

The Philosophical Polemic in Havana Revisited*

by Vicente Medina

English Abstract

The polemic was an important cultural event in 19th-century Cuba. From 1838 to 1840, issues of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, pedagogy, and the influence of Victor Cousin's eclecticism were discussed in the island's leading newspapers. A brief historical account preceding the polemic is offered. I argue that the predominant view of the polemic, which is motivated by a widespread desire for Cuba's independence from Spain, is misleading in its promotion of an emancipatory myth. Lastly, I argue that José de la Luz y Caballero's appeal to patriotism during the polemic unwittingly established a dangerous precedent for self-appointed guardians of patriotism to condition public debates.

Resumen en español

La polémica fue un importante evento cultural durante el siglo diecinueve en Cuba. Entre 1838 a 1840 se debatieron en los principales periódicos de la isla temas en torno a la metafísica, la epistemología, la ética, la pedagogía y la influencia del eclecticismo de Víctor Cousin. Narro brevemente algunos de los hechos históricos que antecedieron esta polémica. Sostengo que es inexacta la interpretación predominante que esta polémica fue motivada por el deseo de independizar a Cuba de España. Tal interpretación promueve un mito de emancipación. Según mi análisis, cuando en su intervención en la polémica José de la Luz y Caballero apela al patriotismo, establece sin saberlo un precedente peligroso que usarán los autodenominados protectores del patriotismo para restringir los debates públicos.

Resumo em português

A polémica foi um importante evento cultural durante o século dezenove em Cuba. Entre 1838 e 1840 se debateram nos principais jornais da ilha temas em torno da metafísica, a epistemologia, a ética, a pedagogia e a influência do eclecticismo de Víctor Cousin. Narro brevemente alguns dos fatos históricos que antecederam esta polémica. Sustenho que é inexacta a interpretação predominante que esta polémica foi motivada por o desejo de dissociar a Cuba da Espanha. Tal interpretação promove um mito de emancipação. Segundo meu análise, quando em sua intervenção na polémica José de la Luz y Caballero apela ao patriotismo, estabelece sim saber um precedente perigoso que usarão os autodenominados protetores do patriotismo para restringir os debates públicos.

The “Philosophical Polemic in Havana” refers to a set of public debates that occurred in 19th-century Cuba among mostly young scholars and men of letters. These debates often resulted in heated arguments and, at times, *ad hominem* attacks among disputants. As a result of their intensity, the debates have become known collectively as “the polemic.”

I am arguing for two main theses. First, that the polemic, rather than being motivated by an emancipatory sense of patriotism seeking independence from Spain, was primarily, although not exclusively, motivated by philosophical and pedagogical concerns about the impact of modern philosophy and modern science in Cuba. Second, that by raising the specter of patriotism in some of the debates, José de la Luz y Caballero, a leading participant in the polemic, tries to condition public debate by attempting to disqualify the views of those whom he viewed as being insufficiently patriotic. In so doing, he unwittingly established a dangerous precedent for self-appointed guardians of patriotism to condition public debates.

The polemic, which is barely known in Anglophone culture, was an important public display of philosophical acumen on the reception of modern philosophy in Cuba. From May 1838 to October 1840, issues of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, pedagogy, and the influence of Victor Cousin’s eclecticism in the practice of philosophy in Cuba were discussed in the island’s leading newspapers.[1] In the capital, Havana, most debates were published in *Diario de la Habana*, *Noticioso y Lucero*, and *El Plantel*; in Puerto Principe in *Gaceta de Puerto Principe*; in Matanzas in *La Aurora de Matanzas*, and in Trinidad in *Correo de Trinidad*.[2] The debates were so contentious that they soon reverberated to rural places, such as the villa of Santísima Trinidad, where a controversy ensued about establishing a teaching position in philosophy and choosing a suitable text for it.[3]

The polemic consists of about one hundred seventy-five mainly newspaper articles, some of which are substantive in length. In addition, the polemic culminated with José de la Luz y Caballero’s unfinished essay, “Impugnación a las Doctrinas Filosóficas de Victor Cousin” [Impugnación to Victor Cousin’s Philosophical Doctrines], which is about one hundred thirty pages long.[4] As one scholar underscores, the polemic shows a rather conspicuous interest of the educated public in the island that for two years sustained an atypical interest in these debates.[5]

By following the above-mentioned debates, the educated public was kept abreast of innovative developments in European philosophy, especially in Francophone philosophy, whose leading exponent in Cuba was Victor Cousin. Thus, Cousin’s eclecticism imbued most of the important arguments animating the polemic.

Victor Cousin (1792-1867) was an influential French philosopher at the École Normale in Paris who expounded studies in the history of philosophy, philosophy of history, and German idealism. In addition, he acquired an international reputation for translating Proclus’s and Plato’s works and editing the works of Descartes. As an

appointed minister of public instruction in 1840, during the July Monarchy, he advocated secularism and nonsectarianism as a way of reforming primary and secondary education to promote national unity.[6]

Cousin was also known for his modern conception of eclecticism. Like classical eclecticism, his modern eclecticism was, to a large extent, a reaction against the scholastic appeal to *magister dixit*. He borrowed ideas from different philosophical systems and, hence, learned from different philosophers to try to create his own system. [7] He also urged reconciliation of opposites not only in philosophy but also in politics. That is, he tried to accomplish the *juste-milieu* or golden mean in philosophy and politics.[8]

Trying to accomplish the *juste-milieu* in France during the July Monarchy might have been commendable, but trying to do the same in Cuba during the 1830s would have been considered seditious. Since 1825, the captain general of Cuba appointed by Spain was granted “*facultades omnímodas*” or despotic power.[9] Henceforth, the island was virtually under martial law for the next fifty years. So for Luz y Caballero, the exercise of such despotic power that privileges the Spanish oligarchy in the island over the white Creole elite was a humiliating experience.

