

■ review

JOURNAL OF CATALAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY,
Issue 4, 2012 | Print ISSN 2014-1572 / Online ISSN 2014-1564
DOI 10.2436/20.3001.02.61 | P. 183-185
<http://revistes.iec.cat/index.php/JOCIH>

J

Jaume Serra Hunter, *Escrits sobre la història de la filosofia catalana*, Barcelona: Publicacions de la Facultat de Filosofia – Universitat Ramon Llull 2011

Vicent Torres

Societat de Filosofia del País Valencià
vicenttb@gmail.com

In his role as Professor of the History of Philosophy at University of Barcelona, Jaume Serra Hunter (1878–1943) aimed from the outset for normality. It was no easy task. Starting with his appointment in 1911, much of his efforts were spent trying to correct the chaotic situation prior to his arrival. The figure who best symbolized that university anchored in the past was Josep Daurella, professor of logic and a wholesale cod seller, whose posterity has benefited considerably from portraits by Gaziel, Pla and Sagarra. Serra Hunter –like Bosch Gimpera and some others– had to struggle from the beginning on two parallel levels: on one hand he tried to redeem the entire university simply by being an honest teacher; on the other he tried to show that those who saw the *alma mater* as an irredeemable burden and, therefore, ruled out any link between it and the new institutions created by the *Mancomunitat* –D’Ors and company–were completely wrong. He was only moderately successful, in part because of adverse circumstances arising from the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Partly, also, due to a lack of a useful audience, some efficient disciples willing to continue the work he had begun. Yet far from being one of those many intractable professors who are content to publish at most one or two manuals over forty years, he had prolific periods in which he published several books and articles in Catalan on the philosophical issues that interested him.

Of those texts, the authors of this edition have selected four related to the history of nineteenth-century Catalan philosophy. Be warned before continuing that none of these articles makes for good reading. Yet that does not mean that we cannot recognize merits in them all. The most interesting is, perhaps, the article on the academic career of Llorens i Barba. It is interesting for the large amount of reliable information it contains, which could still today serve as a guide to trace his biography. It should be noted here that no one before Serra Hunter had undertaken to write rigorously after carrying out arduous archival

research –this is of course true in the case of Llorens i Barba, but also in the case of any other Catalan philosopher after Ramon Llull. And here they all end up in the same boat: Sibiuda, Vives, Balmes and Ramon d'Eixalà, any one you could name. For example, in the case of Vives, as recently as 1960, there were those who obstinately denied his Judaism. According to them, what led Vives to move first to Paris, then to Oxford and finally to Bruges was not persecution by the inquisitorial process that reduced his entire family to ashes, but rather a desire to take in the sights. With such an intellectual backdrop, Serra Hunter's work on Llorens i Barba takes on clear definition and undeniable importance, since it points in the right direction, towards clarification.

The other important text in this volume is the one in which Serra Hunter set out to classify the philosophical tendencies of the nineteenth century, and which was the speech he delivered upon joining the Acadèmia de Bones Lletres (1925). It is also interesting for the sheer volume of facts it provides, although –as Xavier Serra discusses in his introduction to the volume– the interpretation runs aground in some fundamental aspects. For Serra Hunter, the main trend in nineteenth-century Catalan philosophy was a local version of the Scottish school of common sense. Serra Hunter considered that this trend was perfectly suited to the Catalan character and that it was therefore necessary to continue it, along the path set by Ramon Martí d'Eixalà and Llorens i Barba. He had, of course, important reasons that led him to adopt this point of view. These reasons are basically the inefficiency and extremism of the other philosophical currents that had some impact on nineteenth-century Catalonia: the phrenology of Gall, old-fashioned scholastic philosophy or positivism. As a result, Serra Hunter saw a certain continuity in the cultivation of the philosophy of common sense in Catalonia. At least it provided the minimum necessary to start thinking about a local tradition that could lead to a national school. However, the Catalan adoption of the philosophy of common sense was clearly incomplete, and Serra Hunter pointed out the path to follow to perfect it: it was necessary to make the transition from introspective psychology to metaphysics. A difficult step that neither Serra Hunter nor anyone after him dared take. On the other hand, as correctly stated in the introduction to this volume, Serra Hunter underestimated the copious local production derived from scholastic philosophy and was being superficial when comparing the Scottish school of common sense to the 'seny català', since they each point in opposite directions and are therefore incompatible.

The two texts that complete the volume, studies on Llorens and Sanz del Río and the philosophy of Turró, are of less interest. Serra Hunter excelled like no other when it came to supplying his texts with rigorously researched facts. But when it came time to hammer out a relevant interpretation, he lacked the finesse that characterized the work of the great analysts.

However, to keep the reader from getting lost in the muddle of nineteenth-century philosophy, this volume offers an excellent introduction by Xavier Serra, which brings together the essential elements necessary for holding one's interest throughout: its basis is a solid knowledge of the subject; it generates quite stimulating ideas about the book it presents and, finally, it is well written. This introduction now stands, alongside the biography by Jordi Salas-Coderch (Jaume Serra i Hünter: *Semblança biogràfica*, Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2000), as a key element in assessing Serra Hunter's contributions.

If readers are short on time, they should at least read this introduction. It offers a considered and quite effective approach to the figure of Serra Hunter. One will have to forgive, however, the carelessness of the printers, who did not even take the pains to begin each of Serra Hunter's texts on a new page.

Translation from Catalan by Mara Lethem