

The Changing Shapes of  
Knowledge in Spain 1627–1726:  
From *Dreams and Discourses* to  
*Universal Critical Theater*

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The Enlightenment is commonly seen as a response to the crisis of knowledge in late seventeenth-century Europe. This crisis—or questioning of knowledge since the rediscovery of Pyrrhonist scepticism in the Renaissance—was also at the heart of the Spanish Baroque. However, the Spanish response to this crisis is rarely read as part of the European intellectual history. As we know at least since Richard Popkin's studies, the Enlightenment tradition served as a framework in which epistemological positions other than the ones formulated by René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza and John Locke did not fit, for example, those of the Spanish Baroque.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Spain is usually not associated with the Enlightenment itself. In general, the eighteenth century has been seen as a period of decline in Spanish letters after the creative exuberance of the Baroque. In recent years, however, many researchers have begun to reconsider the state of Spanish letters in the eighteenth century, as well as attempt to inscribe Spanish intellectual history within the general European eighteenth-century context.<sup>2</sup> As with many other countries considered to have been in the periphery of the Age of Enlightenment, Spain has thus gradually begun to endow itself with an Enlightenment movement; and as in all the other 'enlightened European nations' where the Enlightenment was a minority phenomenon opposed to traditional thinking, it was a movement with its own local specificities.<sup>3</sup> Even so, these revaluations are only very slowly making their way into mainstream Spanish historiography, and are still hardly perceived within general European intellectual history.

The objective of this article is twofold: to provide a brief sketch of Spanish intellectual history during the Baroque and early Enlightenment, taking the above-mentioned point of departure; and more specifically, to examine the concept *desengaño* (disillusion) in relation to the question of knowledge and scepticism in two widely distributed texts from the first halves of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. The choice of subject was due to

an initial puzzlement over the seeming parallelisms in the titles of Francisco de Quevedo's *Sueños y discursos de verdades descubridoras de abusos, vicios y engaños, en todos los oficios y estados del mundo* (Dreams and discourses on truths revealing abuses, vices and deceptions in all the professions and estates of the world, Barcelona, 1627) and Benito Jerónimo Feijoo's *Teatro crítico universal. Discursos varios en todo género de materias, para desengaño de errores comunes* (Universal Critical Theater: Varied discourses on all kinds of matters to the disillusion of common errors, Madrid, 1726–1740). How did *desengaño*—considered a key concept of the Spanish Baroque—operate in the pre-Enlightenment work of Feijoo? What epistemological changes can be detected? In the following I shall present these two authors and their texts, focusing particularly on the concept of *desengaño* and the position of scepticism.

### *Baroque Knowledge*

The question of accurate and secure knowledge in moral and political thought was a central issue in Baroque scepticism. It had been one of the dominant questions of Spanish humanism, which tended to identify moral philosophy with moral science. Knowledge was thus to a great extent equated with moral knowledge, and value judgements became central to a correct understanding and interpretation of the external world.<sup>4</sup> Much of the Spanish response to these issues takes place in works of fiction, which is probably another reason why they are marginalised within the discourse of knowledge. The Menippean satire was one such fictional genre, the hybrid character of which made it a versatile vehicle for the discussion of knowledge. It had been a favourite genre among the Renaissance humanists for intellectual debate, including attacks on Scholasticism and clericalism. In the Spanish Baroque, the Menippean satire became especially concerned with learning and knowledge related to ethics or ultimate beliefs, and the *desengaño* theme came to pervade the genre.<sup>5</sup>