That might partly explain Luz y Caballero’s concern about Cousin’s influence on the Cuban youth. He worried that those who have been influenced by Cousin’s eclecticism in philosophy might adopt the same spirit of reconciliation in politics becoming acquiescent to, rather than critical of, the prevalent Spanish despotism and the widespread practice of slavery.[10]

Contrary to Luz y Caballero’s concerns about the detrimental effects of Cousin’s eclecticism, some prominent South American scholars, such as Andrés Bello and Juan Bautista Alberdi, welcomed it as a way of combating the old scholasticism in support of modern philosophy and modern science. Bello was a leading 19th-century Venezuelan polymath as well as a prestigious pedagogue, philosopher, and diplomat.[11] Alberdi was a prominent 19th-century Argentine political philosopher and diplomat.[12] In addition to Bello and Alberdi, other reputable Latin American philosophers and scholars also embraced Cousin’s eclecticism.[13] So it seems that, depending on contextual considerations, Cousin’s eclecticism was thought either to be helpful for transforming or preserving the *status quo*.

In Cuba, José de la Luz y Caballero (1800-1862) impugned Cousin’s eclecticism on philosophical and political grounds. Echoing Hegel’s criticism of eclecticism, Luz y Caballero argued that Cousin’s eclecticism is just incoherent because Cousin tried to reconcile that which is irreconcilable, such as materialism and idealism. In addition, he alleged that Cousin’s eclecticism is just politics camouflaged as philosophy because, presumably, it countenances rather than criticizes the *status quo*.

I can adduce several reasons for this project. First, the polemic is an important philosophical and, hence, cultural event in Cuba that has been virtually ignored in Anglophone philosophy. Second, the polemic has been misconstrued by scholars on the right and the left as having been motivated by a widespread Cuban desire for independence from Spain.

Third, the attempts by some of the leading participants in the polemic, especially José de la Luz y Caballero, occasionally to justify their philosophical arguments by appealing to patriotism or *argumentum ad amorem patriae* can be interpreted as a prototype of the fallacy of appeal to the people or *argumentum ad populum*. Such an appeal can also be interpreted as a tacit *ad hominem* argument, whereby the intentions of those who are viewed as insufficiently patriotic are suspect.

And fourth, the appeal to the patriotism fallacy has been and still is being used to curtail the freedom of philosophical speculation and political freedoms in countries around the world. Hence, exploring the polemic in Cuba is not just an exotic philosophical exercise, or a futile logomachy, but one that might have practical implications by alerting people to be vigilant and critical about similar restrictions in the practice of professional philosophy and enjoyment of political freedoms elsewhere.

I explore the importance of this project in four parts. In the first part, I present a brief historical exposition for understanding some of the issues leading to the polemic. I underscore the pivotal role that José Agustín Caballero (1762-1835), uncle of Luz y Caballero, played in reforming the teaching and practice of philosophy in Cuba at the end of the 18th Century and the early part of the 19th Century. Yet Félix Varela y Morales (1788-1853), a former student of Caballero, challenged the scholasticism taught at the Royal and Pontifical University of Saint Jerome of Havana founded in 1728 (henceforth, University of Havana). The historical exposition will show that early arguments on the impact of modern philosophy in Cuba were mainly disagreements about the nature of philosophy, the role of theology in philosophical argumentation, and the attempt to overcome scholasticism in favor of modern philosophy and modern science.

In the second part, I explore fundamentally contested issues animating the polemic: on methodology, morality, and Cousin's eclecticism. None of the issues debated focused on patriotism *per se*. Sometimes, however, Luz y Caballero appeals to patriotism to try to disqualify his opponents. I argue that such appeals are fallacious by allowing concerns about patriotism to eclipse substantive philosophical arguments.

In the third part, I argue that the predominant view of the polemic as motivated by a widespread Cuban desire for independence from Spain promotes an emancipatory myth. Such a predominant view of the polemic is anachronistic and hence one-sided, consisting either in a straw man fallacy or a false dilemma. Lastly, I argue that Luz y Caballero's appeal to patriotism during the polemic unwittingly provided a dangerous precedent for self-appointed guardians of patriotism to condition public debates.

I Historical Background

The polemic transpired at a time of intellectual curiosity and animadversions regarding Spain's role in the island's affairs. This was also a time of political oppression. The captain general appointed by Spain had enjoyed despotic power in Cuba. Such despotic power was used intermittently depending on the perceived or real threat of sedition by groups disaffected with Spain's policies towards its colony, especially members of the white Creole elites, free people of color, and slaves who repudiated the perpetuation and expansion of slavery.[14]

Prior to 1825, Juan José Díaz de Espada y Fernández de Landa (1756-1832), who was appointed Bishop of Havana in 1802, had welcomed the teaching of modern philosophy and modern science at the San Carlos and San Ambrosio Seminary (henceforth, San Carlos Seminary).[15] Nonetheless, the priest José Agustín Caballero, in his *Philosophia Electiva* (1797), circumspcctly introduced modern philosophy and modern science into the curriculum of the University of Havana and the San Carlos Seminary where he taught theology and philosophy.[16]

Caballero's *Philosophia Electiva* retains the preeminence of theology over philosophy. So he cautiously engaged the works of modern philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Malebranche. As Mestre indicates, Caballero expounded Descartes' philosophical ideas, whose name was barely known in Cuba at that time.[17]

Another diocesan priest, namely Félix Varela y Morales, truly reformed the teaching of philosophy and natural sciences in Cuba in the light of modern philosophy and modern science.[18] As a student of Caballero, Varela was exposed to Caballero's timid incursions into modern philosophy and modern science in the San Carlos Seminary. Under Bishop Espada, the seminary, unlike the University of Havana, became a bastion for promoting modern ideas. Thus, Bishop Espada encouraged Varela to transcend futile, scholastic disputes.

