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Peace Profile: Vicent Martínez Guzmán

FABRICIO FORASTELLI

Vicent Martínez Guzmán is a Spanish born philosopher, educationalist, and activist of the international peace research movement. For more than 20 years his philosophical and educational views have been an unavoidable reference in the debates on the normative and epistemological foundations of what he calls “the task of making peace(s).” Since the early 1990s, he has played a significant part in the development of interdisciplinary programs in Peace Studies in Spain. In 1999, he founded the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace at the University Jaume I, Castellón. His work in the fields of communication, linguistics, and education in the phenomenological tradition have contributed to our understanding of “conflict transformation,” while promoting a renovation in human and social sciences. Vicent built up a life that encompasses research, publishing, education, university management, and activism for peace. His advocacy for peace values based on “communicative solidarity” has had an extensive influence in academia, community life, and educational debates.

Vicent was born in 1949 into a working class family in La Vall d’Uixó, a small town in rural Spain. Very young, he first worked at a shoe factory and later in the local orange industry, thus forming his connection with the land and nature. Born ten years after the end of the war that ravaged Spain in the late 1930s and led to the establishment of Franco’s long-lasting regime, he lived his childhood and youth in a period of severe political, social, and economic hardship. Although he has not publically recounted these formative years, his pupils and philosophical adherents, Irene Comins Mingol and Sonia Paris Albert, reconstructed a poignant portrait of Vicent when he received the Juan XXIII Memorial of Peace Award in 2010, one of the many distinctions that he has been awarded over his long career. On this occasion they provided his story and insight into the experiences that have made him a “kind, persistent and hard working person.” Furthermore, his persistency in exploring the notions of “democratic power,” “consensus,” and “civil society” testifies to his belonging to a generation of scholars educated in the turbulent, but intellectually challenging, Spanish university during the “democratic transition” in the late 1970s.

Vicent graduated with a BA in Philosophy and Literature in 1976 at the University of Valencia. From 1980 to 1986, he worked as a high school teacher, becoming a distinguished teacher due to his commitment to educative innovation. At the same time, he developed his doctoral research in Linguistics and Phenomenology under the supervision of Professor Fernando Montero Moliner, one of the most influential philosophers of the period in Spain. In 1985, Vicent was awarded a Doctorate in Philosophy and Education with a thesis dedicated to *J. L. Austin's Linguistic Phenomenology*. Shortly thereafter, he was offered a position as Assistant Professor of the Department of Philosophy in the University of Valencia. Montero Moliner's original readings of Edmund Husserl deeply influenced Vicent's conception of the "human being" in terms of intersubjectivity, reciprocity, and dialogue. He also gained a sense of the importance of the debates on Analytic Philosophy, which later were key for developing his project from a communicational linguistic perspective. In this tradition, he has often used the Husserlian figure of the philosopher as a "functionary of mankind," not only to acknowledge Montero Moliner's legacy, but also his own commitment to democratic debates. As he has stated in many opportunities, the notion of "performativity" has allowed him to explore the "non-violent form[s] of exercising politics" inherent to the "normative reconstruction of our competences for making peace(s)."

By the early 1990s, Vicent was already engaging with the newly created programs on Peace Studies in Spain, first at Madrid and Zaragoza and, shortly after, in Galicia, the Basque Country, and Catalonia. He has often recalled his travelling to Zaragoza to participate in the *Seminario de Investigación para la Paz* (SIP) as the trip that provided inspiration for developing and making explicit his own commitment with the "pacific transformation of conflicts and human suffering." A few years ago, former Secretary of the UNESCO Federico Mayor Zaragoza and Manuela Mesa from the *Centro de Educación e Investigación para la Paz* (CEIPAZ) gave an account of the contributions made by the Spanish peace research centers to the global effort to deconstruct the peace/war dichotomy, and to reconstruct the field in terms of "positive peace" and "non-violent conflict transformation." They named Vicent as a key figure in this peace panorama. Additionally, they evoked the years of intense mobilization of the pacifist, antiwar, and antimilitarist movement worldwide, intensified in Spain by the process of democratization, but also by the massive institutional, political, legal, and cultural changes produced by European integration. Vicent has acknowledged that these debates inspired him to open up his interventions to include civil society as an empowered actor in the field of peace. At the same time, following Johan Galtung, Kenneth Boulding, Anatol Rapoport, and John Lederach's work, he confirmed that "peace research needed to go beyond the limits of the nation-state," to think peace and conflict as global interconnected systems. Thus, from early on, he realized

the importance of the theoretical understanding of new cultural and political movements articulated by the notion of “recognition of differences.”

