



Spanish Philosophy: A Reality or a Myth?

Pablo Torres Martínez¹ and Natalia V. Antonova²

*Kazan Federal University, Department of Foreign Languages in the Field of
International Relations, Kazan, Russia*

E-mail: ¹<pabloto89@hotmail.com>, ²<natallin1710@hotmail.co>

KEYWORDS National Intellectual Tradition. Positive and Negative Categories. Spanish Intellectual Culture. Spanish Philosophy

ABSTRACT The present paper focuses on a controversial and complex phenomenon that has long been disputed in Spain and abroad; that is, existence of philosophy in Spain and essence of national intellectual tradition. The authors therefore take a look at various positions concerning this issue and classify them into several groups. The first tradition analyzed is the Russian one, which is of great interest despite its relatively low scale. The second tradition mentioned is that of Spanish intellectuals which is much more ample and diverse. As a result, traditions targeting interpretation of Spanish philosophy fall into two categories; positive and negative, and the negative one is divided into several subgroups according to the basis for negating the existence of the latter. In conclusion, the authors offer a way to interpret Spanish philosophy against the background of contemporary worldview.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Spanish culture and worldview is intrinsically related to the history of Spanish philosophical thought. However; the number of studies on Russian historiography devoted to Spanish philosophy is relatively small, perhaps because of the originality of the latter. The best-known Russian scientists in the field of Spanish philosophy include Zhuravlev and Zykova as authors of major monographs on the history of modern Spanish philosophy. Besides, there are a number of dissertations and papers associated with particular aspects of Spanish philosophy; in this line, it is worth mentioning the doctoral dissertation fulfilled by Semenova (2007) who analyzed the images of the world and the human in the Spanish artistic verbal culture between 15th-early 20th centuries. Spanish philosophy was similarly analyzed in the works by Slater (2019), Laspra et al. (2018), Rivaya (2016), Falero (2017).

Analyzing the history of Spanish philosophy, Russian Spaniards recognize the ambiguities of the question of the very existence of the latter. In this respect, Colón Rodríguez (2018) does not give a definite answer, nevertheless, he identifies several characteristic features of the above-mentioned phenomenon. Thus, the author notes the inaccuracy of the definition of “philosophy” in relation to Spanish thought, indicating the fundamental importance of liter-

ary context in its formation as well as the general cultural background (Colón Rodríguez 2018). A similar idea has been also pronounced by Sokolov and Iakovleva (2004), “In Spain; philosophy is not understood as a science, but as a peculiar way of questioning about the essence of life and truth for each individual, piercing all areas of spiritual culture” (Kasavin 2017). In her doctoral dissertation, Semenova (2007) further reiterates the idea that “...Spanish culture has always been characterized by thinking in images rather than thinking in concepts” (Fletcher 2016).

At all times, it has been argued that artistic culture assumed the function of speculating and reflecting “in this regard, we can talk about a kind of positional substitution of philosophy by literature” (de Armas 2018). Despite the fact that Russian researchers show great interest in various directions of philosophical searches of the Spanish over the past two centuries, they are far from idealizing their philosophical heritage. Summarizing the interpretation of Spanish philosophy elaborated by Russian scholars, the following features can be highlighted:

1. The influence of Catholicism led to development of Spanish thought throughout most of its history. This idea is shared by the majority of Spanish historians and philosophers.
2. As Wilczynski states, “the nexus between the world and the human being, the personality and the existence is the common

feature of all Spanish philosophies, from Unamuno's existentialism to Spanish Marxism" (Wilczynski 2019).

3. Semenova (2007) points out that Spain almost lacked any sort of laic philosophy; therefore, it was substituted by literature. This position is close to the idea expressed by many Spanish scholars talking about a specific form of Spanish philosophical thought that does not fit into the traditional understanding of philosophy (Petcu 2016).

