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radition and renovation: the formation of Balmes and Martí d'Eixalà in their historic context

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abstract

Jaume Balmes and Ramon Martí are certainly the most profound of the Catalan thinkers in the first half of the 19th century. This work shows some of the keys to contextualize their contributions, using the influences they received as a starting point. The basic objective of the comparison is to show that, although they come from similar sources, their positions in regard to combining tradition and modernity are different. The analysis ends with a paradox: Balmes, a more noted philosopher, did not enjoy the same level of direct influence as Martí d'Eixalà.

keywords

Ramon Martí d'Eixalà, Jaume Balmes, XIXth education.

In this article we present the figures of Jaume Balmes and Ramon Martí d'Eixalà in their historic and cultural context, to try to highlight their similarities and differences in the framework of Catalan thinking in the first half of the XIXth. century. The two most relevant intellectuals of the epoch had very different impacts on the development of Catalan philosophy.

Martí d'Eixalà was a sort of Albertus Magnus, a teacher of important thinkers and author of a work which tried to give a new orientation to the ideas of the epoch, with the novelty of the time, which in the XIIIth. century was Aristotelian empiricism. Like Albertus, Martí d'Eixalà did not advance much in his own proposals, but he prepared the way for a Catalan school which came shortly after. Balmes was a brilliant and original thinker, synthetic with

tradition and open to renovation. In the history of philosophy he might be comparable to Vico, as both represented an isolated flowering, without much impact; an amalgam of the tradition yet able to offer serious criticism of the contemporary philosophy and go ahead in some concepts which would become important later.

Undoubtedly Catalan philosophy in the 40's of the XIXth. century debated between tradition and renovation¹. The two most eminent figures, Jaume Balmes² and Ramon Martí d'Eixalà³, were strictly contemporaries of each other and received comparable philosophical and university educations.

Martí d'Eixalà's brief life (1808-1857) did not allow him to see his theories recognized by slightly later minds, less eclectic and more cautious, which developed what the philosopher and lawyer from Cardona had supported so fervently. Something similar occurred in the even briefer life of Balmes (1810-1848), who almost reached phenomenological conclusions and thought about the "social question" in an almost prophetic way, although few followed his path. Martí d'Eixalà was an essential figure in the development of Catalan philosophy: he was the *capo scuola* of all Catalan thinking of the 19th century. Balmes could have been the great philosopher of the Catholic world of the 19th century, able to open the way for Leo XIII⁴

Their respective paths, traced from a Catalan sentiment, were not incompatible with a Spanish feeling. Their strong "Catalanness" was not the basis of a nationalism, but the starting point of a philosophical tradition for the thought of their era, and both had a political attitude which went beyond borders and languages. Balmes and Martí d'Eixalà, although they lived in Barcelona or Madrid, did not set their view simply in Catalonia or Spain, but looked toward Europe, from which they awaited progress and convergence with the ideas of the future.

The firm Catholicism that both professed was not an obstacle to their seeking and finding great ideas in modern thought. Catalonia, in the decade of the forties in the XIXth. century, had two of the epoch's most relevant thinkers in all of Spain. We will try to show how they were shaped by their parallel experiences and the use they made of their contemporary intellectual resources.

A study of the Catalan philosophical atmosphere reveals that both authors received a basically Scholastic education, but their intellectual evolu-

1 The bibliography is extense. We only mention Abellán 1984 and Bilbeny 1985.

2 For Balmes, one must see, Casanovas 1932*b*; Batllori 1947; Florí 1947. Also Sáinz de Robles 1964 i Roca Blanco 1997. For a view more of his political than philosophical thinking, see Fradera 1996.

3 For Martí d'Eixalà, see Roura 1980 and Vilajosana 2011

4 A view on parallels between the two is found in Vilajosana and Ramis Barceló 2012.

tion, influenced by European thought and political and social circumstances, was very different. We have the paradox that while Martí d'Eixalà was very critical of the period's traditional teaching, his thought didn't reach the critical dimension of Balmes's. Despite this, the wide network of Martí d'Eixalà's disciples made him (at times, unsupported by his own writings) the precursor of a wide scope of intellectual and political trends⁵.