His friend and colleague philosopher, Javier San Martín, speaking at the Conference held at Castellón to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace in 2010, noted that during the late 1980s and early 1990s Vicent’s philosophical interventions were embedded in discussions produced in national and international peace research programs. Both have pointed out that, in Spain, these debates were favored by the creation of research groups discussing and translating Husserl’s work on the concept of the “human” and the crisis of the European human sciences. He quickly realized the importance of building international and national associations. Hence, in 1989, he became a founding member of the *Sociedad Española de Fenomenología*, an academic network that became a meeting point for Spanish philosophers engaging with peace studies, such as Javier San Martín and María Luz Pintos Peñaranda. The idea of the “crisis” and “failure” of Europe has been a recurring metaphor in his work and, therefore, he considers it necessary to reconstruct the role of human and social sciences in the unilateral development of European rationality. San Martín has also suggested that for Vicent the very paradox of the project of expanding “the universality of the European rational attitude to all mankind” implies assuming a deep crisis at the very roots of European sciences, which challenge from the inside the universality of their moral claims. This conviction was a major force in developing his two-fold, critical-methodological approach to “deconstructing cultures of violence” and “reconstructing competences and abilities for making peace(s)” as well as for conceptualizing in theory and practice the significant role he gives to intercultural mediation, education, and dialogue.

Vicent contributed to these dialogues by providing a “multidisciplinary” and “multicultural” approach. It was guided by the awareness of “the suffering some human beings can inflict upon others and nature itself” and the need for producing a transformation of human relationships, alternatives to war, marginalization, and exclusion. Influenced by Galtung’s early conceptualizations on state, civil society, and capitalism, Vicent developed a critique of mainstream centers of strategic studies on management and resolution of conflicts that, since the 1950s, were dealing with issues of global governance as a matter of security, war, and defense. He argued that these approaches to conflict felt short for two main reasons. First, they were grounded in a conception of “negative peace” and, therefore, failed to address conflict and peace as interconnected systems. Second, and most striking, they neglected taking into account questions of moral responsibility.

Inspired by these firm beliefs and while teaching and carrying on administrative duties in the university, Vicent began a research program that constitutes the groundwork of his *Philosophy for Making Peace(s)*. He set

out to develop an agenda sensitive to an ethics of responsibility using Kant, Husserl, and Arendt, and he nurtured the idea of a diversity of cultures for “making peace(s).” The main implication of his critical and methodological perspective is that peace is an end in itself, but also a plural process and a practice. Therefore, a conception of philosophy that seeks alternatives to relationships of domination and violence needs to account for the diversity of cultural discourses on peace within the lifeworld. The philosophical imperative guiding his work argues that we must make explicit the connection between knowledge and nonviolent intervention, thereby rejecting the option of creating a new dominant scientific paradigm. He, however, also acknowledges that “this multiplicity and plurality produce a field of tensions and even contradictions between these cultures and the plurality of knowledge.” This dilemma constitutes the basis of his argument on the reconstruction of the field of peace studies as an “epistemological turn,” a groundbreaking shift in our ways of knowing peace(s). Indeed, the notion of the “epistemological turn” is a means for criticizing positivistic, scientific rationality understood as a free-value, neutral, objective instrument that might end up justifying violence and human suffering on purely instrumental grounds. Much of his intellectual work and activism has been oriented around developing a Philosophy for Peace as a “practical rationality.” In this framework, it incorporates a communication ethics and introduces theories of recognition within that integrate an Ethics of Justice and Ethics of Care.