In Spanish tradition, the history of national philosophy is studied much deeper, but, according to the most outstanding researchers including Abellán and Mora Garcia, it has not been investigated deeply enough. There is also a number of works devoted to this issue, among them the best known are the one by Petcu (2016), Vega (2019) and etc. Regarding the moment of the origin of Spanish philosophy, Spanish researchers also fix differently:

1. Saña Halcón dates the origin of Spanish philosophy back to the times of the Roman conquest and mentions such names as Seneca, Trahan, Marcial, and Lucano among the first Iberian philosophers. Then, he traces the path of Spanish philosophy throughout the centuries up to the contemporaneity (Díez 2017).
2. A number of scholars have also attributed the emergence of Spanish thought to the end of the 19th century, the generation '98 being the creators of the latter. A number of thinkers also attribute the ancestry in the history of Spanish philosophy to Menéndez Pelayo, paying tribute to this outstanding defender of Spanish national tradition (Panadero et al. 2019).
3. Finally, there is the view denying the existence of Spanish philosophy as such, giving priority to the recognized European philosophers. These scholars tend to reduce Spanish philosophy to scholasticism (Belov and Karagod 2016).

Objectives

The present paper focuses on a controversial and complex phenomenon that has long been disputed in Spain and abroad; that is, existence

of philosophy in Spain and essence of national intellectual tradition.

METHODOLOGY

The present study sheds light on the main trends in the history of Spanish philosophy using systemic, comparative, and retrospective analysis methods. The study was also guided by the following principles: 1. historicism; 2. objectivity; and 3. integrity.

Over the past twenty years, the word historicism appears to have been definitely established in the vocabulary of history and philosophy. Since its meaning has varied greatly and has often been obscure, an attempt at some clarification seems in order. Admittedly the task is a difficult one because use of the word is itself evidence of a continuing controversy over the theoretical and philosophical aspects of historiography. It is undoubtedly still too early to reach a consensus about the concepts for which the word may be used, but at least an attempt to answer basic questions concerning the word and its usage may be not only clarifying but also helpful in understanding the theoretic backgrounds which have necessitated the label "historicism". Among such questions are these: In what senses has historicism been defined or used? What are the theories or concepts or conditions which seem to require a new label? What at this time may be regarded as a "proper" use of the word? (Havers 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The idea to question the place of Spanish philosophy in the global panorama did not arise until the 19th century. However, it was stated very sharply in its second half and resulted in a controversy. On the one hand, existence of a philosophical tradition in Spain was flatly denied; on the other hand, it was boldly defended (Menéndez Pelayo 1911). Therefore, the problem became the subject of debate in Salamanca. Subsequently, this issue was actively discussed among Spanish intellectual elite and today it remains quite acute. To outline the attitudes of scientists to the issue, the authors can refer to the *Diccionario de Civilización y Cultura Españolas* (Marco 1997). According to the dictionary en-

try, there are two views on the problem, positive and negative; the supporters of the negative one, in their turn, founding their position differently. The first motive to deny the existence of Spanish philosophical thought is “the confessional absolutism that turned Spain away from the European rationalist movement” (Shore 2016).

The second group of scholars also negates the very existence of national philosophy, which naturally excludes the existence of the Spanish tradition. The third approach “reduces Spanish philosophy to scholasticism” (Decock 2016) and rejects the scientific and practical nature of the latter. The proponents of the positive view quite accept the existence of philosophical thought in Spain, integrating it into the sociocultural background. One of the first and the greatest defenders of Spanish philosophy as a phenomenon was Menéndez Pelayo (1911) whose works largely contributed to spreading the idea of its greatness. De Unamuno (2015), in his turn, also saw the foundations of Spanish thought in “quixotism”, as a system of interpreting reality through imagination and a high code of moral values.

A specific view of the problem was further proposed by Abellán (1967), the famous Spanish philosopher and historian, who distinguished between three positions in relation to the formation of Spanish philosophical thought (Stabb 2017).

First, he positions the opinion defended by Unamuno and his followers, who deny the existence of a peculiar philosophy in Spain (as a country that fell out of the general tradition of European historical development). The followers of this trend see Europe as a reference model, indicating Spain’s underdevelopment against European model. Therefore, they claim the need for Spain to follow the pan-European path. Leyte and Romo (2011) in their paper “La refundación del pensamiento español” also argue that “it is impossible to talk about the history of Spanish philosophy from 1600 to 1900s, because Spain has not played a decisive role in shaping modern philosophy and remains aside from philosophical disputes about the essence of “I”. The concept was also conceived by Unamuno, who estimated the national Spanish philosophy as no more than a “tonal vision of the world through ethnic temperament” (Hayek 2018).