1. Intellectual formation in Catalonia during the first third of the XIXth. century

One can consider that, in general terms, the teaching of arts and philosophy in the first third of the XIXth. century was the continuation of the decadence of the university in the XVIIIth. century. Teaching, despite attempts by reformers from 1812 until Mendizabal's Disentailment, was in the Church's hands; there was no lay education and those who wished higher studies had to go through grammar schools, normally run by ecclesiastics⁶. The situation in Catalonia was not very different, although there was a controversy about the role of philosophy after the expulsion of the Jesuits, which we will discuss later.

Teaching in the Principality of Catalonia consisted in three phases. The first was dedicated to grammar and rhetoric and was studied at the university, in convents, schools and seminaries. This instruction was almost always under clerical control. The second phase, the study of philosophy, was only in the university and the convents. The third phase, higher studies, was only taught at the university, which at that time was in Cervera.

Since the Decree of the Nova Planta, trilingual education was necessary in Catalonia: students had to learn to translate from the vernacular (Catalan) lexicon learned at home to Spanish for school, and then to Latin. As a result, the study of Latin grammar was slightly different in Catalan speaking areas than in the rest of Spain⁷. Balmes came from Vic and Martí d'Eixalà from Cardona, towns in central Catalonia which made this trilingual process suitable and let them gain a special linguistic sensitivity⁸ and brought them

5 Some of his principal disciples were: Manuel Duran i Bas, Estanislau Reynals i Rabassa and Francesc Permanyer (among the lawyers), Francesc Xavier Llorens i Barba and Pere Codina (among the philosophers), Joaquim Rubió i Ors, Josep Coll i Vehí and Joan Mañé i Flaquer (among the literati), Laureà Figuerola (lawyer, economist and politician), i Manuel Milà i Fontanals (philologist).

6 A panorama of the education of the time: Monés i Pujol-Busquets 2009.

7 See Roviró Alemany 2011.

8 The importance of these linguistic studies made both authors extraordinarily sensitive to the philosophy of language and their thinking took into account the latest ideas from France on grammar. See Lázaro Carreter 1948, i Morán Ocerinjáuregui 2000.

together in their intellectual instruction. Catalan was a starting point to learn Spanish and Latin, and from these it was relatively easy to go to other European languages.

Obviously the two thinkers had a solid grammatical and linguistic background. Les Escoles Pies, which formed the man from Cardona, were an exception to the Scholastic educational climate: natural science was appreciated⁹ and an innovative methodology was used which was sensitive to psychological empiricism, which would later nurture Martí's philosophy. On the other hand, Blanes received a very solid education in grammar and rhetoric in Vic¹⁰. Both were extremely well prepared at the end of this phase.

There was a great contrast between the possibilities of the Catalan students, capable of great language acquisition and the methodology used at schools and universities. It is not strange that, in philosophy teaching, the two thinkers were greatly disappointed. With few exceptions philosophy instruction in Catalonia was a late product of the most obtuse Scholasticism. Philosophical studies, since the end of the Middle Ages, said that the first year was for logic and mathematics, physics in the second year and ethics and metaphysics in the third. This scheme was an adaptation of the classical view of Aristotelian philosophy, passed through the sieve of Medieval Scholasticism and reworked through the Scholastic tradition since then.

The philosophical education taught in the University of Cervera, at least after the expulsion of the Jesuits, was not stimulating for a student who liked new ideas. In fact, during the period from the Constitution of Cadiz until its move to Barcelona, the university in Cervera maintained reactionary and absolutist positions¹¹. As Jaume Castells¹² has noted, Cervera was a place with little cultural tradition and its living conditions were in no way comparable to that of the large cities. The Ominous Decade (*Dècada Ominosa*), when both were tied to Cervera, contributed to darkening their expectations in the University.