Varela attempted to overcome the dogmatism of scholasticism in his first philosophical work, *Propositiones varie ad tironum exercitationem* (1812). In it, he embraced classical eclecticism to combat the appeal to *magister dixit*, which had been commonly used in scholastic disputations, especially regarding the authority of Aristotle. He argued that eclectic philosophy can learn from any school, provided the arguments and ideas are compatible with sound reason and experience.[19] Nevertheless, he dismissed scholasticism without undermining the value of Aquinas's philosophy.[20]

Varela was rather critical of Aristotle. He described Aristotle's widespread influence at the time as "a species of philosophical dictatorship."[21] He believed that Aristotle's glory and fame might be partly explained by the great conquests of his disciple Alexander the Great.[22]

By critically engaging modern philosophers, such as Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Newton, and Kant, Varela transcended the stagnant scholasticism that prevailed in Cuba, especially in the University of Havana. So he promoted the secularization and the autonomy of philosophy from the shackles of theology without abandoning his Catholic faith. In his “Elenco de 1816” [1816 Lecture Notes], he argued, “The Patristic Fathers have no authority whatsoever in philosophical matters; such matters ought to be solely dealt with by focusing on the reasons that support them.”[23]

In 1812, Varela had already contended that, with the new developments in science, Galileo, Bacon, and the Spanish doctor Antonio Gómez Pereira attempted to overcome the “Aristotelian yoke” by establishing a genuine philosophical approach. He acknowledged that such a great honor belonged to Descartes who, according to him, relentlessly fought the Aristotelian acolytes. He went on to praise Isaac Newton as the father of modern physics and as the first among all those who tried to explain Nature. [24]

II The Polemic

Varela’s and Cousin’s philosophical views prompted the polemic among enlightened liberal members of the Cuban intelligentsia and men of letters.[25] As professors in the University of Havana, Manuel González del Valle (1802-1884) and especially his younger brother José Zacarías González del Valle (1820-1851), who translated one of Cousin’s works into Spanish, were respected scholars who defended Cousin’s eclecticism.[26] But since Luz y Caballero and Manuel González del Valle had been Varela’s students in the San Carlos Seminary, Varela’s philosophical ideas were also lurking in the background of the polemic.[27]

In an 1840 letter to a former student who had inquired about his views on the polemic, Varela wrote, “ [T]he points of the controversy are three: First, whether the teaching of Philosophy should begin with Physics or with Logic; second, whether utility should be admitted as a principle and standard of action; third, whether the Cousin system should be admitted.”[28] Therefore, the bulk of the polemic is about challenging philosophical issues regarding methodology, morality and gauging Cousin’s eclecticism rather than issues about emancipatory patriotism, as some scholars contend, whom I discuss in the third section of my paper. Hence, in this section, I address the philosophical issues first, and in later sections I address issues regarding patriotism.

A. Methodology

By advocating teaching the natural sciences first, especially physics, rather than first teaching logic, psychology, and morality, as it was customarily done in the scholastic tradition, Luz y Caballero contributed to the polemic. He wrote, “I propose that the philosophy course begins with physics and concludes with the study of logic and morality, which is precisely the opposite of how it is taught nowadays, and how it

has always been taught.”[29] Issues of methodology, however, had been debated for quite some time between Luz y Caballero and his critics. In 1835, as director of the College of San Cristobal (a.k.a College of Carraguao) in Havana, he had already argued in favor of the explanatory method, which is based on induction, against the formal method based on mathematics and pure memorization.[30]

Having been impressed by Bacon’s inductive method and Locke’s empiricism, Luz y Caballero assumed that exposing students to a method of observation and inductive generalizations would prepare them to acquire true knowledge. Thus, he assumed the truth of some controversial claims. For example, he believed that from a chain of specific observations, students would acquire general causal knowledge about their specific experiences. Moreover, he presupposed, “[I]n natural sciences we go from the facts to the theory.”[31] It is puzzling that, despite being familiar with Hume’s philosophical ideas, he simply ignored Hume’s challenging views on induction.[32]

In his passion for overcoming scholasticism and the dangers that he perceived in Cousin’s eclecticism, Luz y Caballero was exuberant about the inductive or scientific method. Manuel Castellanos Mojarrieta, who was a lawyer and secretary of Puerto Príncipe Town Hall in eastern Cuba, argued against Luz y Caballero’s pedagogical shift. Castellanos supported that logic continue to be taught first as a way of understanding our particular observations in physics and the natural sciences. For him, to have a good understanding of physics, we first need to have a solid understanding of sound reasoning, which is provided by deductive logic.[33]

In his rejoinder to Castellanos, Luz y Caballero contended that the development of modern science, including chemistry, anatomy, and geology, resulted from applying the scientific method. The same is not true about what he referred to as the intellectual sciences, which included philosophy, logic, psychology, and morality. According to him, the scientific method had been so successful that modern psychologists tried to implement it even in the intellectual sciences.[34]

Luz y Caballero preferred inductive over deductive reasoning because Francis Bacon’s defense of induction initiated a modern revolution in the natural sciences.[35] In the spirit of Varela’s eclecticism, who had already argued against the scholastic practice of appealing to *magister dixit*, Luz y Caballero ended his reply to Castellanos by defending the power of reason over the power of authority. He wrote, “We owe respect to our teachers rather than blind faith.”[36] Yet Castellanos did not seem to be advocating “blind faith” to anyone. He simply disagreed with Luz y Caballero’s pedagogical approach.

B. Morality

The arguments between Manuel González del Valle, a professor in the University of Havana, and the priest Francisco Ruiz, a professor at the San Carlos Seminary, show that the polemic veered to a debate on the nature of morality. While Valle defended a

conception of morality based on acting according to the principle of duty for duty's sake, Ruiz defended the principle of utility.