Francisco de Quevedo (1580–1645), one of the major poets and prose writers of the Spanish Golden Age, is the principal figure in the Baroque reformulation of the Menippean satire in Spain through his *Sueños y discursos*. His work in this genre runs parallel with his adaptation of Neostoicism, and in both cases he drew inspiration from the great Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius. As a young aspiring humanist, Quevedo exchanged a few letters in Latin with Lipsius at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Lipsius's Christianised version of classical Stoicism had a long-lasting influence on Spain, and Quevedo played a decisive role in this

cultural transfer.<sup>6</sup> The Flemish humanist had also been the first to use ‘Menippean’ as a generic term in 1581 when he dubbed his satire aimed at the philologists *Satyra Menippea: Somnium. Lusus in nostri aevi criticos*.<sup>7</sup> The other half of the Renaissance revival of classical philosophy, scepticism, also played a significant role in Spanish thinking in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Quevedo’s *El mundo por de dentro* (The World from the Inside, 1612), the fourth of the five texts that make up his *Sueños y discursos*, bears witness to this, as we shall see shortly. However, Neostoicism is generally considered the dominant strand of Renaissance philosophy in Spain. ‘Neostoic epistemology’, to put it anachronistically, was centered on judgements of value on the one hand, and how to recognise and apply the correct perspective in the evaluation of temporal affairs on the other.<sup>8</sup> Again the key concept is *desengaño*.

### *Desengaño: 1611 and 1732*

A philological approach to the concept of *desengaño* reveals that the chosen texts by Quevedo and Feijoo are perfectly contemporaneous with the two major works of Spanish lexicography of the period in question: the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, published in Madrid in 1611, and the so-called *Diccionario de Autoridades*, published by the Spanish Royal Academy between 1726 and 1739. The *Tesoro* and *Autoridades* are not only of great interest as containers of words and concepts at a particular chronological intersection; they are also of great interest to our topic of ‘the changing shapes of knowledge’ in Spain over the course of the period. The *Tesoro* is the work of the humanist, polyglot and theologian Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco (1539–1613), and is the first monolingual Spanish dictionary. Previously he had published a book of moral emblems (*Emblemas morales*, Madrid 1611), and in many ways the *Tesoro* bears resemblance to the emblematic genre, or perhaps even to a cabinet of curiosities, in its many sermonic entries. Covarrubias was a man of the church; Pope Gregor XIII had appointed him canon of Cuenca in 1579, and one critic interprets the *Tesoro* as above all a learned source for oratory *inventio*, and as a book of emblems.<sup>9</sup>

While the *Tesoro* was the result of one man’s work, the so-called *Diccionario de Autoridades* (or in full, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana en que se explica el verdadero sentido de las voces, su naturaleza y calidad, con las frases o modos de hablar, los proverbios o refranes, y otras cosas convenientes al uso de la lengua*)<sup>10</sup> was the first major collective enterprise of the Spanish Royal Academy founded in 1713. It was published in seven volumes in Madrid in the period between 1726 and 1739, its first volume

appearing the same year as the first volume of Feijoo's *Teatro Crítico Universal*. As its full title explains, the dictionary aims at providing the 'true significance' of words, and everything of import for the *use* of language; and although recognising the pioneering work of Covarrubias (who had inspired several French lexicographers), the editors in the prologue express their disapproval of giving too much space to etymology, which would only make the dictionary cumbersome for the reader.<sup>11</sup>

Even though Covarrubias chose to label his dictionary a 'Treasure' (*Tesoro*) to align himself with 'other nations who have made copious dictionaries of their languages',<sup>12</sup> it was the Latin *Etymologiae* of the sixth-century saint Isidore of Seville—*Doctor de las Españas*—he wanted to emulate. The *Diccionario de Autoridades*, conversely, clearly aligns itself with the work of both the Accademia della Crusca (Academy of the Chaff) of Florence and the Académie Française, lamenting that the Spanish nation has come last in perfecting the dictionary of its language. Where Covarrubias meanders between theological, exegetical, etymological and encyclopedic digressions and commentaries, the *Diccionario de Autoridades* aims at keeping its entries short and *useful*.

