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osep Lluís Blasco, politician and philosopher

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abstract

Josep-Lluís Blasco (1940-2003) was an inspired ideologist to the political parties embodying nationalist and leftist positions in the Valencian Country. In regard to Philosophy, Blasco awoke an interest in analytic philosophy and took part in one of the most successful projects the Faculty of Philosophy of Valencia ever endeavored: the international symposia on Logic and Philosophy of Science and the publication of the journal *Teorema*. His work counts as one of the most solid contributions our culture has yielded within the field of Epistemology.

key words

Josep-Lluís Blasco, Catalan Philosophy, Analytical Philosophy, Epistemology.

Professor Josep Lluís Blasco was born in Sagunto in 1940. Determining what his main concern, aspiration or personal motivation was throughout his life would entail having to decide whether his philosophical inclination was more weighty than his political interests, and that would be no easy assignment. Blasco showed a lively social and political conscience from an early age. He embarked on an Arts degree in 1959¹ and was diligent in his course work while also being among the critical and active students who were striving to contest the inertia of the Franco regime, which also permeated the university milieu. Finding comrades in the struggle was fundamental for Blasco. He lost no time in joining the cause of political Valencian nationalism, with eyes set on left-wing and nationalist political movements. Halfway through the nineteen sixties he became a member of the *Partit Socialista Valencià* (PSV – Valencian

1 He began this degree a year after having started a Law degree and continued studying the two courses simultaneously.

Socialist Party). However, it should be noted that this party disintegrated and, some years later, around 1974, Blasco and a group of people sharing his political views founded the Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional (PSAN – Socialist Party of National Liberation) in the País Valencià.² The other left-wing nationalist party, Partit Socialista del País Valencià (PSPV – Socialist Party of the País Valencià), was subsequently absorbed by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE – Spanish Socialist Party).

The prospects for nationalism in the País Valencià were complicated since being successful in the elections meant renouncing certain “pure” positions and opting to occupy the “vacuum” left by the Partit Socialista del País Valencià when it was absorbed by the PSOE. In those times it was not easy to understand that working in the political arena and being able to bring about change meant occupying positions of power, and those positions could only be occupied if they were won in elections. After the Franco regime ended the level of electoral practice was low. This “feet on the ground” project meant that Blasco would perforce fall out with some of his comrades who championed positions that, as was subsequently proven, led to electoral defeat. If the Valencian nationalists wished to win the elections, they had to introduce changes and make the effort to come to some agreement, et cetera. The creation of the Unió del Poble Valencià (UPV – Valencian People’s Union), which culminated with the creation of the Bloc Nacionalista Valencià (BLOC – Valencian Nationalist Bloc) were moves in this direction. Blasco was both driving force and ideologist in these parties.

Throughout his academic career, Blasco was aware of the nature of the society in which he lived and the role that the university should play therein. Hence, when he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, he resolutely defended the Catalan language, without hesitation or ambiguity. This was not an easy option at the time. In the post-Franco, heavily Castilian-influenced Valencia, Blasco’s position did not remotely represent a majority view. On the contrary, the environment was hostile to his political leanings. This is one of

2 The historic Regne de València (Kingdom of Valencia, 1239 – 1707) has also been officially known, in the Spanish context, as the Comunitat Valenciana (Valencian Community) since the first Statute of Autonomy in 1982. It consists of three provinces (Alicante, Valencia and Castellón) whose bounds more or less coincide with those of the old Regne de València, with the city of Valencia as its capital. “Valencia” can thus refer to the city, the province and the Community, while the adjective “Valencian” also includes the Valencian language, which has a linguistic community of about half the population of the Comunitat Valenciana. The term “País Valencià” came into use in the eighteenth century and became popular after the 1960s in leftist and nationalist circles since it did not imply the Spanish frame of reference [translator].

Blasco's merits: he was appointed Dean without having to conceal his views about the country, the language and the kind of university he wanted.

Observing his activities in the different spheres –academic, philosophical and political– in which he moved, one might wonder how he attained the deanship, how he came to have the utmost prestige in the Department of Metaphysics when he was such a non-metaphysical man, how he introduced analytical philosophy into the University of Valencia, and so on. I shall try to explain, then, how Blasco, with his critical and rational character, made the difficult easy in the very different domains of his career. Some examples speak for themselves.

