

# **The battle of the paradigms Scholastic vs. «Modern» in the University of Córdoba, Argentina**

## **La batalla de los paradigmas: Escolástica vs. «Moderna» en la Universidad de Córdoba, Argentina**

Walter Redmond  
Austin, Texas, USA  
wbredmond.wr@gmail.com  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8179-1489

Fecha de recepción: 29-07-2022

Fecha de aceptación: 05-12-2022

### **Abstract**

This work deals with a copy of the manuscript of the *Physica* course of the Franciscan José Elías Carmen Pereira at the University of Córdoba (in the Río de la Plata) in the 18th century. It gives an account of the tradition that had been followed up to that time and of the novelties that began to be considered in that century and which arrived with the Jesuits. On the other hand, it points out the polemical place that the work of Fray José Elías occupied in the 20th century, as it was criticised from different philosophical perspectives. Finally, a brief bibliography on Elías del Carmen and his work is presented in order to arouse the interest of any specialist who wishes to concentrate on him.

**Keywords:** Jesuits, Franciscans, José Elías Carmen Pereira, Philosophy, Physics

## Resumen

Este trabajo se ocupa de una copia del manuscrito del curso de *Physica* del franciscano José Elías Carmen Pereira en la Universidad de Córdoba (en el Río de la Plata) en el s. XVIII. Da cuenta de la tradición que se seguía hasta entonces y de las novedades que empiezan a considerarse en aquella centuria y que llegan de la mano de los jesuitas. Por otro lado, señala el lugar polémico que ocupa el trabajo de fray José Elías en el siglo XX, pues recibe críticas desde diferentes perspectivas filosóficas. Finalmente, se presenta una breve bibliografía sobre Elías del Carmen y su obra con el fin de despertar el interés de algún especialista que desee concentrarse en él.

**Palabras clave:** Jesuitas, Franciscanos, José Elías Carmen Pereira, Filosofía, Física

In 1968, when I was a student in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Texas at Austin, I wrote a monograph (still unpublished) on a manuscript on natural philosophy (*Physica*) written in El Río de la Plata, now Argentina. I would like briefly to describe how this manuscript fits into its setting in the history of philosophy: the paradigm shift from Aristotelian commentary to natural science. The manuscript is a copy of a course on *Physica* taught by the Franciscan Friar José Elías del Carmen Pereira in 1784 in the University of the city of Córdoba<sup>1</sup>.

The institution had been founded in 1613 by the Jesuit fathers, who in their courses on *Physica* used as textbooks the four works on Aristotle's natural philosophy by the Spanish Jesuit Antonio Rubio. Rubio wrote these books, as well as his famous *Logica Mexicana*, mostly in Mexico at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and published them in 18 editions in Europe between 1605 and 1615.

The material taught in Córdoba in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was «purely scholastic», but a new «modern» paradigm soon arrived at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From 1732 the Englishman Thomas Falkner, who became a

---

1 *Physica generalis nostri philosophici cursus pars tertia, quae de corporis naturalis scientia, affectionibusque ejus sermonem instituit juxta recentiorum philosophorum placita experientiasque discurrens, elaborata a Patre Fratere Elia del Carmen in regio Corduvensi Academia artium Cathedrae moderatore.* The ms was copied by the student José Vicente de Daente and translated into Spanish by Juan Chiabra en 1911.

Jesuit in Argentina, introduced doctrines of Christian Wolff. In 1749 the Jesuit Domingo Muriel was open to the «modern philosophy» which was seen then as a sort of «bootleg», and in the 1760s two Jesuits taught psychology in new ways, influenced by European savants.

But then came a «conservative» reaction: in 1732 the Jesuit professors were warned against «excessive liberty» in their teaching and in 1752 the General of the Jesuits in Rome was handed a list of 54 propositions taught in Córdoba judged to be «anti-scholastic».

After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, the Franciscans took over the teaching of philosophy, and a «modern» paradigm, culminating in Fray Elías, prevailed in the university. But again, the conservatives did not give up; Elías and other liberal masters were soon challenged by a group of former students of the Jesuits, who then held chairs in a «*collegium*», the Colegio Carolino, in Buenos Aires, and were urging a return to a more orthodox scholasticism.