In Covarrubias the main entry is for the verb *desengañar*: 'Sacar de engaño al que está en él [...]', that is, 'to pull out of deceit [illusion] one who is in it'; and *desengañarse*, in turn, is 'to become aware that what one had taken to be certain was a deceit [illusion]'. The *Autoridades* (1732), apart from various derivative forms, includes an entry for *desengaño*: 'The light of truth, knowledge of the error with which one comes out of deceit [illusion]'.<sup>13</sup> As already noted, there has definitely been a change in the *shape* of the dictionary from Covarrubias to the *Autoridades*, and there has also been a change of emphasis in the entry for *desengaño*. In brief, there has been a move from 'deceit'—or 'illusion'—to 'error'.<sup>14</sup> In the following, we shall examine this in the context of Quevedo's and Feijoo's texts.

### *Quevedo's Menippean Satire Sueños y discursos (1627)*

Quevedo's *Sueños y discursos* have traditionally been perceived as moral satires directed at vices, and as extreme examples of Baroque wit and verbal ingenuity. However, they are also satires of contemporary discourses and practices of knowledge, for example alchemy, astrology and collecting for curiosity cabinets, which is one of the features of the Menippean satire that still needs to be examined in relation to Quevedo's work. The *Sueños y discursos* consists of five texts written between 1605 and 1622 and first printed in Barcelona in 1627: *El sueño del Juicio*

*Final* (The Dream of the Last Judgement, 1605), *El alguacil endemoniado* (The Bedevilled Constable, 1605–1608), *Sueño del infierno* (The Vision of Hell, 1608), *El mundo por de dentro* (The World from the Inside, 1612) and *Sueño de la muerte* (The Dream of Death, 1622).

### *The World from the Inside* (1612)

As already argued, it is in the fourth text of Quevedo's *Sueños y discursos*, *El mundo por de dentro*, that scepticism is most present. The dream or vision frame narratives found in the first, third and last texts are absent here, and the story comes close to an allegory, one of the features that Quevedo introduced to the Baroque Menippean satire through this text, and which was later developed in Fernández de Ribera's *El mesón del mundo* (The inn of the world, 1631) and Antonio Enríquez Gómez's *La Torre de Babilonia* (The tower of Babylon, 1649), culminating at last in Baltasar Gracián's major novel *El Criticón* (*The Critic*, 1657).<sup>15</sup> The prologue to *El mundo* offers a condensed summary of sceptical positions:

It is a proven fact, for so says Metodorus Chio and *many others* that nothing is known and that we are all ignorant, and not even this is known for certain, for if it were, then we would know something, or so one would suspect. *The most learned doctor and philosopher Francisco Sánchez puts it thus in his book entitled Nihil Scitur, nothing is known.*<sup>16</sup>

Francisco Sánchez (1551–1623) had his treatise *Quod nihil scitur* (That Nothing is Known) printed in Lyon in 1581. Following the opening of this treatise quite closely in his prologue, Quevedo sets the stage for his own text (we know he had a copy of the *Quod nihil scitur*). However, Sánchez conceived his text as both a sceptical, anti-Aristotelian treatise and a philosophical 'clearing of the ground'. He presents it as an introduction to subsequent works concerning the examination of *things*: 'For true knowledge is to understand, in the first place the nature of a thing, in the second place its accidents, where it has any'.<sup>17</sup> Quevedo's scepticism, in contrast, appears closely linked to moral *desengaño*. Sánchez's highly polemical (and very entertaining!) treatise was re-edited six times between 1581 and 1665, but his scepticism did not succeed in causing any serious damage to the Aristotelian infrastructure of the Spanish universities, which continued to represent Scholastic strongholds at the time of Feijoo over a hundred years later.