The Philosophy Department in the Arts Faculty of the University of Valencia had only been established four years before Blasco started to study Philosophy. It was staffed by teachers transferred from Murcia who went along with the routine inertia, teaching the typical impoverished scholastic philosophy of the day. True renovation did not happen then but later, from 1960 to 1962, when three new professors came to the University of Valencia: Carlos París, to occupy the Chair of Foundations of Philosophy; José Luis Pinillos, who occupied that of Psychology; and Manuel Garrido who, after getting through some rather controversial public examinations, was to occupy the Chair of Logic. Of the three professors, it was Garrido who stayed longest in Valencia, while the other two moved to Madrid after a few years. Blasco was taught by all three, from his second to fourth year: Foundations and Logic with Carlos París; Philosophy of Nature and Anthropology with José Luis Pinillos; and Metaphysics with Manuel Garrido. The latter was very highly regarded among his students as he used the texts in the original language for his classes and this, since he was dealing with authors like Aristotle, who was generally studied in the scholastic versions, was remarkable at the time. Blasco was soon to make his presence felt. He studied with unusual rigour and, in fourth year Metaphysics, had the chance to demonstrate to Garrido his attentive reading of Heidegger. The following year, when he finished his degree, Garrido had him contracted to teach a weekly class in Metaphysics. He was thus to combine university work with the classes he was starting to teach at the Lluís Vives Secondary School.

Blasco was preparing to write a dissertation on the concept of totality in Whitehead. His intellectual curiosity, however, led him to become interested in a wide range of authors who were beginning to make their name although little was as yet known about them. Hence he went from studying the category of Being in Whitehead and Heidegger to wanting to know what Wittgenstein, the logical positivists and, in general, the analytical philosophers had to say about it. Accordingly, as a result of his inquiries into this new line of thought, he forsook his original metaphysical concerns and came to focus his attention exclusively on epistemological questions. Eventually, in 1971, he wrote his doctoral thesis on Wittgenstein and analytical philosophy.

Studying this philosophical trend was not an easy choice in those years. In general, the new material came in from Germany. It is praiseworthy, therefore, that not only did he discover new authors in this milieu that was so resistant to change but that his progress from his early readings influenced by logical positivism to his subsequent transcendentalist readings of Wittgenstein was a solitary endeavour. It is common knowledge that the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Valencia played a fundamental role with regard to the study and cultivation of analytical philosophy in the Catalan cultural domain. It is also well known that Garrido, when he arrived in Valencia, had to learn symbolic logic at the same time as his students and that he was discovering the new philosophical tendencies together with junior teaching staff members who were joining the Department. While it is true that Garrido played no essential role in directing Blasco's thesis, he did give him "free rein", which was sufficient for Blasco.

This was the period in which the Faculty of Philosophy in Valencia was at the height of its splendour since it was working on one of its most productive and successful projects, the International Symposia on Logic and Philosophy of Science and, concurrently with these, the publication of the review *Teorema*, of which Blasco was a co-founder and the first secretary.

The symposia themselves were held from 1969 until 1974 and were all devoted to philosophy of science, cybernetics and analytical philosophy. With the exception of the second symposium, the proceedings were always published and they were all attended by world-famous philosophers and logicians, including C. Thiel, A. Diemer, H. Frank, G. Hasenjäger, W. O. Quine, D. Pears and P. F. Strawson.

Blasco presented papers in the last three, these dealing with his most recent studies in analytical philosophy. The third and the last of these symposia were, for different reasons, to have particular impact on his academic life.

The third symposium, which was devoted to Philosophy and Contemporary Spanish Science, was presided over by Ferrater Mora and was massively attended. The members of the public, mainly students, made use of the occasion to give explicit voice to their protests against the Franco regime, thereby turning the symposium into a rally. This was in 1971. This gathering, the professor from the University of Oviedo, Gustavo Bueno, wished to adopt the role of dialectical philosopher in opposition to the analytical line that was taken at the time by the Faculty of Philosophy in Valencia. The already-existent clash between analytical and dialectical philosophers came to a head in this forum. Bueno spoke after the paper presented by Blasco – "Anàlisi categorial" (Categorical Analysis) – immoderately attacking the philosophical inclinations of the Department in general. Both Garrido and Ferrater Mora made strenuous efforts

to find a way out of this situation, which was repeated still more vehemently later on with the paper presented by another lecturer in Logic, this time Jesús Mosterín from the University of Barcelona. The dialectical battles gave rise to all kinds of claims and produced a heated situation for which Garrido, in the last instance, was primarily responsible in the eyes of the public and academic authorities, inasmuch as he was the main organiser.

