



THE ROOTS AND BRANCHES OF SPANISH ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT, PART TWO

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The Oldness of Spanish Reformist Thought

Spanish thought, whether of a theological, philosophical or political nature, is old since it dates back to the Middle Ages, where it flourished (among others) in the universities founded in this period: Palencia, Salamanca, Lérida, Valladolid, Huesca, Calatayud, Girona and Barcelona. The consolidation of the Spanish university system continued during the Renaissance and the Baroque era, with nearly thirty higher education establishments founded between 1483 and 1624 – not counting New World universities.

It is from these establishments (and in particular from the *Colegios Mayores* that we [mentioned earlier](#)) that the [letrados](#), jurists and great administrators came first from the underprivileged classes, who then were intended for service within various national, regional and local bodies of government (Royal Councils, Provincial Audiences, Chancelleries, the post of *corregidores*, etc.).

If classical education (logic, rhetoric, theology, civil law, canon law, medicine) remained on the agenda, the renewal brought about by these prestigious *letrados* explains the superiority of the administration of the Habsburgs of Spain over that of the other European countries, in particular at the beginning of the reign of [Philip II](#) (1556-1598), the sovereign considered as the "inventor" of polysynodal governments.

The administrative and ideological revolution that early gave birth to Spanish absolute monarchy is also partly behind the origin of French absolutism, as recent historiographical research has clearly shown.

Salamanca, the Arbitrators and the *Novatores*

It is also in the shadow of the University of Salamanca that the second Spanish scholasticism is born, commonly known as the [School of Salamanca](#). This group of thinkers, teachers, jurists and theologians (including [Martín de Azpilicueta](#), [Tomás de Mercado](#), [Francisco de Vitoria](#), [Martín Fernández de Navarrete](#), [Miguel Caja de Leruela](#), [Diego de Covarrubias](#), [Juan de Mariana](#), [Luis de Molina](#), [Bartolomé de las Casas](#), [Martín González de Cellerigo](#), [Francisco Suárez](#) or even [Domingo de Soto](#)) profoundly renews political and legal science. It transforms and indeed creates many concepts, even branches that did not exist until then: Property law, usury and interest, fair price, public finances and taxes,

international law, etc.

From the end of the 16th century onwards, Spanish thought changed again with the appearance of arbitism (*arbitrismo*), a pejorative term first created in 1613 by Miguel de Cervantes in the short story, *The Dialogue of the Dogs*. Here, the masculine name *arbitrio* designates the "extraordinary means" that a sovereign can use to achieve a given end or resolve a complex situation. Thus, the arbitrators (*arbitristas*), like Cellorigo, [Fernández de Navarrete](#), [Sancho de Moncada](#), [Luis Ortiz](#) or [Luis Valle de la Cerda](#), sought to influence the sovereign by offering him a primer on a given subject, generally of an economic nature (speculation, unfair tax treatment, excessive concentration of agricultural property, government debt, export of capital and raw materials, depopulation).

There was, therefore, among the *arbitristas* (many of whom come from the School of Salamanca), awareness of a series of concrete problems that the government of Spain must work to resolve for the sake the common good - a theme that was largely taken up in the Age of Enlightenment.

Between the end of the reign of [Charles II](#) (1665-1700) and the beginning of that of [Philip V](#) (1700-1746), while Spain experienced a change of dynasty as part of a [War of the Spanish Succession](#) (1701-1714), the arbitrators yielded to a new current of thought, that of the *novatores*, who in 1700, founded the [Royal Society of Medicine and Sciences of Seville](#), responsible for disseminating their ideas, which were based on *atomism*. These researchers (represented by [Diego Martínez Zapata](#), [Luis de Losada](#), [Alejandro Avendaño](#), [Martín Martínez](#), [Tomás Vicente Tosca](#), [Juan Bautista Berni](#) or [Juan de Cabriada](#)) advocated above all the reform of Spanish higher education which, in their eyes, would have to favor physical and natural sciences rather than abstract scholasticism. They blended a renewed *arbitrismo* with the gestating rationality of the Enlightenment.

This transition was not specific to Spain. Across the Pyrenees, it was [Benito Jerónimo Feijoo](#) (1676-1764), forerunner of the *Ilustración*, who spread the theories of Galileo, Isaac Newton, René Descartes, Wilhelm Leibniz, John Locke or [Pierre Bayle](#) to renew philosophy and the sciences. Feijoo advocated a greater opening of Spain to the rest of Europe. The clergyman was not the only one to support such theses, since he was preceded by [Francisco Gutiérrez de los Ríos](#), author of a treatise entitled *El hombre práctico o discursos sobre su conocimiento y enseñanza* (1680).