In Quevedo's *El mundo por de dentro*, the narrator wanders the streets of the world guided by his senses, until he encounters an old man who confronts his

credulity, explaining that he will take him to the main street, which happens to be Hypocrisy Street, to show him the world as it is. The old man is called *Desengaño*, the Undeceiver (or Disillusioner), and he ‘shows the world as it is’ to the narrator by dismantling all the latter’s observations of their encounters on Hypocrisy Street: a funeral procession, a mourning widow, a constable, scrivener and thief, a rich man in a carriage and a beautiful woman. To the young narrator’s enthusiastic remark upon observing the beautiful woman, that ‘The man *who doesn’t love with all his five senses a beautiful woman is not* appreciating the utmost care with which nature fashions its master work’,<sup>18</sup> the Undeceiver replies:

Up to the present I had assumed you were blind, but now I see that you are also mad, and I realise that you still do not know why God gave you eyes, or what their purpose is. It is their duty to see, but to judge and choose is the function of reason. You seem either to do precisely the reverse, or, worse still, to do nothing at all. If you go on trusting your eyes, you will be confounded a thousand times over: *you will take distant mountains to be blue and large objects to be small, for nearness and distance deceive the eyes.*<sup>19</sup>

The Undeceiver obviously blames the narrator for his lack of scepticism in letting his senses deceive him. The senses do not grant direct access to reality as it is; reason has to correct the impressions made upon them. However, the mode of scepticism professed by the Undeceiver is not aimed at finding solid ground for investigations into the physical reality of things, but at finding their *true nature*, that is, their moral nature. His main issue is the narrator’s lack of moral judgement: The question of the deceiving senses is perceived within the scheme of a ‘moral epistemology’.

Quevedo explores scepticism further in his moral treatise *La cuna y la sepultura* (The crib and the grave, 1634), where in the fourth chapter he attempts to *desengañar* the reader on the vanity of learning and science, claiming that the most damaging hypocrisy is that of learning, because it has no foundation other than its own vanity.<sup>20</sup> Francisco Sánchez had challenged his readers to study such a simple thing as a worm, stating that knowledge was the perfect understanding of a *thing*, even though such perfect understanding was unattainable; ‘you could not grasp anything’.<sup>21</sup>

In *El mundo por de dentro*, the narrator comes to grips with reality through a ‘double disillusion’ by way of a magic rope that unmasks everything that passes under it: ‘Can she be the woman I saw over yonder but a few minutes ago?’ the narrator marvels when he sees the beautiful woman under the rope where ‘everything about her seems to have fallen apart.’<sup>22</sup> On Hypocrisy Street the Undeceiver had pointed out the weakness in the narrator’s perception of reality, who by trust-

ing his senses and taking all at face value invariably failed to grasp *true* reality. With the help of the magic rope the Undeceiver's lesson on the appearance and reality aspect of the world is spelt out before the narrator's eyes, so to speak. This systematic play on the dichotomies *engaño* (deceit)—*desengaño* (disillusion, undeception) and *ser* (reality)—*parecer* (appearances) is one of the recurrent features of Baroque texts. In Rodrigo Fernández de Ribera's *Los antojos de mejor vista* (Lenses for better vision, 1626), *Desengaño* also appears personified, but in this case it is the narrator himself who sees and narrates things as they are—with the aid of a pair of special spectacles provided by *Desengaño*, and 'fabricated by Experience' with lenses made of truth.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the narrator's stroll on Hypocrisy street, the Undeceiver urges the narrator to rest with the following words: 'the shock of all these *marvels and disillusion*s weary the brain and I fear your mind will be *disconcerted*'.<sup>24</sup> There is in other words little trust in reason as well. In general, there is nothing left to ground the knowledge of the world on; there is only room for *desengaño*, which tells us that the true nature of the world is *engaño* (deceit). The Undeceiver suggests that the world is better left to its appearances and that the narrator should tune in his understanding to the correct moral options.<sup>25</sup>