Luz y Caballero attempted to mediate between these two polemicists because he esteemed them both. He, however, favored Ruiz's utilitarianism. Valle appreciated the role that the principle of utility plays for improving people's well-being, especially in the economic realm. However, contrary to the principle of utility, he argued that the principle of deontological justice supervene upon all realms of life based on people's intentions. [37]

Ruiz highlighted that he was using the term 'utility' as it was understood by Socrates and Cicero. He quoted with approval the following passage from Cicero's work: "whatever is honorable is beneficial." [38] So he challenged Valle to explain how the principle of duty could determine the nature of our moral actions. For Ruiz, discharging our duties must contribute to people's happiness. If so, he continued, the principle of duty would necessarily be beneficial. Hence, according to Ruiz, the principle of duty depends upon the principle of utility. [39] Furthermore, he argued that there is no real distinction between justice and utility, as Valle presupposed. He maintained, "[J]ustice far from being different from utility constitutes, on the contrary, the supreme utility because in its applications it can provide to society and thereby to its members the greatest happiness." [40]

José Zacarías González del Valle, who intervened on behalf of his brother Manuel's deontological view, highlighted Ruiz's conflation of the right and the good. José wrote, "The language of all nations contains the terms goodness and utility, justice and interest, without successfully reducing them to one." [41]

Since Valle cited parts of Luz y Caballero's "Elenco de Carraguao de 1835" [Lectures of Carraguao from 1835], where he criticized the principle of utility, Luz y Caballero tried to explain his seemingly incoherent position regarding this principle. He argued that, if correctly understood, Ruiz's and Valle's positions are consistent. Therefore, he contended that the principle of utility and the principle of duty are reconcilable.

Luz y Caballero argued against Valle's deontological view because the latter provided an intuitionist defense of the principle of duty. He presupposed that an intuitionist defense of the principle of duty committed Valle to the notion of innate ideas. He, however, found the notion of innate ideas unilluminating.

Luz y Caballero offered a distinctive understanding of the term 'utility.' He wrote, "[U]seful is a railroad train but more useful is justice. The term useful is applicable to anything that we can benefit from whether physically or morally. And if we restrict its use to that which is moral, it is ascribable to generous or malicious actions." [42] He and Ruiz defined the term 'utility' so broadly that it includes the principle of duty. Consequently,

they seemingly commingled two different moral principles that at times pull in different directions.

C. Eclecticism

Next, the polemic focused on Victor Cousin's eclecticism. For Cousin, eclecticism neither completely rejects nor completely accepts any philosophical system; it simply selects from any philosophical system that which seems to be true and good.[43] He supports the liberty of philosophizing, which is a foundational principle of ancient and modern eclecticism.[44]

Eclecticism, Cousin argued, "[W]as born the moment that a sound head and feeling heart undertook to reconcile two passionate adversaries." [45] So his eclecticism is based on toleration.[46] But Cousin goes beyond the principle of toleration in philosophy. He argues for the reconciliation of contraries in philosophy, such as idealism and empiricism, and theism and pantheism.[47]

Jules Simon, one of Cousin's leading disciples, argued that while modern eclectics do not admit it, they cannot avoid the charge of syncretism.[48] Similarly, while never mentioning Cousin's eclecticism by name, Hegel, who praised him for his translations of Proclus's and Plato's works, found eclecticism "something to be utterly condemned" as a hodgepodge of incoherence.[49] Hence, some of Cousin's contemporary counterparts realized that his eclecticism was philosophically shallow, although not necessarily politically dangerous, as Luz y Caballero alleged.

The zenith of the polemic was Luz y Caballero's arguments against Cousin's eclecticism in his essay, "Impugnación a las Doctrinas Filosóficas de Victor Cousin." His motivation in challenging Cousin's eclecticism was a feeling of patriotism on behalf of the Cuban youth. He intended to alert the Cuban youth about the detrimental effects that Cousin's eclecticism could inflict on their fresh minds by persuading them to steer away from the study of physiology and the scientific method as a way of improving people's lives.[50]

Luz y Caballero offered a two-pronged attack against Cousin's eclecticism. First, he argued that by trying to reconcile that which is philosophically incongruous, such as materialism and idealism, Cousin's eclecticism was incoherent. And second, he alleged that Cousin's eclecticism is "politics masked as philosophy, nothing more than that." [51] By this cryptic metaphorical expression, he probably meant that Cousin used his eclecticism to defend the status quo in France during the July Monarchy.

As I have already-mentioned, serious reservations arose, even among Cousin's former disciples, about the coherence of his eclecticism. Moreover, one can grant to Luz y Caballero that Cousin indeed used his eclecticism to support France's July Monarchy. One can even grant him that as a minister of public instruction during 1840, Cousin promoted his eclecticism. Perhaps it is even fitting to call him "official philosopher of the

July Monarchy.”[52] Cousin is the first to admit that his eclecticism and his politics are congruent.[53] Yet they are also different.

Cousin’s eclecticism was first and foremost philosophical. His philosophical works prior to the July Monarchy attest to it. Prior to 1830, Cousin had already published some of his important philosophical works where he developed his eclecticism, such as *Philosophie sensualiste au XVIII siècle* (1819); *Fragments philosophiques* (1826); and *Cours de l’histoire de la philosophie* (1829). Hence, Luz y Caballero’s allegation that Cousin’s eclecticism was “politics masked as philosophy” seems overstated.

