

claim latent in human existence itself is the claim of valid perpetuation."<sup>3</sup> This sort of validation, however, comes to few.

Even within our relatively narrow philosophical circle, an individual could complete graduate study, continue an active research life, teach a career's worth of classes, and still never come across the work, or even the name, of Justus Buchler. Such individuals do not feel inadequate – and maybe they should not – but it is still unfortunate for them that they were not exposed to and nurtured by his well-crafted and penetrating insights.<sup>4</sup> This reminder that philosophical quality alone does not guarantee popular success should commit us to further efforts to validate Buchler's work. Prevalence as a philosophical figure requires favorable circumstances; but, as James has taught us, these circumstances remain at least partly under our control.

#### NOTES:

1. Cf. Beth J. Singer: "the absence of a theory of morality is the most conspicuous gap in Buchler's metaphysics of judgment" (*Ordinal Naturalism: An introduction to the Philosophy of Justus Buchler* [Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1983], 218).

2. This readiness is a corollary to such Jamesian comments as: "Our fields of experience have no more definite boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed forever by a *more* that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds" (*Essays in Radical Empiricism*. [Cambridge: Harvard UP, (1912) 1976 ], 35).

3. Buchler. *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment* (New York: Columbia UP, 1951), 140-141.

4. We all recognize, of course, that, just as others would benefit from the study of Buchler, we would benefit from the study of an innumerable set of other philosophers.

### **"Ontological Parity and Philosophy (Teaching)"**

Richard E. Hart, Bloomfield College

Sidney Gelber has written that "A philosopher invents and shapes categories in order to render the world more intelligible," and to further "...the inventive life of human beings" (10). This statement captures for me the

central goal of Justus Buchler's career in philosophy. Through his teachings and writings, Buchler provided a fundamental insight that has permeated and shaped my life and work in philosophy; to wit, that every theory, every attempted explanation or account, every discipline of enquiry or creation, is underridden and shaped by a metaphysics. The understanding, analysis and critique of the metaphysical foundation are the keys to first grasping and then fully understanding and using any theory or disciplinary practice. Further, such allows for an impartial evaluation of the adequacy and usefulness of any theory or purported explanation.

In the case of Buchler's own original work, his "principle of ontological parity" has had the most lasting impact on my understanding of the nature of philosophy and philosophical enquiry, and on my teaching of philosophy. With ontological parity, whatever is "is," in some order of relatedness and with equal status ontologically. As Buchler says in relation to poetry, ontological parity, as the guiding light of poetry, "imposes...an acceptance of all complexes as 'there', as complexes to be dealt with, no matter in what way they are named or categorized" (125). In what follows I wish to briefly address some of the substantive, technical implications of ontological parity, but more importantly discuss what I regard as the spirit, attitude, and posture of ontological parity. I am interested, both personally and professionally, in what happens, what fundamental re-orientations within philosophy and teaching occur, when ontological parity becomes fully absorbed into one's philosophical bloodstream. I believe that it inevitably and radically alters the conception of the nature of philosophy and what one does in research and teaching.

Buchler's contention that what he calls the three modes of human judgment—assertive, exhibitivite, and active (thinking, making and doing)—are all equal in range and value, reflects the same tone as ontological parity (Gelber 8). What are the conceptual and practical implications of such a philosophic sentiment? What impact did it have on his students? I will answer in four ways, each one interrelated with the others.

First, Buchler was deadly serious about the history of philosophy and the contributions of the great figures. In

his presence (whether in his books or his seminar room), the history of philosophy is never calcified, never dead and gone. It is history, of course, and ideas and theories have been inevitably expanded, updated and improved upon over time. But the great philosophers and their theories, in a real sense, live on. Upon careful scrutiny, important concepts or principles may well emerge from any source, at any time, and impact our thinking in constructive and unexpected ways. In all his classes, Buchler made students study, with near surgical precision, the great philosophers of the past. He was always on the prowl for an original notion, a useful concept that added to the deliberations at hand. He wanted students to first understand, as fully as possible, a philosopher's work, and only then be critical. He could be exacting and seemingly merciless at times in his dismantling and critique of any text under consideration. But he was always respectful and open-minded. He did not foreclose options. He wanted his students to be critical appreciators. In this connection, I shall never forget Buchler's high regard for such diverse philosophers as Spinoza, Husserl, Whitehead, G. E. Moore or Dewey. He was well schooled in all the traditions and styles that constitute the history of philosophy. Philosophy simply could not proceed without a deep reliance on its' history.

Secondly, Buchler was not wedded, as so many are, to a view of philosophic method as narrow, highly technical logic chopping and hair splitting. While a precise and discriminating as any great philosopher must be, his basic philosophic method was what he called "query." His work resonates with the life of query, which meant for him ongoing, disciplined exploration of any and all sources and practices. His was a rigor that was simultaneously expansive, never closed off to possibilities. Buchler was by disposition inclined to derive philosophic insight and stimulation from wherever it could be found (Gelber 10). A poem or a social movement, a scientific theory or a political rally, could be, for him, as pregnant with possibilities as a philosophical treatise.