In the early 1990s, Vicent spent some time as visiting researcher in Frankfurt (1992), Berkeley (1993 and 1994), and the European Peace University (1994–1999). All of these experiences further motivated him to focus on the normative dimension of Philosophy for Peace, that is, the production of “indicators or normative criteria for living in peace.” His time in Frankfurt working with Karl-Otto Apel, as well as his contemporary readings of Jürgen Habermas’ work on “communicative power,” opened up avenues for him to bring epistemological debates on Moral Theory into his philosophical pursuits. During his time at Berkeley, J. R. Searle’s speech act theory led him to foreground the notion of “performativity” in order to develop his approach to communication for peace. Here, he refined his argument, defining peace communication as an “intersubjective pact” based on “solidarity,” “responsibility,” and “reciprocity.” From 1994 until approximately 1999, Vicent collaborated with the European University Center for Peace Studies at Stadtschlaining (Austria). This collaboration would not only enrich his views on intercultural mediation, but also encouraged him to create the Masters on Peace and Conflict. His participation at the European Peace University was crucial for deepening his involvement with the international peace research movement. At this moment in time, he promoted the inclusion of Spain in a network with Ireland and Austria, and eventually set up an exchange program

with the peace center at Innsbruck. Additionally, he began multiple other collaborations through lecturing, supporting, and strengthening peace programs in Spain, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Brazil.

Vicent enriched his philosophical readings with the interventions of Johan Galtung, Axel Honneth, or Peter Strawson, but also, and most radically, by the work of feminist thinkers. In fact, through the years he has increasingly given a major role to women, gender, and sexuality perspectives. Departing from the pioneering work of peace feminists Elise Boulding, Betty Reardon, and Birgit Brock-Utne, he encouraged the use of theories of gender and sexual diversity in the redefinition of debates in Moral Theory, including Carol Gilligan, Sheila Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Judith Butler as well as of Spanish philosophers, such as the works of Carmen Magallón Portolés and Celia Amorós on structural, direct, and cultural violence. At the same time, he decisively included postcolonial and post-development theorizations to review mainstream theories on development and cooperation, in particular Amartya Sen's "Freedom Theory," from which he later co-edited *Amartya K. Sen y la globalización* (2006).

During the 1990s, Vicent continued to actively pursue academic and community activities. He participated in the foundation of the University Jaume I in 1991, where he took a position as Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Sociology along with other senior academic duties. In 1994 and 1995, he organized the first and second National Conferences on Philosophy for Peace, landmark events that are direct antecedents of the course "Philosophy for Peace" that he dictated at the undergraduate level, the first of its kind in Spain. These activities encouraged him to set up the International Masters in Peace and Development Studies (later International Masters in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies) in 1996 and, shortly after, an interuniversity Doctorate in Peace, Conflict and Democracy (now a distinguished Doctorate in International Studies in Peace, Conflict and Development at the Universitat Jaume I). That same year, he played a significant part in the creation of the International Bancaja Center for Peace and Development, a non-profit organization funded by the University Jaume I and the Bancaja Regional Bank, which for many years has promoted cultures of peace within the community and holds an important collection of publications and documents on peace and development studies. The Bancaja Center received the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Medal in 1999. Vicent was also a founding member of the Spanish Association of Research for Peace (AIPAZ), which, since 1997, has coordinated activities of peace research centers in Spain. He has always lived in his hometown of La Vall d'Uixó and, in 2000, participated with local authorities in the creation of a Peace Museum there. Many of these initiatives later had influenced other peace endeavors, such as the inclusion of Communication for Peace in the university curriculum and the setting up of university joint programs such as the Interuniversity Institute in

Social Development and Peace (IUDESP) with the University of Alicante in 2010.

The Chair of Philosophy for Peace today is a leading interdisciplinary program that promotes an integrated system of research, training, and documentation in the field of peace, human rights, and democracy and is oriented to the prevention of conflicts through peaceful means. Vicent conceived of it as a learning community based on diversity, intercultural dialogue, and the exchange of experiences. Over eight hundred students from more than forty countries have lived the program. From 1999 to his retirement in 2010, Vicent combined the direction of the Masters and the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace, which has and became a center of international renown devoted to peace studies. His support of the peace research movement has never faltered, and leading Spanish theorist on Imperfect Peace, Francisco Muñoz, has recently recalled his priceless suggestions and support for the creation of the program on Peace Studies at the University of Granada.