Nevertheless, Luz y Caballero’s concerns about Cousin’s eclecticism were partly justified. As in philosophy, reconciliation in politics is possible among those who share consistent rather than inconsistent beliefs and principles.[54] Moreover, Cousin’s eclectic spirit in politics during the 1830s liberal constitutional monarchy in France could be seen as a virtue because with it, Cousin tried to transcend the vicious partisan politics. However, a similarly inspired eclectic spirit in Cuba’s politics—where the odious practice of slavery was still rampant during 1830s and the captain general appointed by Spain enforced a ruthless despotism—could be seen as sanctioning a vicious society. [55]

Still, Luz y Caballero’s concern about the enervating effect that Cousin’s eclecticism could have exerted on the Cuban youth seems unpersuasive. One could conjecture that by persuading the Cuban youth to tolerate rather than to try to overcome the prevalent despotism and the widespread practice of slavery, those who embraced Cousin’s eclecticism might have helped to prolong an unjust state of affairs in the island. Nevertheless, this would be a questionable conjecture because Cousin was rather critical of despotism and slavery.[56]

Cousin was consistently clear on the following two points — he defended the autonomy of philosophy and individual liberty. Simon, who was rather critical of Cousin’s eclecticism and of his politics, acknowledged this: “Upon these two points he [Cousin] would not yield, and never did yield.”[57]

Some contemporary scholars acknowledge as much. For example, Alan Spitzer states that Cousin’s commitment “to a completely unfettered exploration of fundamental questions implied the strong possibility of unacceptable conclusions.”[58] Such “unacceptable conclusions” could challenge the powers that be whether philosophical, political, or otherwise. By insisting on an instrumental use of philosophy, and by his occasional appeal to patriotism, Luz y Caballero inadvertently inspired an emancipatory myth, namely that the polemic was primarily motivated by an emancipatory sense of patriotism seeking independence from Spain.

III Emancipatory Myth

Politically conservative scholars, such as the late Humberto Piñera, who was a respected 20th Century Cuban philosopher, progressive scholars, such as the late Leopoldo Zea, who was an influential 20th Century Mexican philosopher and historian of Latin American ideas, and Neo-Marxist scholars, such as Alicia Conde and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, who are contemporary Cuban historians, converge on promoting an emancipatory myth. For them, the philosophical polemic is a watershed in the formation of Cuban national consciousness leading to Cuba's independence from Spain.

Piñera writes, "In this polemic, one finds an important part of our history and the hidden seed for the process of Cuban independence." Moreover, he refers to this event as a "cultural process that internally hides a political question." [59] Similarly, Zea states, "Luz y Caballero had entered the polemic for patriotic reasons." [60]

Conde, like Torres-Cuevas, couches the polemic as a false dilemma. Those who conceived of modern philosophy in the tradition of Varela and Luz y Caballero were patriots helping to forge Cuban national identity. Therefore, they laid the foundation for Cuba's independence from Spain. By contrast, those who conceived of modern philosophy in the tradition of Cousin's eclecticism, such as the brothers González del Valle, helped to preserve the *status quo*. Therefore, they helped to maintain strong ties with Spain. [61]

Moreover, Conde and Torres-Cuevas assume that those who embraced Cousin's eclecticism, unlike Varela and Luz y Caballero, were defending their class interest as members of a bourgeois slaveholding oligarchy. [62] Though Luz y Caballero was also a member of such bourgeois slaveholding oligarchy, he opposed Spanish despotism and slavery. [63] So did the brothers González del Valle too, who as members of the liberal group spearheaded by Domingo del Monte, were critical of Spanish despotism. They were also against the slave trade and favored gradual abolition of slavery. [64] Like the brothers González del Valle, Luz y Caballero never advocated independence from Spain as a way of ending Spanish despotism. [65] Nor did he ever propose a plan on how to abolish slavery in the island.

In the polemic, except for the long citation of Varela's disquisition on patriotism excerpted from his *Miscelánea Filosófica* by one of Luz y Caballero's opponents, only scarce references to patriotism appear. Luz y Caballero used the term 'patriotism' four times without actually defining or explaining it. [66]

The contenders seem to have been motivated by multifaceted considerations. But they seem to have been motivated primarily by philosophical and pedagogical reasons, and only secondarily by literary and/or political concerns understood in a broad sense. If that is so, then Piñera's, Zea's, Conde's, and Torres-Cuevas's interpretation of the polemic as having been motivated by patriotism conceived as a widespread Cuban desire for emancipation from Spain risks being anachronistic and hence one-sided.

They seem to be reading back into a 19th-century debate their own 20th-century beliefs about it.

The few scattered references to patriotism by some of the contenders in the polemic, especially by Luz y Caballero, demonstrate a concern for the commonweal of the nation or patriotism in a generic sense. That is rather different from Piñera's, Zea's, Conde's, and Torres-Cuevas' interpretation that the polemic was motivated by an emancipatory patriotism seeking independence from Spain.

No evidence exists, in the polemic or in any of the *oeuvres* of Luz y Caballero's inklings, that suggests Luz y Caballero's favor toward emancipatory patriotism. Yet some of his critics from Spain assumed that he championed emancipatory patriotism because some of his former students joined in the 1868 nationwide struggle of Cuba's independence from Spain.[67] Ironically, some of his sympathizers had assumed likewise.[68] Still, such an assumption is unwarranted.

In one of his few political remarks about Cuba's independence, Luz y Caballero had warned about how dangerous independence from Spain could be.[69] In the absence of any reliable textual and/or oral evidence supporting the above-mentioned assumption, the assumption seems spurious. Hence, one can reasonably assume that Luz y Caballero embraced generic rather than emancipatory patriotism.[70]

The contenders in the polemic engaged in disputations none of which address issues of patriotism. Both camps engaged in the polemic welcomed modern philosophy, but disagreed on which version of it should be adopted. Those who embraced the Cartesian cogito, Cousin's modern eclecticism, and deontology were more sympathetic to Neo-Scholasticism than those who adopted Bacon's induction, Locke's empiricism, and Bentham's utilitarianism. This is so because they, like Cousin, were open to the possibility of ontological conjectures about the existence and attributes of God independently of empirical considerations.