Fortunately neither of the two authors was too steeped in Cerverine philosophy. Both benefited from the radical changes in educational policy from the "Trienni Liberal" to the reestablishment of the absolutism: the "Reglament General d'Instrucció Pública de 1821" (General Law of Public Instruction), inspired by liberalism, was replaced by the "Pla Calomarde" (1824) which had an absolutist character. The consequences of these plans affected Martí d'Eixalà directly, and Balmes more indirectly. Despite this, the contrast between the

9 See Roura 1980.

10 Roviró Alemany 2011 provides a good synthesis.

11 See Prats 2002.

12 See Castells i Bertran 1998.

two manners of understanding philosophy must have left a profound mark on minds like theirs. By chance both thinkers studied philosophy during the “Trienni Liberal”; this parenthesis in history brought about a questioning of the more conservative philosophy taught in convents and the university.

The Cerverine philosophy in the XIXth. century received the influence of two major doctrines which shared an interest in “common sense”¹³. One was the Aristotelian line, stoic and humanistic which, without opposing Scholasticism, defended a certain serene realism as an objective in morality. This is associated in the common mind as the “seny” (sense or judgment) characteristic of Catalonia and other Mediterranean peoples, who share a realistic understanding of philosophy. The other line was preneoscholastic philosophy¹⁴ defended by the Jesuits who, until their expulsion, dominated Cerverine thinking, and which permitted some links to modern philosophy, and specifically with the Cartesian self-evidence of consciousness. Faced with the first line and its predominantly ethical character, this had a more psychological (and therefore theoretical) imprint.

The Jesuit historiography says that the decadence of Cervera began when the Company of Jesus was expelled¹⁵, while the other historiographical stream opines that the predominance of the eclectic “seny” line was a major influence since 1767 and formed the humus from which Balmes and Martí d'Eixalà could form their ideas¹⁶. There is more general agreement that the time when Dou was chancellor was the darkest and most decadent in the university's history¹⁷.

Martí d'Eixalà was enrolled in logic classes in the convent of the Discalced Augustinians in Barcelona in 1820-21¹⁸, although he was possibly enrolled in Mataró, taking classes in the Escolapis de Santa Anna. In 1821 the “Reglament General d'Instrucció Pública” came into effect, prohibiting the teaching of philosophy in convents¹⁹. As a result he had to go to Cervera in 1821-22

13 We follow Colomer i Carles 1998.

14 Anglès Cervelló 1992, p. 167, proposed the phrase “eclectic ecclesiastic authors”. The eclecticism comes from allowing influences beyond the Aristotelian-Thomist synthesis into his thinking. The “preneoscholastic” concept indicates that the philosophy is prior to the Thomist neoscholasticism which was introduced into Spain from Italy by P. Baltasar Masdeu, and by Fra Felipe Puigserver, author of *Philosophia Sancti Thomae Aquinatis auribus huius temporis accommodata*, Madrid, 1824, 3 vols.

15 See the classic study by Casanovas 1932a, pp. 5-6.

16 Bosch, Juvells i Valmitjana 1998, pp. 115-116.

17 Fontana 1988, pp. 101-102.

18 Sáenz-Rico Urbina 1973, p. 259, notes that the Discalced Augustinian school was run by masters Fr. José Coll and Fr. Agustín Talleda. As it is not known if Martí d'Eixalà studied logic in this center, we cannot confirm that it was a direct influence on his thinking.

19 For a broad view, see Palomeque Torres 1970.

to study mathematics²⁰. His teacher was Joaquim Llaró, a liberal clergyman who asked to be transferred to Barcelona²¹. In fact, in February of 1822 the University of Barcelona was inaugurated and in November of 1822 the University of Cervera was closed. That is why the thinker from Cardona had to return to Barcelona, where he studied ethics during 1822–23²².

But in April 1823 the Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis crossed the border and reestablished absolutism and began the political repression of liberals. The purging of faculty suspected of liberal tendencies lasted several years. The end of the year was truly problematic, and Martí d'Eixalà had difficulties in receiving recognition for his studies. November 15, 1823 the edict of the restoration of the University of Cervera was published²³. Martí d'Eixalà didn't enroll immediately in the center; apparently he completed his education in 1824 in Barcelona under Pere Vieta, doctor and professor of Experimental Physics in the "Reial Junta de Comerç de Catalunya" (Catalonia Royal Board of Commerce)²⁴. It is likely that the contact with Vieta gave him a greater sensitivity to empiricism.