Vicent has been a prolific writer and conference speaker. Between other publications, in 1997 he edited *Kant: La paz perpetua doscientos años después*, a collection of essays reflecting on the reconstruction of contemporary debates on Moral Theory and Law in Kantian studies. This work reunites contributions from distinguished philosophers, such as Adela Cortina, Salvador Cabedo, Jesús Conill, Domingo García Marzá, and Carmen Innerarity. From this time onward, influenced by Kant's conception of "cosmopolitan law," Vicent grew increasingly interested in the implications of developing an anti-essentialist, "universal normative moral horizon" able to engage with "the neglected knowledges of other cultures and women." In 2001, he published *Filosofía para hacer las paces* (reedited and updated in 2009), where he rejects accusations of "false realism" and "idealism" and systematizes his proposal on the reconstruction of the field of peace. By 2005, after the events in New York and Madrid and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, he doubled his efforts and published *Podemos hacer las paces. Reflexiones éticas tras el 11 S y el 11 M*, claiming that "the philosophical reconstruction of the field of peace" implies recovering lines, dilemmas, and notions in peace research in order to denounce the "lack of assumption of our fragility" manifested in our "fear to differences." Even after a serious illness, during 2008 he began editing a monographic series called "Documentos de trabajo" (working papers) in collaboration with CEIPAZ and Icaria Publishers. The compilation engages issues of civil society, peace education, conflict transformation, and communication for peace.

Vicent defines *Philosophy for Peace* as "the normative reconstruction of the capacities and competences for transforming human suffering and conflicts by peaceful means." On what terms does this reconstruction take place? From his perspective, peace and the transformation of human suffering

are not conceived as mere topics, abstract ideals, or a field of study, but as “a practice of human relationships, the competencies, capacities, abilities and relative knowledge for the peaceful transformation of conflicts, international relations, humanitarian aid and post-development studies.” Its main task is the development of “competences and capabilities of caring for one another with tenderness and affection in the interpersonal realm and creating just governance institutions in different institutional contexts.” Henceforth, it is a normative reconstruction of “our capabilities and competences in order to live in peace” and to account for an “in concert, non-violent form of exercising politics.” Recovering the idea of the “epistemological turn,” Vicent argues for the reconstruction of the “diverse ways of making peace(s)” as they form part of “the configuration of performativity of human relations for which we can hold ourselves accountable in terms of intersubjectivity and mutual interpellation.” In this way, “all forms of knowledge should be treated equally” and they also interpellate us such that we need to make explicit our values in public debate.

At this point, Vicent displays a dilemma that is central for avoiding cultural, moral, and anthropological relativism. While he proposes to produce “moral minimums” that apply universally to ensure that all human beings have access to their rights, he also acknowledges that it is necessary to account for and include the multiple voices that challenge this universal quest. So, his critical-methodological approach is a concrete practice that theoretically explores three areas: gender and women studies, the studies of “other cultures,” and “nature.” In this way, the very framework of moral procedures is discussed with regard to our capacity for developing forms of “moral imagination” that provide, in his words, a “new notion of politics as the capacity of consensus within the framework of new forms of local and global governability, to confront poverty and misery as well as inequalities that are the roots of violent conflicts.”

Vicent has put incredible energy into nurturing and forming peace researchers and practitioners. Scholars in the field like Martha Jalali, Irene Comins-Mingol, Eloísa Nos-Aldás, Sonia París-Albert, Francesc Colomer, Josefina Echavarría Álvarez, Wolfgang Sützl, Fatuma Alí, Sidi Mohamed Omar, Sophia Herrero-Rico, Eric George, Alberto Cabedo-Mas, and Jennifer Murphy have assumed and expanded his legacy. He has promoted research on education, gender, social movements, and the role of civil society in conflict transformation, deepening the Chair’s commitment to the peace movement while critically recuperating global agencies’ initiatives on “gender mainstreaming,” “cultures of peace,” “interculturality,” and “new humanisms.” In his later interventions, he has made a point of linking his conception of normativity to concrete practices that involve notions of the “body” and “affection” (affect theory-practice).

Vicent has persistently insisted that “we need to regain our capacity of indignation.” If “indignation” is a moral and political imperative that signals the breaking of subjectivities into the public sphere from an active position, inviting us to alliance, participation, and social articulation, it is because it plays against certain narratives of victimization. Fostering “hybrid” rather than “pure” identities, accounting for reciprocal responsibility, finding “unity in the diversity of the others,” he continues to actively write and lecture, now as honorary director of the UNESCO Chair, accounting for plural and diverse figures of resistance.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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