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Justus Buchler and the Metaphysics of Natural Complexes

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Introduction

"Justus Buchler is an American philosopher, long well known as a scholar and teacher and now becoming more widely recognized as the author of a new metaphysics. Utilizing his own system of categories, Buchler has given us an analysis of the basic traits of nature and man, experience and judgment, method and meaning, art, science, and philosophy that differs strikingly from the analyses provided or presupposed by other philosophers. There are others who share some of his commitments or take similar positions on particular topics, but Buchler's major categories are distinctively his own, and his systematic outlook (the position I have called "ordinal naturalism") is without precedent in the history of philosophy." (p. 11)

(...)

Buchler calls the ontology that determines his view of nature a 'metaphysics of natural complexes.' (I shall use the word 'ontology' to refer to metaphysical systems of the highest level of generality, as contrasted with metaphysical theories of lesser scope, such as a metaphysics of morals or Buchler's 'metaphysics of utterance.') His treatment of such topics as experience, knowledge, meaning, truth, inquiry, and art reflect the same metaphysical stance as his ontology and utilize some of the same generic concepts, and he sometimes refers to his entire system by the same name. The root concept of Buchler's ontology is the concept of 'natural complex.' While it retains something of its ordinary sense, within the framework of Buchler's metaphysics this term takes on a special meaning and is his most general ontological category. Rather than seeing nature to be composed of substances, events, processes, matter, spirit, or any other specific type of entity or being, Buchler finds all such categories too narrow. Given the other categories and principles of his ontology, he maintains that there is nothing that cannot be accurately construed as a natural complex. The term is applied by him to attributes as well as entities, to ideas and terms of discourse as well as bodies, human individuals, and the constituents of human experience.

In the language of Buchler's metaphysics, every natural complex is an order. This word, too, has a technical sense for him, resting upon his systematic concepts of 'trait' and 'relation.' All of these will be discussed at length in the chapters of this book devoted to Buchler's ontology. The concept of an order, however, must be introduced here to convey some of the features of "s version of naturalism. Roughly, an order is an organized multiplicity: a complex distinguishable as a unity in virtue of the pattern of relatedness among its components. In "s systematic usage, the terms 'natural complex' and 'order' are not completely synonymous: a natural complex is also, in another respect, a trait. But the terms 'complex' and 'order' are coextensive, and Buchler calls the central principle of his metaphysics 'the principle of ordinality.' Thus his system may also be termed a 'metaphysics of orders' or 'metaphysics of ordinality,' or, as some have called it, an 'ordinal metaphysics,' and his outlook may be characterized as an 'ordinal naturalism.' The principle of ordinality that governs

Buchler's system is inseparable from his concept of a natural complex, and is the fullest expression of what it means to be a natural complex. For reasons that will later be made clear, Buchler denies that complexes can be composed of simples. Briefly and, perforce, inadequately stated, the principle of ordinality asserts that every complex must be constituted by other complexes, and also that every complex must be a constituent of some other complex or complexes. The term 'order' refers to a complex viewed as having constituents. For a complex viewed as a constituent of an order, Buchler uses the term 'trait', giving to this term a generalized sense which makes words that might be considered synonymous with it (such as 'characteristic' or 'attribute') only types of trait." (pp. 21-22)

From: Beth J. Singer, *Ordinal Naturalism. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Justus Buchler*, Lewisburg; Bucknell University Press 1983.

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A complete list of Justus Buchler's publications his available in: Beth J. Singer - *Ordinal Naturalism. An introduction to the philosophy of Justus Buchler* - Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1983, pp. 220-225.

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Abstract: "The principles of ontological parity and ordinality have distinct functions in Buchler's ontology. Ontological parity could be independently subscribed to, whereas ordinality signals the positive conception of the nature of reality as irreducibly complex or indefinitely related, which Buchler's metaphysical system seeks to articulate. Both principles inform Buchler's system, but each has a distinctive function. They are not, I suggest, necessarily at odds with one another, as some critics claim. I do identify several difficulties that follow from (1) the level of generality claimed by Buchler and (2) the claim of *irreducible* complexity or indefinite relatedness."