Balmes studied philosophy in the Vic seminary from 1820 – 23. In this center the political avatars were heard more indirectly, with a flavor of the intellectual controversies typical of the XVIIIth. century. Balmes witnessed the combat between the two Scholastic forms of understanding philosophy²⁵. On one hand, Aristotelian Felix Amat's *Institutiones Philosophiae*²⁶, was used as a text in the Barcelona, and later in the Vic seminary. On the other, Jesuit Andrés de Guevara's *Institutionum elementarium philosophiae*²⁷ the paradigm of the Company's philosophic thought during the XVIIIth. century.

At this time there appeared the already cited handbook by the Mallorcan Dominican Felip Puigserver, said by Urdánóz to be "the world's first work on Scholastic and neoThomist renovation in the XIXth. century"²⁸. Balmes, like Martí d'Eixalà²⁹, knew Puigserver's work, although he had studied Amat's and Guevara's more avidly. In particular, starting in 1824, the University of

20 See Roura 1980, p. 34

21 Palomeque Torres 1970, p. 36.

22 See Roura 1980, p. 36.

23 Monés i Pujol-Busquets 2009, p. 59; also, an interesting comparative chronology between the Spanish legislative model and its reception in Catalonia p. 54–61.

24 See Roura 1980, p. 38.

25 A good summary of the question is in Roviró Alemany 2011, pp. 73–76.

26 Amat de Palau i Pont 1832.

27 Guevara 1796–1798.

28 Urdánóz 1975, p. 612.

29 See Roura 1980, pp. 162 i 203.

Cervera declared that it would only recognize studies from seminaries that had studied the works of Guevara³⁰.

Because of his condition as a cleric, Balmes could not openly show his distance from the Scholasticism tied to Aquinas which he had studied, and toward which the Church wanted to return. Martí d'Eixalà, on the other hand, openly moved away. As an example, one can see the treatment received by this line of thought in the appendix that Martí added to his translation of Amice's text of the history of philosophy, "throughout the 17th century the state of philosophy in Spain was lamentable: Scholastics ended up dominating everything, thanks in part to the religious intolerance which shielded and defended them with spiritual and temporal arms"³¹.

Both authors studied their specialties in the University of Cervera during the Ominous Decade, and there they received their degrees, theology the former and law the latter. At the start of that decade there was a sharp conservative turn in education (and even more so, in philosophy)³². Despite that both thinkers, educated during the Trienni Liberal, could sight some renovating ideas which would be essential in their later thinking.

2. The structure of Balmes's and Martí d'Eixalà's thinking

Jaume Balmes had a totally Scholastic background, although it was shared among various authors. Indirectly he assimilated (through Guevara) the ideas from the Cerverine Jesuit tradition and Amat's XVIIth. century Aristotelianism. He sowed, among many other disciplines and in a private way, mathematics and linguistics, and brilliantly overcame the weaknesses of his philosophical education. We could say that Balmes managed to avoid the difficulties of his era by introspection and daily observation.

Miquel Batllori³³, following Ignasi Casanovas's ideas, presented Balmes as a Scholastic. This interpretation, which has its followers to this day³⁴, is only part of the story. Balmes certainly had Scholastic training but he wasn't, *strictu sensu*, a Scholastic. Batllori correctly notes that his basic theses are not opposed to Scholasticism, but it must be added that they don't subscribe to it. In fact, Balmes's work has an *aggiornamento* of Scholasticism, a decided attempt to fit together Christian thinking and modern philosophy, in agree-

30 Corts Blay 1992, p. 70.

31 Martí d'Eixalà 1842, p. 179 (our translation).

32 A general panorama: Palomeque Torres 1974.

33 Batllori 1947.

34 See Forment 1998, cap. II.

ment with the defense of the role of the Church and using arguments appropriate to the era³⁵.