Interestingly, the polemic around Fray Elías's *Physica* extended into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was censured by intellectuals from diametrically opposed viewpoints. The Positivist philosopher Alejandro Korn (d. 1936) quipped that Elías's work «is precious, because it shows the depth of the pit from which we have had to pull ourselves up»<sup>2</sup>, and less disparagingly and indeed with some accuracy, Jesuit historian Guillermo Furlong (d. 1974), called Elías's scholasticism «decadent, since his metaphysics is deeply influenced by theses deriving from Cartesian currents, and in his cosmology he mixes strictly philosophical themes with scientific ones»<sup>3</sup>.

The syllabus of Elías's course on *Physica* shows the preponderance of «science», but he is careful to follow «the scholastic method» in posing and answering the objections of his opponents. The work is divided into four «books». The first treats of «body» in general: its formal notion and its «principles», matter and form, which Elías defines more «scientifically» than «philosophically». Elías says here in regard to the Aristotelian notion of «prime matter», that he, «following the example of the more cultivated nations», does not wish to be too dogmatic on the subject.

---

2 *Obras*, 3: 345.

3 Guillermo Furlong, 1947.

Eliás's second book treats of the void and space, along with allied phenomena (Torricelli's barometer, Magdeburg spheres, capillary tubes). The third book covers the various properties of matter such as motion, inertia, gravity and the acceleration of falling bodies and from a «theological» viewpoint he treats spirit and matter.

The fourth book is concerned with light and its properties. Light for him is something like a wave-particle. Light, both in its source and in its diffusion, is a quite rapid vibratory movement along straight lines either of the ether or of a medium like air or water. But light is a substance, «globules» that transmit the impulse in a straight line.

Elías alluded to a large number of sources (after 62 I stopped counting them in my monograph), most of them «modern» European thinkers. He did not have access to all these authors, but nevertheless he considers their views carefully, either explaining why he accepts them or criticizing them in the «objections» part of his method. There is originality in his work, both when he proposes his own «theses» and when he argues for or against those of others.

At the time I wrote my monograph, no systematic study had been done on Fray Elías, but he had been treated in several books and articles. In my own (incomplete) bibliography I noted that the works concerning him fall into two periods in the last century: the second decade (when a Spanish translation of Elías's manuscript and two others was published in 1911) as well as around 1950.

I cannot do better than to close with what I wrote 50 years ago about Fray Elías: Let us note at once that [Elías] was writing at a time when the distinctions between philosophy and science were not as clear as they sometimes are now (Fray Elías apparently has no word for «scientist» other than «philosopher» and «commentator»), and much of the content of the *Physica* is more «physics» than «philosophy» [in present-day senses], and should be given specialized treatment by students of the history of science. This would entail, first of all, a perusal of all his source material, in order to determine the extent of his originality. His views on the nature of light, for example, may prove interesting. We should also note at the start that Fray Elías' age was far less sensitive to the distinction between religion/theology and what lies outside this sphere. However, the two are easily separated in most of the scholastic authors, and especially in the case of Fray Elías, who

was «daring» in his defense of reason against the pretensions of theologians taking philosophies for Christian teaching, the separation is very easy indeed<sup>4</sup>.

### Some articles on Elías del Carmen and his work

CARMEN PEREIRA, Elías del, *Physica generalis nostri philosophici cursus...*, Ms. In the library of the Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 1784, copied by José Vicente de la Fuente.

---, *Conclusiones ex universa Philosophia...*, a «tesario», printed in 1786, apud *Typographiam Regiam Parvulorum Prphanorum*, Buenos Aires. A copy is to be found according to Furlong (RP 259-260) in the library of Mr. Antonio Santamarina in Buenos Aires.

---, *Conclusiones...*, a «tesario», by Francisco Javier Martínez de Aldunate (and his brother, Francisco Genaro?), cf. Furlong RP, p. 260 and Enrique Martínez Paz.

---, *Cartas a los provinciales*, in the Archives of the Jesuit Province of Argentina.

CHIABRA, Juan, *La enseñanza de la filosofía de la época colonial*, Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 1911, a translation of the *Physica generalis* of fray Elías, along with one of the *Logic* by L. J. Chorroarín (1783) and of an anonymous *Moral Philosophy*.

