

Book Reviews

Antonio Pintor-Ramos, *Nudos en la filosofía de Zubiri*. Publicaciones Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca/Caja Duero, paperbound, 2006, 257 pp, 16€.

This book is another superb contribution to Zubiri scholarship by Antonio Pintor-Ramos, arguably one of the greatest Zubiri scholars of today. The book is an in-depth investigation of some critical issues of Zubiri's thought, with emphasis on their historical context. Included are the influence of pragmatism on Zubiri, the relationship of Zubiri and Kant, and the (frustrated) reception accorded Zubiri's metaphysics, primarily centering around *Sobre la esencia*. The primary focus of this book is the early development of Zubiri's thought, and the problems that arose in connection with some of Zubiri's first works, though Zubiri's later, mature thought is discussed as well. The present book nicely complements Pintor-Ramos' other books on Zubiri, including *Génesis y formación de la filosofía de Zubiri*, *Realidad y sentido: Desde una inspiración zubiriano*, and *Realidad y verdad: Las bases de la filosofía de Zubiri*.

As usual in Pintor-Ramos' work, the writing is precise, insightful, well-researched, and exhibits great attention to detail without being pedantic in the least. Manifest at every turn is his broad and deep acquaintance with the history of philosophy, especially contemporary philosophy, and with the corpus of Zubiri's work. This makes a careful reading of the text necessary but very rewarding. The book unquestionably belongs in every Zubiri library.

The discussion of pragmatism and its influence on is very deep and very broad. Though Zubiri dismissed pragmatism, positivism, and historicism early in his career, with an acute observation in *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* that is still valid today, Pintor-Ramos looks for influences of these currents of thought in Zubiri's mature work, not as theories Zubiri would ever embrace, but as influencing sentient intelligence, especially Zubiri's emphasis on its physical basis.

Curiously, when discussing one branch of pragmatism, logical positivism and the Vienna Circle (*Wiener Kreis*), Pintor-Ramos does not mention the most famous of the ideas of that anti-metaphysical school, namely the Verification Principle, according to which the meaning of a statement is its method of verification. Since metaphysical statements cannot be verified—so the argument ran—they are therefore meaningless. Unfortunately, the Verification Principle itself could not be verified, leaving a massive contradiction at the heart of the school, a blow from which it never recovered. Nor does he discuss the nominalist tendencies of most of the pragmatists, and Zubiri's implied critique of nominalism, which comes out clearly in his writings on mathematics and Gödel's theorem. However the purpose of the book is not to discuss and critique the ideas of these schools, but to look for their influence on Zubiri, who never mentions the Verification Principle in his work (though he must have been aware of it). Evidently Zubiri thought it unworthy of attention.

Indeed, Zubiri's thought was always in the metaphysical direction [p. 148], in contrast to the anti-metaphysical beliefs of the pragmatist and positivist schools. Note that for the continental philosophical tradition, including Husserl and Heidegger, what is most real is related to the mind; whereas for the anti-metaphysical schools, physicalist in character, exactly the opposite belief obtains: the mind and its thoughts are *least* real.

Throughout the course of the book, Pintor-Ramos reviews the ideas of many of today's writers on Zubiri, including many who have published books on Zubiri. Because of his great desire to avoid false interpretations, Pintor-Ramos is especially careful to criticize efforts that distort Zubiri's views, or which do not have a solid basis in his writings. At the same time, he also realizes that any living philosophy must have new developments and new applications, and writings about a philosopher's work cannot be just a sterile analytical and expository exercise.

The long chapter on Zubiri and Kant shows that Zubiri recognized the problems which Kant addresses, problems that stem in large measure from Hume's philosophy; but he also knows that a solution to these problems requires a rethinking of all of Kant's (and Hume's) assumptions, and thus an entirely new philosophy. Zubiri's key observation is that—in opposition to Kant—we do have direct contact with reality; our most fundamental experience is not mediated by synthesis according to the categories. With this, everything changes, including the notion of transcendental and the influence of finitude/nihilism. Pintor-Ramos notes: "Here, in my opinion, is the unbridgeable gap separating Zubiri from Kant: philosophy is the study of the transcendental realm, and this transcendental is *given impressively* as a form of all the contents of an impression...[p. 176]...Zubiri...says something which for Kant is inconceivable: if there is a transcendental dimension it must be "given" with each thing and, since all of our ways of access to things are sentient, the transcendental realm is not of a conceptual nature, but must be sensed...the distance between Zubiri and Kant does not come down to important theoretical differences, but is grounded in different beliefs about how we are installed in existence..." [p. 180]. In a sense, Zubiri succeeded because he did not ask as much of intelligence as others: rather than require it to deliver to us things as realities, he was content with something much more modest. Thus, the transcendental is "that which is universalizable to all things, is given in sensing," rather than being. [p. 176] Pintor-Ramos elaborates: "the sentient character of *all* reality prevents equating it with the totality of the real and, if that reality as transcendental is given, it will be the same transcendental order that delimits an intramundane space for metaphysics..." [p. 177]. Zubiri, of course, took much from Kant, especially the notion that philosophy cannot give us new information about the things of the world—that is the job of science, and the distinction between the two was not fully appreciated until Kant. Zubiri also took another idea from Kant—not discussed in this book, but very important—namely that we can know ourselves in a way that we can never know things. Specifically, we can know ourselves as substances in something approximating the traditional manner, which has the consequence for moral philosophy that we can ascribe causality in the traditional sense to our actions. Knowledge of causality in that sense, as Zubiri has argued, can never be ascribed to the things of the world.