During his time in the Cerverine wilderness, Balmes must have read different authors who did not follow the official academic philosophical line. One must note the influence of Victor Cousin's spiritualism; he was a widely read eclectic popularizer in Spain in those days. Through him many intellectuals knew the first Scottish Common Sense School, with Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart at the head, and modern French and German philosophy. Madrid romanticism would lean more and more toward German philosophy while Catalonia preferred the French and Scottish. Both influences were clear in Balmes, but they are also notable in Martí d'Eixalà. In the Barcelona air they breathed, first the Cardona thinker and later the Vic priest, there was a notable empathy for French thinking and Reid's Scottish Common Sense which, with slight modifications, could be made to fit with the Mediterranean "seny"³⁶.

Martí d'Eixalà was an eclectic, although very selective, author. His tendency toward naturalism and empiricism kept him from developing a very metaphysical philosophy. His epistemology sought criteria that were verifiable, objective, natural, and up to a point empirical. In this sense he joined his criticism of authors "abstract" systems (terminology he borrowed from Condillac), who, he said, never used testable hypotheses:

The whole structure of these systems consists of building and linking hypotheses so that they don't contradict each other and work toward a common goal; but just as the skillful combination of scenes in a drama doesn't prove the reality of the play's thesis, neither does the clever coordination of the parts of a theory let one conclude that it conforms to the nature of reality³⁷.

It is evident that in the work of the philosopher and lawyer from Cardona there was a rejection of the Jesuit scholasticism and the Aristotelian-Thomist synthesis and at the same time a selective appropriation of Aristotelian naturalism and French, English and Scottish empiricist philosophy.

Balmes, on the other hand, was an author who was able to integrate, both historically and systemically, just as Hegel had done in his own way, all prior philosophy. Far from putting Scholasticism to the side, he made it the base of modern philosophy: it was a vision, partly a precursor of Maréchal's transcendental Thomism, trimmed with a Cartesian based phenomenology, and capable of integrating Reid's discussions with those of the empiricists. Certainly the halls of Madrid and Paris opened their doors to this renovat-

35 See Fradera 1996, p. 103.

36 In fact, the drift from common sense to "seny" is not in Martí d'Eixalà's work, but is in that of his disciple Llorens i Barba. Related to this question, see Vilajosana 2011, pp. 111-112.

37 Martí d'Eixalà 1841, p. 293 (our translation).

ing philosophy where everyone of the elements, without disclaiming the past, converged with the thinking of the future.

Martí d'Eixalà's background was more harmonic and not as audacious. In his work there is a counterpoint of classical philosophy (Aristotelian-Thomist) and modernist philosophy: the thinker from Cardona lined up on the side of the latter. Llorens i Barba, as well as Duran i Bas in legal terms, saw their teacher Martí d'Eixalà as the vanguard of advanced thought, although on occasions this extreme is not corroborated as much in his writings as his attitude³⁸.

Certainly Balmes was able to historically integrate a series of dissimilar authors and tendencies. On a firm Aristotelian-Thomist base he salted Cartesian phenomenology, capable of stemming from innate self-evident truths. The Jesuit philosophy, which walked the fine line between rationalism and voluntarism, was no obstacle; on the contrary it permitted him to join his Aristotelian naturalistic rationalism with Reid's common sense epistemology. From the Scottish philosopher to Kant, speaking phenomenologically, was a small historic step which Balmes covered easily.

So we can say that the philosopher from Vic integrated almost all earlier works, overcoming seemingly insurmountable hurdles and setting aside authors he considered to be minor. It was Scholasticism opened to the modernity which was so important in Europe and brought such little good to Spain, and especially to Catalonia. On the other hand, Martí d'Eixalà represented Modernity (and Grecolatin and humanist philosophy) against Scholastic philosophy. His work meant a combination of timid steps in favor of later philosophy, such as when he introduced the concept of conscience as faculty above all others, similar to the idea later developed with more impact by William Hamilton.

Both built their philosophies on a substrate that was in part, much the same. When they reached thirty they had, philosophically speaking, mastery of similar themes: Martí d'Eixalà knew Cerverine Scholasticism and the classic authors well; Balmes was up to date with science and European philosophy. The difference between them was the way they integrated the philosophical past and present.