The second tradition, according to Abellán, consists of interpreting Spanish national spirit as a kind of ideal, the founder of this point being Menéndez Pelayo. This understanding implies the uniqueness of Spanish philosophical Spain, which is extremely valuable not only for the Spanish people, but also for Europe, as a whole, being the genuine source of true wisdom. Montanez- Heredia et al. (2016), to some extent, correspondingly shares this idea, defending not only the peculiarities of Spanish philosophy, but also the special national giftedness of the Spanish nation both in terms of culture and philosophy. The scholar also provides ample evidence to support his position and disputes the opposite view. Besides, Saña Halcón refers to the national literary heritage in order to find the origins of Spanish philosophy. In the most radical terms, the same concept is also represented by the idea of “hispanidad” (Maeztu), which proclaims the Spanish way of both cultural and historical development as the only true one (Montanez- Heredia et al. 2016).

The third position, highlighted by Abellán regarding the problem of existence of Spanish philosophy consists of synthesizing Spanish national philosophy and European philosophical tradition (Ramos). Analyzing the history of Spanish philosophy, Abellán first accounts for the interest in the origins of the latter. Once again, he voices Menéndez Pelayo’s idea of self-identification and aspiration to acquire the status of a strong nation with its own ideological concept as the key concepts determining the emergence of interest in the history of national philosophy. Summing up, he infers that philosophy does exist in Spain, but in a specific form that does not meet the generally accepted standards. Furthermore, Abellán explains the “specific status of Spanish philosophy” by the “peculiarities of its historical development”. It is for this reason that he proposes to define this national phenomenon as “thought” or “worldview”, referring to the works by Gaos (Mexico) and finding indirect confirmation to the idea in Ortega’s legacy (Delpech 2018).

CONCLUSION

From the facts provided above, it can be concluded that the problem of existence of philoso-

phy in Spain remains relevant up to the present moment. Despite not having a definite answer, the question still attracts scholars' attention. There is also no doubt that Spanish thought lacks the structure and the regularity typical, for example, of German classical philosophy. Nevertheless, in the modern pluralistic society, inclined to look at social phenomena as multidimensional realities, the form of intellectual analysis which characterizes Spanish thought can be recognized as a specific national philosophical tradition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present paper focuses on a controversial and complex phenomenon that has long been disputed in Spain and abroad; that is, existence of philosophy in Spain and essence of national intellectual tradition. In order to obtain general results for future studies it is suggested to compare the essence of philosophy in the countries in the neighborhood of Spain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