### *Diachronic Decrease in Desengaño*

A brief search in CORDE (*Corpus diacrónico del español*), the online chronological database of the Spanish language maintained by the Royal Spanish Academy, shows that the allegorical use of *Desengaño* in registered works decreases gradually from 1600 to 1700. It appears in twenty-seven documents in the time spanning from 1600 to 1649 (including works like Cosmo Gómez de Tejada's *León prodigioso* (The prodigious lion, 1636), Juan de Palafox y Mendoza's *El pastor de nochebuena* (Christmas Eve's shepherd, 1644–1659) and Baltasar Gracián's *El Discreto* (The Complete Gentleman, 1646)), in ten documents from the period 1650–1700, and there are no occurrences of a personified *Desengaño* after 1700 (1700–1750). The trend is the same for the entry 'desengaño', which has 1340 occurrences in 311 documents in the period 1600–1649. Most of these are in narrative prose, and this remains the trend until the end of the century, while in the eighteenth century the number of documents have dropped considerably (to 34 in the period 1700–1750). There are hardly any occurrences of 'desengaño' in narrative prose, while up to eighty percent are in didactic prose. Feijoo's works are the main source for these occurrences.<sup>26</sup>

*Feijoo, the Teatro Crítico Universal and Philosophical Scepticism*

Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, born in Orense (Galicia) in 1676, entered the Benedictine monastery of San Julian de Samos at the age of fourteen. He studied at the universities of Salamanca and Oviedo, where he arrived in 1709 and later came to hold the chair of theology. Established in Oviedo, he only left his Convent of San Vicente on a couple occasions, once to go to Madrid to publish the first volume of his monumental *Teatro Crítico Universal* at the age of fifty. The *Teatro Crítico Universal* gives ample evidence that Feijoo kept in touch with the latest news and publications through letters and visitors to Oviedo. His first publication, however, was the *Apología del Scepticismo Médico* (Apology for Medical Scepticism, 1725), a defense of the *Medicina scéptica y cirugía moderna* (Sceptical medicine and modern surgery), published in Madrid in two volumes in 1722 and 1725 by the physician Martín Martínez (1684–1734). The latter was a member of the industrious *Regia Sociedad de Medicina y demás Ciencias* (The Royal Society of Medicine and other Sciences) of Seville, and had achieved the prestigious position of honorary doctor of the king at the court in Madrid, where he was also professor of anatomy.

The Royal Society had originated as a *tertulia* in 1697: *Veneranda Tertulia Hispalense, Sociedad Médico-Química, Anatómica y Matemática*. This consisted of a group of mostly practicing physicians opposed to the Galenic doctors of the University of Seville, who after persistent lobbying obtained the official approval of the last Habsburg king, Charles II, in 1700. It thus became the first officially recognised medical institution favourable to the new science. The *Carta filosófica médica chymica* (Philosophical medico-chemical letter), published in Madrid in 1687 by the Valencian doctor and co-founder of the Society, Juan de Cabriada, promoted empiricism and is one of the key works of the *novatores* ('new thinkers'), as these groups were called. In contrast to the university doctors they aimed at spreading their knowledge, not protecting it. They adhered to an empiricism inspired by Bacon, and discussed the question of applying experimental method to all of natural philosophy.

The opening up towards 'the new philosophy' and 'the new science' in Spain has generally been associated with the change of dynasty and the import of foreign, especially French, ideas after the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) and the accession of the Bourbon Philip V (1714–1746) to the throne, but this picture has been considerably nuanced by research in the past decades.<sup>27</sup> This research has also served in part to challenge the traditional position of Feijoo, for some time considered the lonely torchbearer of Enlightenment ideas in the dark Iberian Peninsula.