While Martí d'Eixalà was more "analytical" in the sense that he wanted to discern, qualify and filter the ideas of the philosophic tradition, Balmes was more "synthetic", trying to integrate contemporary problems into the tradition. These differences are not surprising, given that they are true reflections

38 For the role of Martí d'Eixalà in the birth of the Catalan school of philosophy and the Catalan school of law in the 19th century, see Vilajosana 2012. Here he argues that some ideas supposed to be key ideas of Martí are really from Llorens i Barba (in philosophy) and Duran i Bas (in law).

of the different philosophical methods the used. Each explicitly proposes a different approach to philosophical problems Martí's view in favor of analysis is notable in his both philosophic and his judicial writings. In his "Course of Elementary Philosophy" we can read:

When we are faced with a complex object or phenomenon, it is best to analyze it. Sometimes a simple phenomenon can be considered in different ways or times; in such a case the attention is fixed on each aspect, resulting in a sort of analysis³⁹.

In his treatise on civil law:

Our procedure is always analysis; generalizations can only come after. Always, with respect to the principles, the law is broken into the pieces that make it up, and its rule is presented to our understanding as a precept, and at the same time as a set of circumstances which cause its application to take place; juridic intuition always appears as an organism which only is understood by knowing the parts which make it up⁴⁰.

Balmes limited analysis to the role of simply clarifying discourse, but it was not in any way the thinker's objective. The objective goal had to be synthetic, which meant understanding that the product was always different than the sum total of its parts:

It cannot be denied that analysis, that is the decomposition of ideas, serves admirably to add clarity and precision in some cases; we must not forget, however, that the majority of beings are sets, and the best way to perceive them is to see at a glance their parts and the relationships which make them up⁴¹.

And using words which could have easily come from Martí, Balmes states:

Analysis leads us to decompose, but we cannot take the decomposition so far that we forget the construction of the machine the pieces come from. Some philosophers, by analyzing the sensations, have ended up with no more than the sensations; in ideological and psychological science, that is equivalent to mistaking the doorway for the building⁴².

Conclusions

The previous pages show the parallels between the lives of Balmes and Martí d'Eixalà. Both lived through the changes of the Trienni Liberal and took advantage of the cracks of intellectual freedom to spy out new horizons.

39 Martí d'Eixalà 1841, p. 276 (our translation).

40 Martí d'Eixalà 1838, p. 24 (our translation).

41 Balmes 2010, p. 123 (our translation).

42 *Ibid.*, p. 128 (our translation).

They shared an enormous enthusiasm for knowledge and philosophy, although they had different views relative to tradition. While Martí tried to set the base of an innovative philosophy by selection, Balmes tried to agglutinate the different tendencies in an almost Hegelian manner. An example would be his view of “common sense”.

For the modern reader, they were linked to completely different intellectual circles. Martí d'Eixalà prepared an intellectual path so his students could reach different ports in which he would never set anchor. On the other hand Balmes made the whole trip; from the starting point of Scholasticism and the church mentality he managed to raise the flag of innovative philosophy.

Both shared a common university background, forged in Cervera during the darkest years of the Ominous Decade. Martí's formation was directed from the start toward empiricist tendencies while Balmes's had a traditional scholastic base. Despite this, both were able to overcome the official teaching and make Catalonia a privileged spot where contemporary European ideas could arrive. Their openness to Europe did not impede a similar one toward Spain.

Both were firm Catholics. Balmes was, to a point, a Catholic philosopher and Martí a philosophical Catholic. They shared a critical position with respect to the official Church philosophy. Each distanced himself, in his own way, from the official Catholic ideology and established his own system of thought. A deeper analysis of their epistemological, psychological and ethical thought would reveal many similarities which have only been hinted at in this article.

To close, a parallel study of the formation of Balmes and Martí d'Eixalà helps us to understand why in Catalonia at that time two such intellectual giants appeared and how that place and environment conditioned the scope of their philosophical discourse.

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