It is necessary to understand the complexity of the scene since the interests of the “school”, on the one hand, were confronted with political interests on the other. From a position on this occasion that was more dogmatic than critical, Gustavo Bueno sought to incarnate dialectical Marxism by attacking analytical philosophy as aseptic and detached from social reality. Then again, the students found that this was an ideal occasion to give voice to their claims against the repression of the Franco regime. Moreover, the situation was exacerbated with the expulsion of a lecturer who had discussed Marxist theories in class, which was the final detonator, or at least the most “visible” one, of the student protests. At this point, Blasco, together with one of the guest academics, Javier Muguerza, came to agreement over a solution with the leaders of the student assembly: they would read a manifesto in protest at the expulsion of the Marxist lecturer on condition that the congress could then proceed without further interruption. Garrido was relieved to see that the agitators respected their part of the pact. He, however, failed to honour the agreement. No manifesto was published in the proceedings, which put Blasco in a bad light, since it was he who had made the commitment to do this in reaching the accord. Garrido always suspected that Blasco had something to do with the revolt.

The two symposia that followed the third highly controversial one were held behind closed doors, attended only by teachers and students from the department and guest lecturers. In the latter event, held in the Sicània Hotel in Cullera, different papers were presented on the philosophy of Willard Van Orman Quine – the guest professor on that occasion – who then offered in-depth discussion of the lectures. This was highly productive. Subsequently, in 1974, Blasco engaged in correspondence with Professor Quine about some aspects of the Spanish translation of his work *Ontological Relativity*.

In March 1971, the Department of Logic working with the Department of History of Philosophy, launched a review –*Teorema*– of exceptional quality and rigour in those times. It was initially directed by two professors, Manuel Garrido and Fernando Montero, and was envisaged as a philosophical review that would embrace a wide range of tendencies: phenomenology, Marxism, structuralism, mathematical logic, philosophy of science, cybernetics and analytical philosophy, *inter alia*. Some months later Montero left the publication so that its production was entirely left to the Department of Logic, a circumstance that would end up tilting it still more towards analytical philosophy and

mathematical logic. *Teorema* published articles by members of the Department and those invited to the symposia, while the proceedings of the fourth and fifth symposia, for example, were published as monographic numbers of the review.

In 1973, with the book *Lenguaje, filosofía y conocimiento* (Language, Philosophy and Knowledge), the fruit of his doctoral thesis, Blasco offered a lucid, well-ordered account of analytical philosophy as practised in England and, in so doing, evinced his doubts and criticisms and set out his own conclusions. This thesis-based publication was brought out in Spanish by a Barcelona publishing house. However, Blasco had previously worked on the translation of different works into Catalan. In 1969, he had translated Althusser's *For Marx* and Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. With Tomàs Llorens, he also directed the essay collection "Garbí 3" in the publishing house Concret, which had been founded by Valerià Miralles, Alfons Cucó and Tomàs Llorens, then owners of a Valencia bookshop of the same name. The impediments presented by the Franco regime against publishing in Catalan were by no means inconsequential since permission to establish Catalan publishing houses in País Valencià was systematically denied. As a result, books produced by Concret and subsequently by Tres i Quatre, appeared with fictitious publication details. Such was the case with Althusser's book, which was ascribed to the publishing house Lavínia (located in Barcelona). The "Garbí 3" collection was followed by "Quaderns Tres i Quatre", directed by Vicent Raga, in which Blasco played his part in 1972 by writing the Prologue to a book by Galvano de la Volpe titled *Lògica materialista* (Materialist Logic).

Prologues tend to be written to support, summarise or highlight the thesis the author will be presenting and developing in the ensuing pages. On this occasion, though, Blasco spelled out the inefficacy of trying to apply a universal method –such as dialectics– to the different spheres of knowledge, among them, mathematical logic.

While it is true that these collaborative endeavours show Blasco's commitment to the language and culture of País Valencià, there was no truth in the accusation of the early seventies – which almost cost him his job – that he was fomenting and leading a "Marxist Catalan nationalist" insurrection in the bosom of the university, aided and abetted by his friend and colleague Alfons Cucó. Student revolts in those years were very spirited and the convulsive situation in the universities led the government to ban classes so that the faculties were only open for students to sit for examinations. Garrido came to an agreement with the lecturers in his Department to award a political pass mark to the students, a move that displeased the authorities in the Ministry of Education who, having learned of this, wanted the guilty parties to be called to account. A meeting of professors was called in which it was declared that there was a Marxist and Catalan nationalist plot led by the staff members Blas-

co and Cucó, who were held to be the real culprits behind the political pass and accused of having a pernicious influence on their colleagues. Logically, the Dean at the time, Julián San Valero, understood that an initiative such as a concerted political pass mark could not be solely the work of non-tenured lecturers. He was convinced that some professors had also been involved and was committed to taking adequate measures against them. When the Dean's response is analysed it is reasonable to surmise that, in fact, what was to be expected from the threat was that the professors would salvage the situation out of fear of reprisals. And thus it was. The professors concerned were made to sign a document stating that they had carried out oral examinations. Blasco was never willing to sign.

