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Obituary

Luis Salvatico (October 23, 1963 – December 24, 2022)

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Last December 24, 2022, the academic community of philosophy and history of science in Argentina and South America was shocked by the sad and unexpected news of the death of Luis Salvatico. Despite the mourning a few months after his departure, writing a few lines in his memory in this Journal is necessary and opportune.

The Formative Years

Coming from the city of San Francisco (Córdoba, Argentina), Salvatico entered the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities (FFyH) of the National University of Córdoba (UNC) in 1985. This is how Salvatico himself referred to this event:

When I began my philosophy studies, Argentina was in the process of returning to democracy after a dictatorship that had decimated critical thinking in general and philosophy in particular. Also significant were certain institutional changes in the philosophy career that were made since 1986. A few years earlier, Víctor Rodríguez had returned from a research stay in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburg, and somehow, he brought a wealth of experiences that we tried to reproduce in Córdoba. These experiences materialized in a new curriculum with an area of specialization in epistemology and the history of science.²

Salvatico highlights here the historical context in which processes of democratic normalization began in the national universities and the institutions and practices of teaching and research in philosophy began to be recreated after all that the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina had violently destroyed. In this context, Salvatico underlines the name of Víctor Rodríguez, who in 1986 promoted the creation of the Logical-Epistemological Area of the School of Philosophy as one of the areas of specialization of the new plan of studies of the philosophy career in the FFyH-UNC.

Salvatico would always recognize his training debts with Victor Rodriguez, who was initially his professor in the two courses of History of Science of that new plan of studies and

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² Luis Salvatico, personal communication, email to author, November 14, 2018.

later, the Director of his thesis of Bachelor of Philosophy (UNC, 1989) and his Ph.D. thesis in Philosophy (Universidad Nacional de La Plata – UNLP, 2003). Both theses expose a singular style of thinking and doing the history of science closely linked to philosophy in general and epistemology in particular. Or one could also say a style of thinking and doing philosophy/epistemology inseparable from the history of science and historical cases.

In Salvatico (2006) – a book that presents a reworking of his doctoral thesis –, Salvatico refers first of all to moments and teachers that marked the path toward his thesis: as an undergraduate student, the History mentioned above History of Science courses taught by Víctor Rodríguez, in which dazzling readings and discussions were proposed; as a graduate student in the Doctoral Program in Philosophy at the Complutense University of Madrid, José Miguel Gamba's classes on Aristotelian philosophy of science; at the UNED (Spain), the lectures directed by Manuel Sellés on cosmology from Newton to Herschel; and upon his return to Argentina, the suggestions of Guillermo Ranea, co-director of his doctoral thesis, on the “cleanliness” of the concept of mechanicism.

To meet this challenge, Salvatico plans a strategy: to propose the theoretical notion of “pure mechanicism” and use it to reconstruct and evaluate particular cases of natural philosophies of the seventeenth century and demonstrate some of the transformations that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Encouraged by his “conviction that an important group of seventeenth-century natural philosophers was guided in their scientific work and philosophical systematization by a set of common intuitions” (Salvatico 2006, 167), Salvatico elaborates the aforementioned theoretical notion, knowing that it is one of those “anachronistically imposed structural categories, constructed to order complexity” (Machamer 1998, 71). This book clarifies and stimulates debates on the complex subject of mechanicism, which the history of philosophy, the history of science and the philosophy of science have treated.

The Epistemology and History of Science Conferences (*Las Jornadas de Epistemología e Historia de la Ciencia*)

Salvatico has been fully committed to the *Jornadas de Epistemología e Historia de la Ciencia* since its first edition in 1989. Organized by the Logical-Epistemological Area of the School of Philosophy and the Research Center of the FFyH-UNC, these Conferences have promoted exchanges, the formation of groups and networks, the production of knowledge in history and philosophy of science, and the transformation of research and teaching practices. Many researchers from Argentina and other Latin American countries have participated in these conferences for three decades. And from them, the volumes of “Selected Papers” of each edition of the *Jornadas* emerged, which from 2016 would become the current Journal *Epistemología e Historia de la Ciencia*. Salvatico was an active and enthusiastic organizer and participant in practically all the Conferences, editor of volumes of “Selected Papers”, and later, member of the Editorial Committee of the referred Journal.

When asked about how the *Jornadas* contributed to the constitution and growth of lines of research in epistemology and history of science in Argentina, Salvatico responded:

I consider that the *Jornadas* contributed to consolidating the specialty of philosophy of science with a historical approach. Of course, one should not forget that during many years of logical empiricism, philosophers devoted themselves to the task of making logical reconstructions of scientific theories (...) But scientific activity observed through the prism of history offers an entirely diverse and varied perspective; the image offered by this prism shows many details that the ‘big picture’ (Kuhn, Lakatos, Laudan, etc.) does not manage to show. For this reason, and at the price of observing details and at the expense of describing the landscape, history has much to say about

how the scientific enterprise develops. The *Jornadas* of epistemology were and are a space to delight in some of the many details found in scientific activity.³

Teaching

After a valuable undergraduate and graduate teaching career, Salvatico became a full Professor at UNC. His last undergraduate teaching activity was the teaching of “two subjects in two Faculties: History of Science II in the bachelor’s degree in philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities (FFyH) and Epistemology of Social Sciences and Social Work in the Social Work Career at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FCS)”.⁴ It is worth briefly referring to the 2022 programs of these two subjects since they demonstrate the persistent philosophical stakes of Salvatico’s teaching practice and its close relationship with his research practice.