Enduring Quarrels And An Ambiguous Legacy

If we can credit the Spanish Enlightenment, which fed on the above-mentioned currents, with a certain number of successful reforms (upgrading of work, trade, industry and agriculture; reorganization of the administration; metamorphosis education and university), it should also be noted that they also contributed to deepening old fractures between supporters of an Iberian way (especially turned towards America) and a European way.

This confrontation between the [casticistas](#) (partisans of the *casta*, that is to say, of the national tradition) and the [extranjerizantes](#) (which we may call hereafter the *europaístas*, that is, Europeanists) is illustrated by the opposition of a large part of the Spanish church to new ways of thinking introduced in the Iberian Peninsula. Resistance to the publication of works deemed contrary to religion was the work of the court of the Holy Office, but the latter censored almost as much the monarchy itself - behavior which was not abnormal in the Europe of the time.

In the 18th-century, the *casticismo* musical rebelled against the predominance of forms from the rest of the continent (in particular from France and Italy), and this attitude favored the popular success of Spanish genres, such as [zarzuela](#) or [tonadilla](#).

The Italians [Domenico Scarlatti](#) and [Luigi Boccherini](#), who both ended their days in Madrid, exercised a quasi-tyranny at the court of [Ferdinand VI](#) (1746-1759) and [Charles III](#) (1759-1788) (24), just like the castrato [Farinelli](#) had met with immense success with these kings' father. The few Spaniards to break through, like the organist and harpsichordist [Antonio Soler](#) (1729-1783), were their pupils.

Literature also testifies to this European preponderance, notably French and English. We see this in [Leandro Fernández de Moratín](#) (1760-1828), nicknamed "the Spanish Molière", or in [José Cadalso](#) (1741-1782), whose [Cartas marruecas](#) was inspired by [Montesquieu](#) and his [Noches lúgubres](#) by [Edward Young](#).

It was around this time that the unflattering qualifier of *afrancesado* ("Frenchified") arose, and which was revived with the [French Revolution](#) and the Napoleonic invasion (1808-1814). The demand for Spanish arts and literature served as a weapon for an ideological war against foreign influences, considered impious and harmful by certain sectors. The rise of the *casticista* movement was favored by the fate of [Louis XVI](#), the "cousin" of [Charles IV](#) (1788-1808), who tried to save the French sovereign from the guillotine, and by the censorship of many foreign works.

During the occupation of the Iberian Peninsula by the First Empire, the opponents of [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) were not all adversaries of the new ideological currents - which explains the promulgation of the Constitution of 1812 (one of the first in Europe). The struggle between the Old Regime and liberalism continued for the next two centuries, with reformulations according to the times: Carlist reaction from 1833 to 1876, the difficulties in giving birth to a parliamentary regime from 1875 to 1931, then bloody civil war of 1936 in 1939, followed by a dictatorship which lasted until 1975.

It is through the bias of "two Spain" (*dos Españas*) that this age-old conflict is often addressed. Even if it is not for us now to discuss the relevance of this concept, we must nevertheless be careful when it comes to applying it to the Spanish Enlightenment.

Most of them were indeed moderate, deeply Christian and patriotic, even if they favored an evolution of religious doctrine. It is probably the painter [Francisco de Goya](#) (1746-1828), straddling two periods, who best illustrates these tensions inherent in the time. Favorite of the court, darling of the aristocracy, he did not hide his closeness to the most advanced ideas of his time. Nevertheless, disenchanted with the cruelty of the war unleashed by Napoleon, he found it difficult to progress in the absolutist Spain of [Ferdinand VII](#) (1808-1833) and chose exile in France in 1824.

The engraving, the [Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters](#), which is part of [Los caprichos](#), has an ambiguous title in Spanish, where the term *sueño* designates both the sleep and the dream. Is it when he abandons reason, dear to the Enlightenment, that man drifts and gets lost in the horror of irrationality? Or does reason, pushed to the ultimate and imposed by force, end up producing horrors similar to those that Goya represents in the last years of his life? None of the *Ilustración* representatives could resolve this dichotomy.

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The [image](#) shows, "The sleep of reason produces monsters" (No. 43), from *Los Caprichos*, by Francisco

Goya, a print from 1799.