REFERENCES

- Abellán JL 1967. *Filosofía española en América, 1936-1966*. Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Guadarrama (In Spanish).
- Belov V, Karagod J 2016. The Crisis of European Culture in the Works of Russian Philosophers of the Twentieth Century Around the Ideas of Spengler. In: *2016 3rd International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Inter-cultural Communication (ICELAIC 2016)*. 2-4 December 2016, Xiamen, China.
- Colón Rodríguez RE 2018. Translating Lotman and Bakhtin from Russian into Spanish in Cuba: Desiderio Navarro's work on critical thinking development. *The Translator*, 24(4): 318-334.
- de Armas FA 2018. Visual Culture: Art and Ekphrasis in Early Modern Spain. In: Hilaire Kallendorf (Ed.): *A Companion to the Spanish Renaissance*. Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL Publisher.
- Decock W 2016. Spanish scholastics on money and credit: economic, Legal and political aspects. In: W Ernst, D Fox (Eds.): *Money in the Western Legal Tradition: Middle Ages to Bretton Woods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, P. 279.
- Delphech MB 2018. Philosophy in Spanish: An Identity Project. In: *Proceedings of the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy*, 22-24 May 2013, Athens, Greece, 35: 29-34.
- De Unamuno M 2015. *Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno, Volume 3: Our Lord Don Quixote*. New Jersey, United States: Princeton University Press.
- Díez IG 2017. *The Birth of Thought in the Spanish Language: 14th Century Hebrew-Spanish Philosophy*. Springer.
- Falero A 2017. The meaning of Japanese philosophy: A Spanish perspective, *Globalizing Japanese Philosophy as an Academic Discipline*, 6(51): 25-34.
- Fletcher R 2016. Philosophy in the expanded field: Ciceronian Dialogue in Pollio's Letters from Spain (FAM. 10.31-33). *Arethusa*, 49(3): 549-573.
- Havers G 2019. *Analytical Marxism and the meaning of historicism*. In: Lee Trepanier, Grant Havers (Eds.): *Walk Away: When the Political Left Turns Right*. Lexington Books, P. 151.
- Hayek FA 2018. *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and the History of Ideas*. Illinois, United States: University of Chicago Press.
- Kasavin I 2017. Towards a social philosophy of Science: Russian prospects. *Social Epistemology*, 31(1): 1-5.
- Laspra B, Cerezo L, Antonio José (Eds.) 2018. *Spanish Philosophy of Technology: Contemporary Work from the Spanish Speaking Community*. Berlin: Springer.
- Leyte A, y Romo F 2011. *La refundación del pensamiento español*, *La cultura del XIX al XX en España*. Pais Vasco, Spain: Fundación Zuloaga (In Spanish).
- Marco SQ 1997. *Diccionario de Civilización y Cultura Españolas*. Volume 128. Madrid, Spain: Ediciones AKAL (In Spanish).
- Menéndez, Pelayo M 1911. *Historia de la Poesía Hispanoamericana*. Madrid, Spain: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes (In Spanish).
- Montañez-Heredia E, Irizar S, Huertas P, Otero E, del Valle M, Prat I, Díaz-Gallardo M, Perán M, Marchal J, Hernandez-Lamas M 2016. Intra-articular injections of platelet-rich plasma versus hyaluronic acid in the treatment of osteoarthritic knee pain: A randomized clinical trial in the context of the Spanish National Health Care System. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, 17(7): 1064.
- Panadero E, Fraile J, Fernández Ruiz J, Castilla-Estévez D, Ruiz MA 2019. Spanish university assessment practices: Examination tradition with diversity by faculty. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 44(3): 379-397.
- Petcu T 2016. Hungarian philosophy in the context of the European philosophy. *Hermeneia*, 16: 151.
- Rivaya B 2016. The political history of 20th century Spanish philosophy of law. In: Enrico Pattaro, Corrado Roversi (Eds.): *A Treatise of Legal Philosophy and General Jurisprudence*. Springer Link. Chapter 13, pp. 457-501.
- Semenova-Head L 2007. Recent changes in the orientation and quality of translations of literary works from Russian into Portuguese and from Portuguese

- into Russian, Iberian and Slavonic Cultures: Contact and Comparison, pp. 205-212.
- Shore P 2016. Theology and the development of the European Confessional State. In: UL Lehner, RA Muller, AG Roeber (Eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology: 1600-1800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Slater J 2019. The Spanish disquiet: the biblical natural philosophy of Benito Arias Montano by MM Portuondo (Book Review). *Annals of Science*, DOI: 10.1080/00033790.2019.1655665
- Sokolov AV, Iakovleva LE 2004. National philosophy and the interaction of philosophical traditions. *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 43(3): 6-22.
- Stabb MS 2017. *In Quest of Identity: Patterns in the Spanish American Essay of Ideas, 1890-1960*. North Carolina, United States: University of North Carolina Press.
- Vega JL 2019. Spain and the doctors: Historical theories as diagnoses in national psychopathology. *Tempo*, 25(3): 693-714.
- Wilczynski J 2019. *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism Socialism and Communism: Economic, Philosophical, Political and Sociological Theories, Concepts, Institutions and Practices- Classical and Modern, East-West Relations Included*. London: Macmillan.

Paper received for publication in October, 2019
Paper accepted for publication in December, 2019