Salvatico always emphasized the distinctive seal of the plan of studies of the bachelor’s degree in philosophy of the FFyH-UNC, in which two mandatory History of Science courses are within the Logical-Epistemological Area. In this sense, in the rationale of his 2022 “History of Science II” program, he expressed the following:

In the second historical module of the Logical-Epistemological Area, we try to continue with the basic training in the History of Science, both in methodological aspects and in contents (...) In addition, a sensitive approach to philosophical issues in general and epistemological issues, in particular, is attempted, trying to show various relationships between science and philosophy from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.⁵

In terms of content, this program proposes six thematic nuclei: Historiography of science; 2. Darwin and Darwinism; 3. The young Einstein and his context; 4. The revolution of the microworld; 5. The road to DNA; 6. The role of models and the evolution of simulation in social sciences are all accompanied by epistemological reflections. In particular, the thematic nucleus 5⁶ is a sample of the mutual enrichments that occurred between this program and the one considered below.

In the rationale of the “Epistemology of Social Sciences and Social Work” program,⁷ Salvatico emphasizes the unavoidable task of epistemological analysis and evaluation of the knowledge assumed, borrowed, produced and validated in the field of Social Work, the usefulness of epistemology as a critical tool in the training of Social Workers, useful both for their research practices and for their intervention practices. A “case analysis” corresponding to the epistemological approach addressed in each of the five units is proposed. Throughout the program, an epistemology attentive to the specificity of theories and practices in Social Work is provided. In particular, Unit 4, which deals with the emergence, expiration and transformation of classifications in the social sciences, is closely linked to several of the cases studied in the last research project directed by Salvatico.

³ Luis Salvatico, personal communication, email to author, November 14, 2018.

⁴ Luis Salvatico, personal communication, email to author, September 2, 2022.

⁵ <https://blogs.ffyh.unc.edu.ar/escueladefilosofia/files/2022/08/18.-Historia-II.pdf>

⁶ With the titles referring to the creation of biosocial groups: autism, Alzheimer’s disease, etc., in which the questions of the creation and changes of concepts in human and social sciences and, in particular, the “looping effect” (Hacking 1995) of the classes of such sciences are dealt with –

⁷ <https://sociales.unc.edu.ar/asignaturas/545-epistemolog-de-las-ciencias-sociales-y-el-trabajo-social>

Research

After having integrated different Projects for more than a decade, from 2006 onwards, Salvatico served as Director of the following Research Projects: “The development of mechanical philosophy from the publication of *Principia Mathematica* (1687) to the emergence of field theory” (years 2006-2007); “Natural philosophy in the seventeenth century concerning the cultural context: case studies and historiographical evaluation (years 2008-2009 and continuation in 2010-2011); “Embodied science: an ambiguous idea for the contextualization of science. Case studies” (years 2016-2017) and finally, “Materiality and stability in human and natural sciences. Case studies” (years 2018-2022).⁸ From these projects, Salvatico presented research results in publications and national and international scientific meetings,⁹ as well as trained researchers, thesis students, scholarship holders and graduate and postgraduate trainees.

The co-director of the last two mentioned projects: Hernán Severgnini, points out that, although Luis Salvatico always directed projects from the perspective of “a philosophy of science very sensitive to the history of science”, since 2016, there has been “an expansion in the research topics”. In this regard, Salvatico’s new tasks in teaching and management in the Faculty of Social Sciences and the interactions in that context led him to “update his research in the field of human and social sciences” to “produce philosophical reflections in that field” and to include human and social science topics in his Project.¹⁰

This is especially visible in the latest project, completed in 2022. At the beginning of the presentation of this project, it is stated that the history of science is not used to present “instances that illustrate philosophical conceptualizations of science”, but rather it is the concrete scientific practices, the cases in the history of science, that “dictate the path of philosophical reflection. The a priori philosophical parameters we use in the research are only heuristic and may be modified in the course of inquiry into the cases”.¹¹ Here is the Abstract:

In this project, we continue to investigate the ‘embodied’ character of science; by the expression ‘embodied science,’ we refer to the implicit material character of many of its scientific practices (which we consider present in both natural and human sciences), to its technological pretension and its *social and economic context (situacionalidad)*, among other factors. In this project, we assume that scientific research, in its attempt to stabilize itself, shows in its concrete practice aspects of this materialization. The standardization of conceptual and material technologies will be seen as one of the goals of scientific activity. The diversity of cases chosen is pertinent since it allows the game greater flexibility in producing philosophical reflection. We are guided by the assumption that these aspects of scientific practices give rise to a novel epistemology as a philosophical approach while serving as a heuristic for analyzing historical cases.¹²

⁸ The UNC’s Secretariat of Science and Technology (SeCyT) evaluates and funds all projects.