The prevalent emancipatory myth of the polemic seems one-sided consisting either in a straw man fallacy or in a false dilemma. This myth can be seen as a straw man fallacy because there were motley philosophical controversies none of which was on patriotism *per se*. The myth can also be seen as a false dilemma because there are better explanations of the polemic based on reliable textual evidence. For example, in his brief but interesting 1862 book on philosophy in Havana, José Manuel Mestre, who was critical of Cousin's eclecticism, revisited the polemic. His assessment of the polemic is congruent with Varela's assessment of it back in 1840. For Mestre, like for Varela, the philosophical debates during the polemic were primarily about the nature of philosophy, such as the debate on the role of logic, morality, and Cousin's eclecticism. [71]

During the polemic, Luz y Caballero deflected attention from legitimate philosophical arguments by appealing to patriotism. In doing so, he tried to disqualify his

opponents' arguments by tacitly questioning their motives. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, assuming that all participants in the polemic thought of themselves as *bona fide* patriots in the generic sense, especially the brothers González del Valle, who publicly acknowledged sincere respect for Varela and for Luz y Caballero, is reasonable.

Like Luz y Caballero, the brothers González del Valle genuinely loved their country and were working for the improvement of their compatriots according to their own conception of the good. Thus, the implicit disagreement between Luz y Caballero's and their conception of the good for Cuban society can be portrayed as a reasonable disagreement among people of good faith. Their explicit disagreements, however, were about how best to practice and teach philosophy in Cuba.

IV Conclusion

I have shown that the early arguments prior to the Philosophical Polemic in Havana were mainly disagreements about the nature of philosophy, the role of theology in philosophical argumentation, and the overcoming of scholasticism in favor of modern philosophy and modern science. The newly generated arguments by the polemic are primarily about methodology, morality, and the philosophical import of Victor Cousin's eclecticism. Hence, none of the newly generated arguments is about patriotism per se. Thus, Luz y Caballero's occasional appeal to patriotism in trying to justify his philosophical disquisitions, and thereby disqualify his opponents' views, was based on a fallacious *argumentum ad populum* and/or a tacit *ad hominem* argument.

I have argued that the predominant view of the polemic, which has been understood to be motivated by a widespread Cuban desire for independence from Spain, misleadingly promotes an emancipatory myth. Such a view of the polemic is anachronistic and hence one-sided, consisting either in a straw man fallacy or a false dilemma.

I have also argued that Luz y Caballero's allegation that Cousin's eclecticism is just politics camouflaged as philosophy seems overstated. Regardless of the shortcomings of Cousin's eclecticism, his liberal principle of toleration in philosophy and politics and his arguments supporting the autonomy of philosophy have helped to establish a legacy respecting the unrestricted liberty and practice of professional philosophy.[72]

Despite Luz y Caballero's Herculean efforts on behalf of the liberty of teaching modern philosophy and modern science in Cuba, his appeal to patriotism during the polemic has paradoxically established a dangerous precedent. Henceforth, defenders of political expediency could try to justify and/or excuse acting under the aegis of patriotism to restrict the scope of public debates.

A frequently quoted expression by Luz y Caballero illustrates the risk of the above-mentioned threat. He wrote, “A philosopher, being tolerant, is cosmopolitan, but he ought to be, above all, patriotic.”[73] He seemed oblivious to a real tension that existed between the practice of toleration in philosophy and politics and his *cri de coeur* to patriotism. Should those who are unpatriotic be tolerated? If so, to what extent should they be tolerated? Most importantly, who has the right to decide who is a genuine patriot and who is not? Luz y Caballero’s silence on these challenging questions is ominous.

To sum up, Luz y Caballero’s occasional appeal to patriotism to try to rebut his opponents’ arguments unwittingly provided a dangerous precedent for self-appointed guardians of patriotism to condition public debates. Perhaps such conditioning has been and still is a regrettable common practice in different parts of the globe. However, once we allow for people appealing to patriotism rather than to reason and argumentation to try to settle philosophical debates, we are essentially sanctioning the tyranny of politics over reason. We might be unable to prevent such tyranny. Nevertheless, we can always be vigilant and critical about those who try to restrict the practice of professional philosophy and enjoyment of political freedoms anywhere in the world.

Vicente Medina
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange, NJ 07079
973-761-9766
medinavi@shu.edu

Notes

*I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues Yvonne Unna, David O’Connor, Mark Couch and Abe Zakhem for their valuable comments and suggestions. I must acknowledge Diana Alvarez-Amell, who helped me translate the abstract into Spanish, and Kirsten Schultz, who translated it into Portuguese. David Benfield also provided valuable suggestions for improving my argument. Finally, I am grateful to the editor, assistant to the editor, and the anonymous reviewers of IJP for their help.

[1] R. Agramonte, *Don José de la Luz y la Filosofía como Ciencia de la Realidad* (La Habana, 1946), 5-20.

[2] A. Conde Rodríguez, “Ensayo introductorio” in *La Polémica Filosófica Cubana (1838-1839)* vol 1 (La Habana, 2000), 3; hereafter, this text is abbreviated as PF 1 or PF 2 depending on the appropriate volume. While Luz y Caballero published most of his works in the *Diario de la Habana*, his opponents published most of their works in the *Noticioso y Lucero*. The latter was the precursor to the conservative newspaper, *Diario de la Marina*, which represented the interests of the Spanish oligarchy in the island. See J. I. Rodríguez, *Vida de Don José de la Luz y Caballero* (New York: 1874), 99. For the

history of some of the leading newspapers in the island, see A. Mitjans, *Estudio sobre el Movimiento Científico y Literario de Cuba* (La Habana, 1963), 93-96 & 121.

[3] G. Bentancourt Cisneros, *Trinidad*, (1840) in PF2, 495-500. See the reply by Ciudadano del Mundo (pseudonym), *El Texto de Varela y la Cátedra de Filosofía de Trinidad* in PF, 549-552; see also the rejoinders by G. Bentancourt Cisneros, *Al Ciudadano del Mundo*, (1840) in PF2, 553 and G. Bentancourt Cisneros, *Al Ciudadano del Mundo, Residente de Trinidad* (1840) in PF2, 554-558.

[4] Luz y Caballero's originally published his "Impugnación" under the pseudonym of *Filolezes* in two separate pamphlets of about sixty pages each printed in the Government press by Don José Toribio de Arazona. See Rodríguez, *Vida de Don José de la Luz y Caballero*, 100.