The final chapter deals with the "frustrated reception" accorded Zubiri's philosophy after the publication of *Sobre la esencia* (1961). Pintor-Ramos points out that the book became what he terms a *libro-isla*: "a book within which it is possible to move with sufficient clarity, but travel out of which is dangerous because we do not know the pillars on which the island rests, nor do we have a sufficiently clear view of the situation to establish connections with the rest of the philosophical planet." [p. 192]. This problem was only resolved with the publication of *Inteligencia sentiente*, of course; but Pintor-Ramos delves into the reasons why Zubiri experienced so many difficulties at the time, many of which center on the fact that he directed the book at Neo-Scholastics and others assumed to have a thorough background in classical philosophy. Terminological difficulties also played a part; and the very title of the book led many to believe that it was just another version of Neo-Scholasticism. As Pintor-Ramos notes, the book is solid but incomplete. Outside of Spain Zubiri's work was little known because few philosophers of international stature had come from Spain after Suarez, so no one looked to Spain for philosophy. Of course, Zubiri is not a "Spanish", but a truly international philosopher, who happens to be Spanish, and part of the mission of the

Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America is to make his thought known in the empiricist-oriented Anglo-Saxon world. This chapter also includes a long discussion of Zubiri's notion of *verdad real* and the difficulties of understanding it based solely on *Sobre la esencia*. Of course it could not be understood except in light of *Inteligencia sentiente*.

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Jordi Corominas and Joan Albert Vicens, *Xavier Zubiri: La soledad sonora*, Madrid: Taurus, 2006, 917 pp. with photos, paperbound, 28.50€

Miguel de Unamuno wrote in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* that to understand a philosopher's positions one must first understand the philosopher, the man of flesh and bone, he whose life is being played out in his philosophy. Corominas and Vicens have achieved this in *La soledad sonora*, a book which gives us, with great detail yet in a very readable manner, the flesh and bone of Xavier Zubiri. While clearly beneficial for a wider audience, this book is ideal for those who are already familiar with Zubiri's writings but need to learn more about the man who wrote them. I can personally say that the light this book shed on the philosopher's life and historical situation made me more greatly appreciate Zubiri's writings.

This book is not a mere introduction to Zubiri; very few of the 900+ pages address any specific theme in Zubirian philosophy. What the book *does* offer, however, is a rich account as to why Zubirian themes are what they are, and this approach makes it a wonderful addition to any Zubirian's library. It is an equally helpful resource for anyone interested in 20th Century Spanish and European history because the authors have taken great care in describing the political and intellectual climate of both Spain and Europe in the first half of the 20th century. In short, this is a book about a man and his times, and how a man and his times bring forth such a rich philosophical system as we find in Zubiri.

The book is divided into three main parts, each of which could be a book unto itself. The first part of the book, "El dolor de ver lo todo transformarse en problema," covers Zubiri's life and times, from his birth in 1898 to 1931. It consists of thirteen chapters, each devoted to the major stages of Zubiri's education. Of particular importance in this part of the book is the intellectual crisis that ensued as Zubiri was torn between his own modernist sympathies and the Church's anti-modernist stance. This crisis was so acute that it had somatic consequences, plaguing Zubiri's education with illness. He received an excellent Catholic education nonetheless (though he would sneak modern philosophers and pragmatists to read at night) and passed the *bac*. He then entered seminary, where the crisis worsened to the point that he left for the Universidad Central, where he was able to pursue modern thought as a student of Ortega y Gasset (he even wrote an 80-page *trabajo* on pragmatism). Zubiri traveled to Louvain, where he studied. While at Louvain, he earned his Doctorate of Sacred Theology degree from the Gregorium in 1920. He received his *license* at Louvain, his *doctorado* in philosophy from the Universidad Central, and was ordained a priest, all in 1921. However, due to some heterodox beliefs expressed by Zubiri in a letter while he was at Louvain, he was briefly excommunicated in 1922. In 1923 he began teaching at the Universidad Central, becoming a *catedrático* in 1926. After an intense personal relationship with María Zambrano in 1927, and desiring to not actively participate in his office as a *sacerdote*, Zubiri went to Germany in 1928 to study with the great German thinkers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sommerfeld, Schrödiger, Zermelo, Einstein, and

Planck. It is in Germany that Zubiri met Américo Castro and his daughter Carmen, with whom Zubiri fell in love. This love for Carmen sets the stage for a major moment of Zubiri's life.