The physicians in Seville were not the only *novatores* at the end of the seventeenth century: There were several other *tertulias* and academies which were of a more scientific than purely literary vein, and which challenged the Scholasticism of the universities on experiential grounds. Apart from Seville, the cities of Valencia, Barcelona and Zaragoza all had groups of *novatores*. The *Academia matemática* was founded in Valencia in 1687. Nor was the movement of the *novatores* limited to medicine and the physical-mathematical sciences; there were also new currents in historiography: The *Synopsis histórico cronológica de España, formada de los autores seguros y de Buena fee* (Historical-chronological synopsis of Spain based on recognised authors of Good Faith), published by Juan de Ferreras in 1700, is a characteristic example of the ‘historical scepticism’ of the historian Francisco Sánchez-Blanco, with its sceptical attitude towards local traditions of pious saints and legends, and antedates Feijoo’s texts within the same field by a quarter of a century.<sup>28</sup>

The text from Feijoo’s *Teatro Crítico Universal* we will examine more closely in what follows moves mainly in the sphere of philosophical scepticism. Yet it repeats many of the arguments in his 1725 apology for Martínez’s *Medicina scéptica*. ‘On those questions that are not related in any way to the dogmas, everyone can think as he pleases and follow or abandon Aristotle if he so chooses’, Feijoo states.<sup>29</sup> Apart from this apology and the nine volumes of the *Teatro Crítico Universal*, Feijoo published five volumes of ‘learned and curious letters’ (*Cartas Eruditas y Curiosas*, Madrid 1742–1760).

### Teatro Crítico Universal (1726–1740)

As with Quevedo’s *Sueños y discursos* a hundred years earlier, the *Teatro Crítico Universal: Discursos varios en todo género de materias, para desengaño de errores comunes* is one of the most widely read and frequently published and translated Spanish works of its century. It was published in nine volumes between 1726 and 1740.<sup>30</sup> It also provoked a great polemic that made even the Crown intervene in Feijoo’s defense. Ferdinand VI (1746–1759) prohibited critique of the book in 1750. Antonio Medina Domínguez has argued that the polemic between ‘the ancients’ and ‘the moderns’ that aroused from the publication of Martín Martínez’s work was not just a discussion of the criteria of truth and science, but also a question of power and who had the right to produce and distribute knowledge. Ferdinand VI’s defense of Feijoo thus testifies to a new paradigm of enlightened absolutism, and is

proof of the extraordinary resistance against Feijoo's vulgarization of encyclopedic knowledge in Spain.<sup>31</sup>

*'I write about everything'*

The *Teatro Crítico Universal* consists of 118 discourses on a great variety of subjects. 'I write about everything, and there is no subject foreign to the intention of my work', Feijoo professes in the prologue to volume four of the *Teatro*. 'Discurso' is to be taken in its Latin sense, 'to go from one place to another'—'*discurrir a lo libre*' (move freely from one place to another), as Gracián characterised the Spanish *ingenio* (ingenuity) initiated by Seneca and Martial.<sup>32</sup> Feijoo himself explains in his prologue to the reader that he dismissed trying to arrange his discourses in 'determined classes, following in a regular progression the faculties or matters to which they belong' because he soon found this impracticable. He also argues that by dividing the discourses on particular subjects among the different volumes, each volume would 'afford a more agreeable variety'. Critics have discussed whether his writings pertain to the genre of the essay (a term not used to designate a genre in Spain until 1804) or to the 'journalism' of his times.<sup>33</sup> Feijoo is actually said to have considered his work in line with that of English essayists like Addison and Steel in the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*.<sup>34</sup>

However, the intention expressed in the full title of Feijoo's work, as well as in its prologue, is quite explicit: the 'disillusion of common [vulgar] errors'. Feijoo defines his use of 'error' as 'an opinion he considers to be false'. His *discourses* move from one place to another, but they all move towards *truth*; they 'do the work of criticism' for a presupposedly prejudiced readership. The scepticism at work here is quite distinct from that expressed in the title of Montaigne's work in the late sixteenth century: *Essais*.