The consequences of the whole affair were immediately evident because when the occasion arose for joining the University's staff of assistant lecturers, both Blasco and Cucó, who met the requirements necessary for the new teaching posts, were excluded. The regime's authorities had decided to carry out an ideological purge in the universities. Fortunately, the appeals made by both after some time had passed – and after the death of Carrero Blanco – were successful.

After these events it was difficult for Blasco to work with any normality in the Department headed by Garrido. Fortunately for him, the professor of Metaphysics who had initially not shown any interest in the subject of Theory of Knowledge taught by Blasco –an indifference that ended up with this subject being transferred to the Department of Logic– left the University and the incoming professor of Metaphysics, Navarro Cordón, reclaimed Theory of Knowledge for his Department. This circumstance meant that Blasco changed his academic location, moving from the Department to Logic to that of Metaphysics in 1975. Since Navarro Cordón did not remain in Valencia very long, Blasco was soon to become head of the department. The Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Valencia was thus to acquire its own identity and analytical philosophers were working in different departments. Moreover, it was a faculty that, due to the fame it still enjoyed after the symposia and the publication of *Teorema*, tended more to science than to metaphysics.

Blasco was to make of every academic event a major piece of writing. While *Lenguaje, filosofía y conocimiento* arose from his doctoral thesis, the book *Significado y experiencia* (Meaning and Experience), which was published in 1984, was the product of his professorial memoirs. On this occasion, his criticism was aimed at logical positivism and its reductionist endeavours. Although he recognised the doses of clarity and rigour introduced by members of the Vienna Circle into their approach to traditional problems of philosophy, he did not believe that such problems could be avoided.

His last books, co-authored by Tobies Grimaltos who was first his student and then colleague in the Department, were *Teoria del coneixement* (Theory of Knowledge) and *Signo y pensamiento* (Symbol and Thought), published in 1997 and 1999, respectively. In the case of the latter work, Dora Sánchez was also a co-author. Both works were conceived of as manuals for students.

His inaugural speech as a permanent member of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Section at the Institute of Catalan Studies, delivered in December 1999, is one of his most important and original writings. On this occasion, in a relatively brief space, he elaborated his *La llibertat de la raó* (The Freedom of Reason) from a purely epistemological standpoint, without resorting to the practical dimension of human reason. It would not have been so original if he had spoken of the knowledge we have of freedom, or if he had pondered the freedom a researcher should or should not have in the course of research because, in one case it would have been a matter of discussing the epistemology of freedom while, in the other, it would have meant talking about professional ethics. He had a different idea: “I shall attempt to offer a direct explanation of the function of freedom in the structure of knowing”, which is to say he wished to deal with the question of freedom as a condition for the possibility of knowledge. If one speaks of freedom of knowledge, one is referring to practical effects and is definitively shifting into the terrain of morality. However, if one speaks of freedom by situating oneself within the structure of knowledge, one is on a different epistemological or theoretical plane.

In philosophy, it is possible to discern Blasco’s Kantian inspiration: human reason, while it may be limited does not as a result of that have to be deemed ineffective because, besides alerting us to the dangers of being misled by false illusions or the preponderance wielded by certain philosophical systems, it can become the best guide for managing human affairs. Blasco applied this rational, critical exercise to philosophy and politics and, in short, to the tasks for which he was responsible as Dean in the Faculty.