This anticipates the third implication of ontological parity. He was thoroughly interdisciplinary in the fullest and richest sense of the term. Instead of simply throwing two disciplines or fields together, hoping that such artificial union might yield results, Buchler intensely probed the arts, the natural sciences, history and culture

for additional and unique philosophical sustenance. After working with Buchler for a time, I came to appreciate the important differences between philosophy and \_\_\_\_\_, philosophy in \_\_\_\_\_, and philosophy of \_\_\_\_\_. Through the course of my own career, I have made constructive use of all three conjunctions, responding to context and need. Were it not for Buchler, my understanding of the nature of interdisciplinary studies would have remained muddle-headed and unproductive.

Each of the prior three points relates directly to the fourth. Well before it became fashionable, or an important, democratizing movement within the American Philosophical Association, Buchler was a pluralist. What I regard as his "Socratic spirit" kept him forever open-minded and forward thinking, a stance he considered crucial to any meaningful enquiry. He was never bounded by a single method or technique. He was no fan of ideologies, philosophical fashions, slogans, fixed ideas of truth or ultimate value. As one of the originating members of the ever-growing Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, he was a pioneering force. When the title for the new organization was being debated (over 30 years ago), I am told that Buchler was the one who insisted that the word "Advancement" was the most important aspect of the name. For him, such an association of philosophers and other interested parties should not assemble simply for the purpose of tedious scholarship on the great contributors to the classical American tradition. The principle objective for him was to move American philosophy forward, to reach new insights, new areas of application, new interdisciplinary connections. The works of the past were to be studied critically, respected but not revered. American philosophy needed to advance if it were to remain vital to philosophy in general and intellectual life broadly.

Buchler's impact on my career in teaching largely, and naturally, parallels what has already been said about his conception of the nature of philosophy and philosophical work. He made me realize that all philosophy teaching presumes some working concept of the nature of philosophy. He reinforced within me the notion that teaching philosophy is, at some point, an inevitable invitation to interdisciplinary pursuits. He, also, taught, by example, the importance of general education for university

students. As many know, he had extensive experience with crafting and administering general education programs (Contemporary Civilization) during his years at Columbia University. He often spoke of this as the most fundamental intellectual experience of his life. For many years I have been fine-tuning the Philosophy in Literature course that I regularly offer. In a Buchlerian spirit, I am forever exploring the myriad ways in which philosophical enquiry and experience are articulated in and through works of literature. I have long been involved, at Bloomfield College, as lecturer and now coordinator, with the Sophomore Core, an interdisciplinary, core course representing diverse perspectives and methods and organized around the generic theme of social responsibility. All students must complete a volunteer, community-service project along with the usual academic work of research and writing. Over the years, I've enjoyed teaching a variety of courses in interdisciplinary arts and humanities, as well as special topics courses on philosophy and the environment, philosophy and technology, and philosophy and social theory. Buchler widened my perspective and reinforced the legitimacy of such research and teaching. Through his own interests and writings, he demonstrated how such interdisciplinary activity enhances philosophic understanding, at times leading to conceptual breakthroughs that would otherwise remain hidden, leaving us bereft, insulated in technical analysis, and speaking only to ourselves.

With regard to my research and writing, the picture is again quite similar. My dissertation, *Theories of Literature: A Comparative, Metaphysical Study* (1984), unearthed, explored and critiqued the metaphysical foundations of a variety of literary theories, including Buchler's. The three books I have subsequently edited or co-edited all involve interdisciplinary enquiries as related to environment, Plato's dialogues and contemporary transitions within American philosophy. My published essays on figures such as Dewey, Langer, Buber and Buchler typically probe assumptions and underlying foundations, influenced by Buchler's method of metaphysical investigation. My more recent essays on Shakespeare and Steinbeck have afforded me an opportunity to further demonstrate how philosophy and query are manifest within literary contexts.

Buchler would no doubt have some sharp questions for me about the work I have here described. He would likely want to make adjustments to my account of how he understood the nature and practice of philosophy. But I am certain he would have been supportive and encouraging. In one sense, he has been gone for many years. But insofar as his students, persons like myself, feel a steady line of influence connecting Buchler's teachings and writings from a half century (or more) ago to our present activities in philosophy, he has never left us.

#### WORKS CITED

Buchler, Justus, *The Main of Light: On The Concept of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Gelber, Sidney, "Notes and Reflections on Justus Buchler," in *Nature's Perspectives*, edited by Marsoobian, A, Wallace, K. and Corrington, R. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991.

#### **"Breaking the Linguistic Stronghold on Meaning: The Case of the Arts."**

Armen T. Marsoobian, Southern Connecticut State University

Richard Hart's invitation to participate in this panel gave me an opportunity to reflect back over the years that have passed since I began my studies here at Stony Brook. The panel's title, "The Impact of Justus Buchler: American Philosophy at Stony Brook," gave me the lens through which to look back. Buchler introduced me to American philosophy and, in particular, the two key figures in my philosophical life, Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey. In the late 70s these philosophers were not widely read nor discussed in the then dominant philosophical circles. This picture has changed considerably in the intervening years. There has been a renewed interest, both in philosophy and in many non-philosophical disciplines, in their writings. The chief interest has been on Peirce and Dewey's pragmatism and also, in Peirce's case, his semiotics. A greater acceptance of pragmatism can be found in parts of the mainstream analytic tradition, witness the work of Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty. Within my area of