'*Teatro*' in its metaphorical sense is the place where something is exposed to 'universal regard or criticism' (*Diccionario de Autoridades*), which corresponds to Feijoo's stated intention in the prologue. Feijoo himself comments on the term *crítico* in his letter '*De la crítica*' (On criticism) contained in the second volume of his *Cartas Eruditas y Curiosas*, stating that fifty years before the word (together with *system* and *phenomenon*) was hardly ever used even in learned circles, while 'unlucky [is] the mother in our age who does not have a "critical" son'. Peter Burke has pointed out that the term *critical*, which was earlier related to *textual* or *literary criticism*, gained a wider acceptance in this period, as many contemporary book titles testify to. He mentions Feijoo's *Teatro Crítico Universal* among them.<sup>35</sup>

*Feijoo's Use of Scepticism*

'Rigid scepticism is an extravagant delirium; moderate scepticism a prudent caution', Feijoo states in the first paragraph of 'Philosophical scepticism'.<sup>36</sup> Quite in line with the program professed by the *novatores*, Feijoo's moderate scepticism—rejecting Pyrrhonism—aims at the authorities, proffering experience above theory. Feijoo then focuses his attention on three arguments for distrusting the senses. These are: That we must make a distinction between the impression objects make on our senses, that is, their sensible qualities, and their real properties; That our senses create illusions, like Augustine's 'bent oar' example demonstrated; That we cannot know whether there are objects that actually correspond to our sensations, like the Cartesian dream argument showed. This last argument is the most serious. Feijoo distinguishes between metaphysical knowledge ('universal principles') and immediate, experimental knowledge ('*evidencia experimental*'). He launches various attacks on Descartes and the Cartesians, for example on their belief in 'subtle Matter', which he compares to the popular belief in the invisible goblin (*duende*). Just as the common people attribute to the goblin all nocturnal movements and clamours, whose true causes they ignore, so do the Cartesians reduce all the movements of nature to the impulse of subtle matter.<sup>37</sup> Feijoo does value Descartes—he dubs the Cartesian *cogito* 'experimental evidence' after all—but he is definitely a greater admirer of Bacon: 'What Descartes said of any good, he got it from Bacon', he writes in one of the other essays of *Teatro Crítico Universal*.<sup>38</sup>

The main part of the *discurso* discusses whether we can obtain *scientia*, that is, certain knowledge, in the Aristotelian sense, of the essence of things. He concludes that in physical and natural matters no demonstration or scientific certainty is possible, only opinion. If we reach any truth, we either owe it to experience, which is not scientific knowledge, or it is so apparent that even the crudest men perceive it.<sup>39</sup> But while philosophers explain such truths in technical terms, common men explain them in vulgar terms, which are all the better since they are more easily understood. While the fisherman, the hunter, or the farmer knows *something*, the philosopher knows only to doubt everything. In the classroom of physics one never gets to pass from doubt to certainty because how to doubt endlessly is the only thing taught. He goes on to lament the situation at the Spanish universities of his time, saying that the same questions that were disputed two hundred years earlier are disputed with the same vigor in his time.<sup>40</sup>

Feijoo goes on: 'If any disillusion (*desengaño*), or certain knowledge has been reached in relation to one or another physical theorem, it was not born in the classroom; it came from the outside as a benefit of experience.'<sup>41</sup> He names

Evangelista Torricelli, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Paolo Sarpi, William Harvey and Thomas Bartholin among other ‘experimentalists’ to support his view. In his earlier apology for the ‘medical scepticism’ of Martínez, Feijoo used the example of how ‘the moderns’ with their repeated ‘experimental observations’ under varying circumstances—as opposed to the singular experience of the ‘ancient Aristotelians’—came to ‘undeceive us’ (*debemos el desengaño*) of the erroneous belief in nature’s abhorrence of vacuity.<sup>42</sup> As Sánchez-Blanco has pointed out, early eighteenth-century scepticism in Spain was ‘an intellectual attitude necessary to admit a perfectible and ecumenical concept of truth’, that is, truth as a collective enterprise.<sup>43</sup> Feijoo points to experimentalism as the solution to scepticism.<sup>44</sup> He closes his discourse by reflecting on the notion of progress, thereby testifying how the pursuit of knowledge had been reconceptualised in Spain since Quevedo’s Baroque pessimism and ‘negative scepticism’. Who knows, he asks, whether a more well-founded system for the attainment of truth will be found in the future? If so, he surmises it will most probably take its starting point in Baconian method—adding that the Royal Society of London and the Royal Academy of Science in Paris are ‘but a sketch of Bacon’s great project’.