From an early age, Blasco understood that if one was to have any real influence in the political life of the country, having access to its institutions was essential. This idea explains his need to join the “Joan Lluís Vives” collective,³

3 The members of the Joan Lluís Vives collective were: Antoni Aucejo i Pérez, senior lecturer in Technical Chemistry; Josep Maria Aulló i Reverte, non-tenured assistant lecturer in Chemical Physics; Josep Ll. Blasco i Estellés, senior lecturer in Metaphysics and Theory of Knowledge; Emèrit Bono i Martínez, professor of Political Economy; Joan Brines i Blasco, assistant lecturer in Contemporary History of Spain; Joan Brines i Solanes, senior lecturer in Paediatrics; Antoni Ferrando i Francés, senior lecturer in Valencian Linguistics; Agustí Flors i Bonet, research fellow at the Institute of Agricultural Chemistry and Food Technology of Valencia (CSIC – Spanish Council for Scientific Research); Ramon Lapiedra i Civera,

where he would become one of its most outstanding members. The collective appeared in 1983 with the intention of “taking a stand” within and from the university. This group of academics explicitly set out the need to deal with and discuss matters that directly affected both the university sector and the citizens of País Valencià in general. From the legitimacy that was logically bestowed on them as members of the educational structure of the day, they called for a space in which it would be possible to express opinions on issues of special relevance, for example the unity of language in the Països Catalans.⁴ As they explained, they did not aspire to pronouncing “definitive verdicts” but to offer well-argued and justified opinions in their capacity as experts.

It must be said that not all the members were of the same political bent but it is also true that, while they were not motivated by party considerations and were not aiming at any specific political action, neither were they moved by purely erudite concerns nor even by a desire to engage in exclusively academic activities. Their purpose was to offer guidance at a time of utter disorientation. In a nutshell, it was that. When they declared as a priority the need to cooperate in bringing about cultural standardisation in País Valencià, they understood “cultural” in the fullest sense. This basically meant acting on three levels: university policy, linguistic standardisation, and defence and improvement of the natural environment and the historic and artistic heritage of País Valencià. If one focuses on each of the three areas of action, one finds that, with regard to university policy, it was deemed urgent to reinforce the independence of academic decisions *vis-à-vis* the tightly partisan and electioneering decisions being made outside the university. How to go about it? Public denunciation of instrumental activities and the university’s acquiescence in them. As for linguistic standardisation, it was a question of promoting the use of the language and engaging in initiatives appropriate for ensuring that such use was authentic. They posited that the linguistic unity proclaimed by all the pertinent scientific institutions had been questioned for political reasons – those of the Spanish right – without any criterion of objective value. In this case, it was essential to shed all ambiguity so as to meet the demands of the task of institutionalisation of Catalan at all levels of teaching. Finally, with respect to the maintenance, defence, and improvement of Valencian heritage, collaboration between and coordination of

professor of Theoretical Mechanics; Antoni Martínez i Andreu, senior lecturer in Technical Chemistry; Vicent Martínez i Sancho, senior lecturer in General Physics; Josep Ll. Pitarch i Tortajada, lecturer in charge of the Valencian Linguistics course; Josep Ros i Pallarés, professor of Mechanics and Waves. All the members were from the University of Valencia.

4 This term coined at the end of the nineteenth century with more cultural than political connotations is nowadays commonly used by Catalan nationalists to designate the territories in which the Catalan language is spoken [translator].

the different initiatives had to be achieved by keeping partisan interests at bay since these were adverse to the interests of País Valencià.

As a teacher at the University and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and subsequently of Education Sciences, Blasco made a decisive contribution in the university reforms that were undertaken during the vice-chancellorship of Ramon Lapiedra. In the twenty years of the collective's existence, a great number of articles were produced and Blasco took part in the writing of a considerable part of them.

Apart from the years between 1975 and 1979, in which he was basically engaged in politics, Blasco's activities were eminently linked with teaching. He could have stopped giving classes quite early on since the illness from which he suffered left him, after a final operation, without vocal cords. However, he learned to speak without them and continued to give classes and to participate in all spheres of university life. As Dean, he continued to work thus, making his presence heard more with his good sense than with his voice. In a letter addressed to Manuel Garrido many years earlier, Blasco expressed what was, for him, a matter of paramount importance. He wished to counter the rumour that was then circulating at the Complutense University of Madrid claiming that he was physically unable to give classes and would therefore not opt for the chair which, as we now know, he eventually came to occupy. This idea was excruciating for Blasco as he did not want to stop giving classes, or to leave the university, and neither did he want to forego his chances of winning the chair in the public examination that was scheduled some months after his operation. He explained that he had made progress in speaking and how, with the help of a microphone, he had been acquiring the necessary fluency for speaking in public. He did recognise that he tired easily but offered assurance to his former teacher with regard to the speed of his progress. He wanted to challenge the false rumour of "retirement".

In many instances academicism has led to an inertia that is difficult to break, a distancing between institutions and cultural life. This time, however, one finds an essentially academic man – lecturer in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Valencia, Dean of this faculty for many years, member of the Institute of Catalan Studies, et cetera – who was free of the ideological fiction that tends to accompany such cases.

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