

## Ezequiel de Olaso<sup>1</sup>

1932-1996

Ezequiel de Olaso was one of the most prominent historians of philosophy. He contributed enormously to arousing interest in a wide range of topics in the history of philosophy through his writings, his teachings, his lectures in Latin America, North America and Europe, and his participation in many many conferences. He was a very close friend and collaborator with me in many projects. His passing is a great personal loss. And the philosophical community throughout the World will feel that it has lost a great friend, leader and contributor.

After beginning his advanced study in philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires (Where he wrote a thesis on methodic and critical doubt in Spinoza and Leibniz), he did his doctoral studies with the famous Spanish philosopher, Jose Ferrater Mora, in Byrn Mawr Pennsylvania, writing on Leibniz and Greek Scepticism. It was during the period of his studies in the United States that we first met, and discussed our common interests in the role of scepticism in the history of modern philosophy. An article of mine on Leibniz and the French Sceptics appeared in 1966. Ezequiel undertook to go much further into the subject, and to see what Leibniz knew about ancient scepticism, and how his knowledge and interest was reflected in his philosophy. Ezequiel tracked down and later published Leibniz's notes on answering the scepticism of Sextus Empiricus. His several studies on Leibniz and scepticism are all important for understanding how Leibniz reacted to the revival of Pyrrhonian scepticism, and to understanding how this is reflected in his system.

Ezequiel went on to consider scepticism in Hobbes's theory of reason and law, in Hume, in Father Feijoo, and in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among

---

<sup>1</sup> Originalmente publicado em *Kriterion*, n. 94.

others. With a deep knowledge of the classical sources and of modern philosophers, and with his most careful examination of texts and issues, he was able to present significant understandings of philosophers from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

In addition to his scholarly contribution Ezequiel was in the forefront of training a new generation of scholars, and of bringing together scholars from Latin America, North America and Europe. He was a professor at various Argentinian institutions, ending his career as professor of Philosophy at the University of San Andreas. Ezequiel taught at the University of San Juan, Puerto Rico (1957 and 1969), at the Center for Logic, Epistemology and History of Science at Campinas in Brazil, 1975-1977, as well as at Colgate University in New York in 1991.

It is my understanding that he was in large measure responsible for arranging for the Spanish translation of my *History of Scepticism* in Mexico in 1983. Using his own work, mine and that of Charles Schmitt, Ezequiel created interest all over Latin America in the history of scepticism, resulting in many conferences from Buenos Aires to Riverside, California on the subject. A new generation of scholars, such as José R. Maia Neto, are emerging as the ones to carry further the examination of the role of scepticism in modern philosophy.

Many people in the Americas and Europe will remember and thank Ezequiel for his role in bringing together an international group of historians of philosophy. The conferences he organized in Argentina, and in California, and his participation in many gatherings in North America and Europe made him an ambassador of the Republic of Letters. His interest and concern have encouraged many of us from beginners to senior citizens to carry on our researches, and to try to make them worthy of his standards. He sought out people everywhere who were concerned with understanding scepticism ancient and modern. He made their work known to the Spanish speaking world, especially in his writings in the *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofía*. He recognized the genuine international character of scholarly research that knows no borders geographically and linguistically.

He and I were concerned about the lack of intellectual contact between scholars and students in Latin America and those in North America and Europe. We tried in our various ways to bring people together either personally or through publications and correspondence. Hopefully we each in our own ways have contributed to breaking down the artificial barriers that have grown up over time, and opened up the possibility of a genuinely new international world of scholars and scholarship. Once Ezequiel was allowed to

travel, after the fall of the Argentinian junta, we met in many parts of globe, first in Atlanta in 1982, then in Buenos Aires, London, Paris, Wolfenbuttel, Germany, Leiden. We last met right here in Los Angeles in November 1995. Ezequiel came to a conference I had organized at the William Andrews Clark Library of UCLA on "Leibniz and Religion". After the conference, Ezequiel and his lovely wife, Marta, came to our home. I knew that he had had serious heart problems, but he looked well. He told me he felt fine. So it was a very great shock to learn a few months later that he had passed away.

At this point I think that I and others who have worked with him, and have had the good fortune to know him personally, should thank him for his most important contributions to scholarship and international relations of scholars, and for the unswerving encouragement he gave us (and for his careful critical evaluations of our work). Those of us who will continue to work in the areas that he was interested in will carry on his spirit, and will continue to be inspired by his ardent concern for understanding the dynamics of the history of philosophy, especially the interaction of scepticism and dogmatism through the ages.

Ezequiel has left us the treasures of his publications, his study of Unamuno, his writings on Leibniz and his Spanish edition of some of Leibniz's writings, his book on the scepticism of Hume and Rousseau, his volume of the *Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Filosofía* dealing with philosophy from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and his forthcoming *Estudios Latinoamericanos de Filosofía Moderna* in collaboration with Jose Antonio Robles of the UNAM of Mexico. He has also left us over seventy important articles in Latin American, European and North American journals. In the very near future I will send to the *International Archives of the History of Ideas* a volume of eight essays by Ezequiel, the late Giorgio Tonelli, and myself, on scepticism in the Enlightenment. I hope that this will be a fitting tribute to his contributions and to our friendship. I also hope, as Ezequiel and I discussed when last we met, that it will bring a new era in interpreting the sceptical strains in European philosophy in the later part of the eighteenth century

Let us carry on his work and ideals.

Richard H. Popkin  
Washington University St. Louis  
UCLA