[5] J.J. Remos, *Proceso Histórico de las Letras Cubanas* (Madrid: 1958), 152-153.

[6] D.S. Goldstein, "'Official Philosophies' in Modern France: The Example of Victor Cousin" *Journal of Social History* 1.3 (1968), 269.

[7] D. R. Kelly, "Eclecticism in History of Ideas" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001), 577-592, especially 579.

[8] J. Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psych in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 154.

[9] H. Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 102-103; see also R. Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2004), 56.

[10] Moreno Fragnals, *El Ingenio*, vol. 1 (La Habana: 1978), 272-273.

[11] A. Bello, "The Craft of History (1848)," in *Selected Writings of Andrés Bello* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1997), 175-186.

[12] J. Alberdi, "Ideas (1842)," in *Filosofía e identidad cultural en América Latina* eds J.J. E. Gracias and I. Jaksic (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1983): 53-65.

[13] B.A.G. Fuller, *A History of Modern Philosophy* 3rd ed., vol. 2. (New York: H. Holt and Co, 1955), 474.

[14] Moreno Fragnals, *Cuba/España España/Cuba* (Barcelona: Barcelona, 1995), 190-205; see also Gott, *Cuba*, 56.

[15] A. Hernández Travieso, *Varela y la Reforma Filosófica en Cuba* (La Habana: 1942), 47-64; see also Conde Rodríguez, "Ensayo introductorio," in PF1, 6.

[16] Fuller, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, 468; see also M Vitier, *José de la Luz y Caballero como Educador* (La Habana: 1970), 329-338.

[17] J.M. Mestre, *De La Filosofía en la Habana* (Habana: Imprenta La Antilla, 1862), 13.

[18] *Ibid*, 16; see also Vitier, *José de la Luz y Caballero*, 339-346.

[19] F. Varela, *Propositiones variae ad tironum exercitationem* (1812) in *Félix Varela Obras*, 3 tomos eds E. Torres-Cueva et. al. (La Habana: 1997), 3. Hereafter, these volumes are abbreviated FV1, FV2, or FV3.

[20] *Ibid*, 4.

[21] *Ibid*, 20.

[22] *Ibid*, 20.

[23] F. Varela, *Elenco de 1816* in FV 1, 70.

[24] Varela, *Propositiones variae ad tironum exercitationem* in FV 1, 21-22.

[25] Conde Rodríguez, "Ensayo introductorio," in PF1, 39-40; see also L. Zea, *The Latin American Mind* ed. J.H. Abbott and Lowell Dunhamtrans (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 115.

[26] H. Piñera Llera, *Panorama de la Filosofía Cubana* (Washington, DC: Union Panamericana, 1960), 68 and 119.

[27] J.M. Mestre, *De La Filosofía*, 49.

[28] F. Varela, "Physics and Logic" in *Latin American Social Thought: The History of Its Development since Independence, with Selected Readings* ed. H.E. Davis (Washington, DC: The University Press of Washington, DC, 1961), 182. For the complete letter, see F. Varela, "Carta a un discípulo sobre su posición ante la polémica filosófica" [Letter to a disciple about his position regarding the philosophical polemic] in FV3 (1840), 234-242.

[29] J. Luz y Caballero, *Advertencia-Proemio al Elenco de 1834* [Preface to the Lectures of 1834] (1838) in PF1, 70.

[30] J. Luz y Caballero, "Al Aritmético Curioso" [To the Curious Arithmetician] in *José de la Luz y Caballero como Educador: recopilación de sus escritos* ed. Francisco González del Valle (La Habana, 1931), 89-121.

[31] Luz y Caballero, *Advertencia-Proemio* in PF1, 71.

[32] D. Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 15-25.

[33] M. Castellanos Mojarrieta, *Refutación de la Advertencia-Proemio* [Refutation to the Preface] in PF 1 (1838), 72-76.

[34] J. Luz y Caballero, "Cuestión de Método: Si el Estudio de la Física debe o no Preceder al de la Lógica" [A Question on Method: Whether the Study of Physics ought to Precede the Study of Logic] in PF 1 (1838) 77-95; see also M. Vitier, *José de la Luz y Caballero como Educador* (La Habana: 1956), 33-34.

[35] Luz y Caballero, "Cuestión de Método" in PF1, 93. No evidence exists that scientific discoveries were made by using Bacon's understanding of induction. See J.R. Newman, *Science and Sensibility* (New York: Anchor, 1963), 70-71.

[36] Luz y Caballero, "Cuestión de Método" in PF1, 95.

[37] M. González del Valle, "Sobre la Máxima de la Utilidad" [On the Principle of Utility] in PF 1 (1839), 310.

[38] Cicero, *On Duties* eds. M.T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 112–113.

[39] F. Ruiz, "Sobre Helvecio y el Sistema de la Naturaleza" [On Helvetius and The True Meaning of the System of Nature] in PF1 (1839), 314.

[40] *Ibid*, 315.

[41] J.Z. González del Valle, "¿Máxima de Utilidad o Ley del Deber?" [Principle of Utility or Principle of Duty] in PF 1 (1839), 340.

[42] J. Luz y Caballero, "El Principio de Utilidad en el Elenco de Carraguao" [The Principle of Utility in the Lectures of Carraguao] in PF 1 (1839), 351.

[43] V. Cousin, "On the Destiny of Modern Philosophy" in *Philosophical Miscellanies* transl. G. Ripley (Boston: 1838), 45-54, especially 52.

[44] Kelly, "Eclecticism in History of Ideas," 581.

[45] V. Cousin, "Exposition of Eclecticism," in *Philosophical Miscellanies* transl. G. Ripley (Boston: 1838), 104.

[46] V. Cousin, *Introduction to the History of Philosophy* transl. H.G. Linberg (Boston: 1832), 24-25.

[47] *Ibid*, 413-414.

