that have no common propositions, terms, constructs, species or genera. Here, there is no space to present my detailed answers to these questions. So, I leave it to you to review the variety of notions of "argument," "statement," "sentence," "proposition" and "term" presented in logic texts--and in extended treatises and ruminations by those philosophers who think they can know the meaning of a proposition by knowing its truth instead of knowing the truth of a proposition by knowing its meaning.

I have constructed a logically consistent taxonomy of the variety of constituents of theories, arguments, and statements. Therein, I have found the ways in which theories can be critically and systematically analyzed, evaluated, and compared. Further, I am able to differentiate the ontological, phenomenological and epistemological perspectives of philosophers and scientists by the kinds of principles of ontological priority (assertions that "some complex is more or less real than another") which they employ. Hence, I can understand and

clearly communicate to my students just how it is the case that a philosopher is either a holist or atomist, either a collectivist or individualist, either an idealist or materialist, either teleologist or mechanist or ontologically neutral in one or more respects. Further, in sociology courses, I have shown students how principles of ontological priority (now posing as principles of sociological priority) are combined and used in functionalist, social action, social process, interaction, cultural deterministic, Marxist and other theories. This is particularly important, because it shows students that when making assumptions about what is, how complexes are related and just what causes what, philosophers and scientists sometimes make mistakes from which they cannot recover—mistakes that box them into a corner from which there is no exit except intellectual suicide by contradiction. Hence, students learn that good theorizing requires contemplation of ontological questions.

In summary, Buchler has not just provided a solid foundation for my philosophical inquiries. He has empowered me to systematically study others' philosophies and to philosophize—to assert my own perspectives of theories and to develop systematic methods by which theories can be analyzed, evaluated, and compared. In addition, he has further enabled me to do what he recognized I do—ramify his perspective—in fact he called me a "ramifier." Just one passing note—never say "word games" when in Buchler's presence—and Buchler is still present.

"The Implications of Ordinality."

John Ryder, State University of New York

I have titled these remarks 'The Implications of Ordinality' because ordinality is the philosophic concept that most generally characterizes Justus Buchler's work. It is not, however, his only distinctive concept. His theory of judgment, and the attendant approach to experience, are also both unique and profound, as are such categories as preception through which he understands human being. At the more general metaphysical level Buchler introduced another important concept or principle, that of ontological parity, which also goes a long way to distinguishing his philosophical perspective from most others. In these pages I would