⁹ Luis Salvatico’s last participation in a scientific meeting was as a Lecturer at the “II Jornadas Latino-Americanas de Epistemología Histórica/ I Escola de História das Ciências da UnB”, organized by the research group *EPISTASTHAI – Epistemología e História Comparada das Ciências Humanas (CNPq)* –, in the Department of History, Graduate Program in History at National University of Brasilia (UnB). At this event, which took place from November 29 to December 2, 2022, in Brasilia (Brazil), Luis Salvatico delivered the opening lecture: “Considerations on the inclusion of Alexandre Koyré in the bachelor’s degree in philosophy (UNC). Analysis of the case of the Logical-Epistemological Area”.

¹⁰ Hernán Severgnini, personal communication, meet with the author, March 31, 2023.

¹¹ Presentation of the Consolidate Research Project Type I: “Materiality and stability in human and natural sciences. Case studies”, sent from SeCyT-UNC to an external peer reviewer, September 17, 2018.

¹² <https://ffyh.unc.edu.ar/secyt/convocatorias/proyectos/>

The aforementioned “extension” of the project now led to the analysis not only “a) the technical and socio-economic context before the industrial revolution; b) the emergence of the steam engine and its relationship with the thermodynamic theory”,¹³ but also the following historical cases:

c) the increase of Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnoses in Argentina in the last decades; d) the tensions involved in Alzheimer’s disease as a human class c) the history of intersexuality as a self-ascriptive class (Hacking), d) the origins of the ‘migrant’ class in the social-scientific treatment of the migration problem; e) the interactions between the classified and the concrete interventions that the ‘science of migration’; f) the methodology of work in the studies of Molecular Medicine, attending to the in vitro-in vivo materializations; g) the processes of stabilization of the social histories of childhood in the context of education in psychology; h) the conceptions of childhood as material operators in the theories of psychological development.¹⁴

Management

As Severgnini emphasizes, “Much of Luis’ activity was management, both in the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities and in the Faculty of Social Sciences. He was called to many management positions because of his personality, people skills, and ability to connect, reconcile disputes and work with very different people”.¹⁵ Among these, the following stand out: Secretary of Coordination of the FFyH-UNC from 2008 to 2011; Secretary General of the Board of Directors of the FFyH-UNC from 2009 to 2011; Director of the María Saleme Burnichon Research Center of the FFyH-UNC from 2011 to 2015; Secretary of Research and Graduate School of Social Work of the FCS-UNC from 2013 to 2016; Counselor of the FCS-UNC from 2018 to 2021; Coordinator of the Logical-Epistemological area of the School of Philosophy in 2022.

It is also worth mentioning management positions in the *Philosophical Association of Philosophy and History of Science* (AFHIC), where he was Pro-Secretary from 2009 to 2011 and Director of Scientific Dissemination from 2010 to 2012.

Commitment and Legacy

As soon as the news of Luis Salvatico’s death was received, institutional mourning was declared at the FFyH-UNC,¹⁶ the Organizing Committee of the Conference on Epistemology and History of Science sent an email to the community, the *Journal Epistemology and History of Science* published an “Editorial In memoriam...”¹⁷ in its last issue, and the Department of History of the National University of Brasilia - UnB issued a “Note of Mourning”.¹⁸

Under the emotional impact of this surprising and sad event, one of the words that appeared recurrently was “commitment”. With this word, how Salvatico assumed the challenges and responsibilities of university management and teaching, research and communication in philosophy and history of science, in the times and spaces in which he lived and acted, was synthesized. In this regard, it can be said that Luis Salvatico embodies the commitment of that youth who, after the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina, was fully involved in the return and consolidation of democracy in national universities and particularly

¹³ Luis Salvatico, personal communication, email to author, November 14, 2018.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁵ Hernán Severgnini, personal communication, meet with the author, March 31, 2023.

¹⁶ <https://ffyh.unc.edu.ar/noticias/12/2022/duelo-institucional-por-el-fallecimiento-de-luis-salvatico/>

¹⁷ <https://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/afjor/article/view/39983/40266>

¹⁸ <http://www.his.unb.br/noticias/161-nota-de-pesar-prof-luis-salvatico>

in the cultivation of a way of teaching and research in philosophy inseparable from the history of science. Therefore, it is time to assume and recreate his legacy¹⁹ to continue making the way forward.



Luis Salvatico's opening lecture, "Considerations on the inclusion of Alexandre Koyré in the bachelor's degree in philosophy (UNC). Analysis of the case of the Logical-Epistemological Area". at the National University of Brasilia (UnB), Brazil, November 29, 2022.

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¹⁹ Hernán Severgnini is currently facing the challenge of the academic design of "History of Science I" and "History of Science II". He expresses that, in doing so, he asks himself: "What would Luis be telling me...?" and also that he tries to continue cultivating "a history of science that puts philosophical conceptions in a crucible and in evaluation" and "a philosophy of science inseparable from historical cases" (Hernán Severgnini, personal communication, meet with the author, March 31, 2023).