The second part of the book, "No hacemos sino comenzar," covers Zubiri's life and times from 1931 to 1945, and is composed of fifteen chapters. This part of the book is full of information concerning the Second Republic, the Spanish Civil War, and the Second World War, and is a great resource for those interested in such topics. It also focuses on Zubiri's departure from the priesthood and his professorship at the Universidad de Barcelona. Upon returning to Madrid in 1931, rumors were already in circulation about Zubiri and Carmen's relationship. Zubiri became involved in the journal *Cruz y Raya*, whose first edition was published in 1933. It was also in 1933 that Zubiri requested to leave the priesthood. In 1934 Zubiri was released of his priestly duties, but not from the vow of celibacy. He would later be released from those vows in 1936, the year in which Zubiri married Carmen. In order to prevent a scandal, the Zubiris moved to Rome. Their stay was short, however, as the Italian government expelled them from the country due to foreign policy changes by Mussolini's government. They went to Paris in the same year. After the Spanish Civil War came to an end in 1939, the Zubiris returned to Spain. Living in Barcelona, Zubiri joined the faculty at the Universidad de Barcelona. In 1941 Zubiri renounced his chair there, never to officially teach in a university again. In 1942, the same year Zubiri finished *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*. It would take two years for the book to get through the censors, but it was published, *Nihil obstat*, at the end of 1944. During that process, the Zubiris returned to Madrid.

The third part of the book, "Desfallecí escudriñando la realidad," consists of nine chapters that cover Zubiri's life and times from 1945 to his death in 1983. In 1945 Zubiri was encouraged by friends to offer the now famous *cursos privados*, beginning with "Ciencia y realidad: Introducción al problema de la realidad." In 1946 the Zubiris went to the United States to visit Carmen's father Américo Castro, who had immigrated there in 1944 after having been deported from Spain for rebelling against the *Dictadura*. Back in Spain, with the encouragement of Juan Lladó and the Banco Urquijo's financial backing, the Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones was created. The society funded not only Zubiri's private courses but also the work of other independent scholars. In 1950 he rejected a proposal to teach at the Universidad de Chile on behalf of the Spanish government (and the 75,000 peseta salary) because he did not want to bind himself with the Franco regime. Zubiri continued to teach his own courses throughout the 1950s. In 1961 Zubiri met Ignacio Ellacuría, a young Jesuit who was writing his doctoral thesis on Zubiri's work, and their philosophical relationship would continue for the rest of Zubiri's life. In 1962 Zubiri published *Sobre la esencia* which was an immediate success in the bookstore, but the academic reception was ambivalent, primarily due to the book's density of thought. Zubiri continued teaching his private courses throughout the 1960s. In 1967 Ellacuría was sent to El Salvador to serve as a professor at the Universidad Centroamericana, the Jesuit university in San Salvador (he would be assassinated there in 1989), but was allowed to visit Zubiri for several months each year. In 1970 Zubiri met the current director of the Fundación Xavier Zubiri, Diego Gracia. The Seminario Xavier Zubiri, a colloquium series dealing with a variety of philosophical topics presented by a variety of speakers, was created in 1972. 1975 marked the end of the *Dictadura*, followed by the coronation of Juan Carlos I (who had attended one of Zubiri's lectures on the question of space in 1973). In the last years of the decade, Zubiri started to write *Inteligencia sentiente*, his noological trilogy. The first volume was published in 1980, the second in 1982, and the final volume in 1983. In 1980 Zubiri was diagnosed with intestinal cancer, and three years later he died, on September 21, 1983. His final words were "En esta vida ... uno está solo, y no es de extrañar que muera solo" (705).

This book contains much more than what is presented here; it is very thorough and well-detailed, even including passages from letters and reconstructed dialogues

based on testimonials. The authors have taken great care to introduce the reader to the real Zubiri, whose grand intellect was the by-product of a *soledad sonora*. Although *sonora* means clarity, it also connotes harmony. The book excels at showing the life and historical impulse that led Zubiri to such a clear, harmonious philosophical view.

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