FURLONG, Guillermo, *Nacimiento y desarrollo de la filosofía en el río de La Plata (1536-1810)*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Guillermo Kraft Ltda., no date.

GONZÁLEZ, Joaquín Víctor, *Memoria de la Universidad de La Plata*, Buenos Aires, Publicación oficial, 1909-1910.

KORN, Alejandro, *Obras completas*, Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 1949, disponible en: <http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/handle/10915/126896>

MARTÍNEZ PAZ, Enrique, «Una tesis de filosofía del siglo XVIII en la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba», *Revista de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*, año 6, 1919, pp. 228-286.

MARTÍNEZ VILLADA, Luis G., «Notas sobre la cultura cordobesa en la época colonial», *Revista de la Universidad*, año 6, vol. 4, 1919, pp. 192 y ss.

---

4 Walter Redmond, "Fray José Elías del Carmen Pereiea, O.F.M., The *Physics*", University of Texas at Austin, 1968, unpublished.

MIRANDA, Francisco Javier, *Vida del venerable sacerdote don Domingo Muries, escrita por un discípulo suyo*, Córdoba, Biblioteca del Tercer Centenario, 1916.

QUILES, Ismael, «La filosofía escolástica en la América Latina durante la colonia», *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Congress of Philosophy*, Brussels, vol. 13, 1953, pp. 49-56.

ZURETTI, Juan Carlos, «Algunas corrientes filosóficas en Argentina durante el período hispánico. La llamada filosofía moderna», *Actas del Primer Congreso Nacional de Filosofía*, Mendoza, t. 3, 1949, pp. 2122-2128.

---, «Fray Elías del Carmen Pereira, profesor de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba», *Itinerarium* (ULS 3:2135), vol. 4, núm. 11, 1947, pp. 353-371.

---, *Historia de la cultura argentina, arte, ciencia*, Buenos Aires, Itinerarium, 1952.

---, «La orientación de los estudios de filosofía entre los franciscanos en el Río de La Plata», *Itinerarium*, vol. 4, núm. 1, 1947, pp. 203-207.

---, «La Universidad de Córdoba y Juan Bautista, un filósofo portugués en el Río de La Plata», *Estudios*, núm. 416, 1946.

---, «Tesis sobre filosofía y ciencias, defendidas en 1792 en el Real Colegio de San Carlos de Buenos Aires», *Revista de la Universidad de Buenos Aires*, vol. 3, núm. 8, 1948, pp. 515-553.

---, «La crisis de la filosofía en el siglo XVIII y los autores conocidos en la Universidad de Córdoba», *Estudios*, abril 1947, pp. 128-134.

**To this bibliographical list, we could add some more recent studies that have taken an interest in the subject that I discovered decades ago:**

BALDÓ I LACOMBA, Marc, «Filosofía ecléctica e Ilustración académica en el Río de la Plata. La física y las matemáticas (1767-1810)», *Saitabi*, núm. 42, 1992, pp. 93-115. Disponible en: <http://hdl.handle.net/10550/27042>

BALDÓ I LACOMBA, Marc, «La universidad colonial hispanoamericana (1538-1810): bibliografía crítica, metodología y estado de la cuestión. El Río de La Plata», *Estudios de historia social y economía de América*, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, núm. 16-17, 1998, pp. 207-229. Disponible en: <http://hdl.handle.net/10017/6211>

BENITO MOYA, Silvano, «El libro manuscrito en la Córdoba del siglo XVIII. El caso de la *Physica Particularis* de Fr. Elías del Carmen Pereyra», *Bibliographica americana. Revista Interdisciplinaria de Estudios Coloniales*, núm. 8, 2012, pp. 32-68. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7815958>

LÁZARO PULIDO, Manuel, «La tradición franciscana, lugar de construcción de las bases filosóficas en la península ibérica», *Carth*, 26, 2010, pp. 247-292.

PUYRREDÓN, Alfredo, «La enseñanza de la filosofía en la Universidad de Córdoba bajo la regencia franciscana», *Actas del Primer Congreso Nacional de Filosofía*, Mendoza, 1949, t. 3, pp. 2108-2117. Disponible en: <https://www.filosofia.org/aut/003/m49a2108.pdf>