[48] J. Simon, *Victor Cousin*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co, 1888), 83.

[49] G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy* trans. E.S. Haldane vol 2 (New York: The Humanities Press, 1974), 400-401.

[50] J. Luz y Caballero, "Impugnación a las Doctrinas Filosóficas de Victor Cousin" [Impugnación to Victor Cousin's Philosophical Doctrines] in PF 2 (1840), 863-69; see also Vitier, *José de la Luz y Caballero como Educador*, 19-21.

[51] Luz y Caballero, "Impugnación a las Doctrinas Filosóficas de Victor Cousin" [Impugnación to Victor Cousin's Philosophical Doctrines] in PF 2, 869 footnote 5. Manuel Sanguily concurs with Luz y Caballero's interpretation regarding the conservative political nature of Cousin's eclecticism. See M. Sanguily, *José de la Luz y Caballero: Estudio Crítico* (La Habana: 1890), 64; see also C. Vitier, *Ese Sol del Mundo Moral: para una historia de la eticidad cubana* (Mexico: 2002), 27.

[52] Goldstein, "'Official Philosophies' in Modern France," 259.

[53] Cousin, "Exposition of Eclecticism," 107.

[54] For a criticism of Cousin's eclecticism in politics see Simon, *Victor Cousin*, 55-56.

[55] Rodríguez, *Vida de Don José de la Luz y Caballero*, 98.

[56] For his arguments against despotism, see V. Cousin, *Lectures on the True, The Beautiful, and the Good: Increased by an Appendix on French Art* transl. O.W. Wight (New York: T&T Clark, 1854): 316-324. For his opposition to slavery, see *Ibid*, 309.

[57] Simon, *Victor Cousin*, 35.

[58] A.B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), 95.

[59] Piñera Llera, *Panorama de la Filosofía Cubana*, 51-52; see also Francisco González del Valle, ed., *José de la Luz y Caballero como Educador*, 7-13.

[60] Zea, *The Latin American Mind*, 119 and 112-121; see also Harold Eugene Davis, *Latin American Thought: A Historical Introduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972), 69.

[61] Conde Rodríguez, "Ensayo introductorio," in PF1, 6; see also E. Torres-Cuevas, *Félix Varela: los orígenes de la ciencia y con-ciencia cubanas* (La Habana: 1995), 378.

[62] Conde Rodríguez "Ensayo introductorio," in PF1, 33, 61, 66; see also Torres-Cuevas, *Félix Varela*, 388.

[63] Rodríguez, *Vida de Don José de la Luz y Caballero*, 210-212; see also C. Vitier, *Ese Sol del Mundo Moral*, 35-36. No doubts exist about Luz y Caballero's opposition to Spanish despotism, but his views on slavery are controversial. He argued against the slave trade, but seemed to have favored gradual abolition. He even owned slaves. That is why General Antonio Maceo, a hero of Cuban independence of African ancestry, was highly critical of him. See J. Castellanos and I. Castellanos, *Cultura*

Afrocubana: el Negro en Cuba, 1492-1844 (Miami: Ediciones Universal 1988), 271-275. In his testament, however, Luz y Caballero is critical of slavery and leaves money to free as many slaves as possible who worked at his sugar mill, *La Luisa*. See Vitier, *Ese Sol Del Mundo Moral*, 35.

[64] J.M. Aguilera Manzano, "The Informal Communication Network Built by Domingo del Monte from Havana between 1824 and 1845" *Caribbean Studies* 37 (2009), 67-96.

[65] Rodríguez, *Vida de Don José de la Luz y Caballero*, 207-208. Sanguily wrote a critical study of Luz y Caballero as a response to Rodríguez's meticulous biographical work. Unlike Rodríguez, he offered an interpretation of Luz y Caballero as a patriot whose teaching favored, rather than opposed, Cuba's independence from Spain. However, he offered circumstantial evidence for his questionable interpretation. See Sanguily, *José de la Luz y Caballero: Estudio Crítico*, 197-199; see also E. Piñeyro, *Hombres y Glorias de América* (Paris: Garnier Hermanos, 1903), 196-197.

[66] Luz y Caballero, "Impugnación a las Doctrinas Filosóficas de Victor Cousin" in PF2, 590, 656, 720, 863.

[67] M. Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los Heterodoxos Españoles* Libro VIII (Barcelona: 2008), 270. He wrote a scathing *ad hominem* attack against Luz y Caballero in 1882. That is, twenty years after Luz y Caballero's death. See also M. I. Mesa Rodríguez, *José de la Luz y Caballero Maestro de una Gran Generación* (La Habana: 1956), 22-34.

[68] Sanguily, *José de la Luz y Caballero: Estudio Crítico*, 197-199; see also J. Martí, "José de la Luz" *Patria*, 17 de noviembre de 1894 *José Martí: Obras Completas*, vol. 5 (La Habana: 1894), 271-273.

[69] R. Guerra Sánchez, *José de la Luz y Caballero como Político* (La Habana: 1957), 33; see also C.R. Rodríguez, *José de la Luz y Caballero* (La Habana: 1947), 16-18.

[70] A. Bachiller y Morales, *Apuntes para la Historia de las Letras y de la Instrucción Pública en la Isla de Cuba* (Miami: Editorial Cubana, 2006), 458; see also Rodríguez, *Vida de Don José de la Luz y Caballero*, 31 and 196-199; J. Mañach, *Luz y "El Salvador"* (La Habana: 1948), 15.

[71] J.M. Mestre, *De La Filosofía en la Habana*, 49-74.

[72] Goldstein, "'Official Philosophies' in Modern France," 273-274.

[73] J. Luz y Caballero, "Elenco de 1840: Noción de la Filosofía" [Lectures of 1840: Conception of Philosophy] in *José de La Luz y Caballero: Obras Elencos y discursos académicos* ed. Conde Rodríguez, vol. III (La Habana: 2001), 78.