In the ‘varied discourses’ of the *Teatro Crítico Universal*, the *engaño* – *desengaño* dichotomy has lost the transcendental power it had in Quevedo’s *Sueños y discursos*, and has become related to the spread of ‘worldly’ science and the uprooting of error. Scientific truth has become a goal in its own right, requiring an epistemology based on the senses, experience and reason.

## Notes

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1. Richard H. Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992), p. 119.
2. The journal dedicated to Spanish / Hispanic eighteenth-century studies, *Dieciocho XVIII*, which is now in its thirty-third year, gives a good overview of this in Volume 30, Issue 1 (Spring 2007).
3. Jose Antonio Maravall, *Estudios de la historia del pensamiento español (siglo XVIII)* (Madrid, 1991), p. 13.
4. Jeremy Robbins, ‘The Arts of Perception: The Epistemological Mentality of the Spanish Baroque’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 82, 2005, p. 39.

5. The bibliography of the Menippean genre has increased considerably in the past decades. A recent update on the genre in Spanish literature is provided in Ramón Valdés & Carlos Vaíllo (eds), *Estudios sobre la sátira española en el siglo de oro* (Madrid, 2006).
6. The essay 'Nombre, origen, intento, recomendación y descendencia de la doctrina estoica' (Name, origin, intention, recommendation and descent of the Stoical doctrine) was probably written in 1612, but was first published in 1635 in Madrid, together with Quevedo's translations of Epictetus's famous manual and the Greek gnomic poet Phocylides, *Epicteto y Phocilides en español con consonantes* (Epictetus and Phocylides in Spanish rhyme), as well as, more surprisingly, the *Defensa de Epicuro contra la común opinión* (Defense of Epicure against common opinion), testifying to the eclecticism of late Spanish humanism.
7. *A Menippean Satire: The Dream. Satire against the Philologists of our Age*. I thank Per Pippin Aspaas at the University Library, University of Tromsø, for help with translating the Latin title.
8. See Robbins 2005, Chapter Two 'Neostoicism, Value Judgement and Moral Perception'.
9. Sagrario López Poza, 'Los libros de emblemas como "tesoros" de erudición. Auxiliarios de la "inventio"', in Rafael Zafra & José Javier Azanza (eds) *Emblemata Aurea. La emblemática en el arte y la literatura del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid, 2000), p. 263–279.
10. Dictionary of the Castilian language in which the true meaning of the words is explained, their nature and quality with (examples of) phrases and modes of speaking (the 'authorities'), proverbs or sayings and other things convenient to the use of the language. Usually referred to as the Dictionary of Authorities, *Diccionario de Autoridades, Real Academia Española*, facsimile edition (Madrid, 1990).
11. *Diccionario de Autoridades*, 1990, p. ii.
12. Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, eds Ignacio Arellano & Rafael Zafra (Madrid, 2006), p. 12. Covarrubias is thinking of for example the *Trésor de la Langue Française* by Jean Nicot (Paris, 1606).
13. 'Luz de la verdad, conocimiento del error con que se sale del engaño'.
14. See Jesús Pérez Magallón, *Construyendo la modernidad: la cultura española en el tiempo de los Novatores (1675–1725)* (Madrid, 2002), p. 27.
15. Antonio Romero-González, 'La sátira menipea en España: 1600–1699', unprinted Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1991, p. 189.
16. Francisco de Quevedo, *Dreams and Discourses*, ed. R. K Britton (Warminster, 1989), p. 181. I use Britton's English translation, in some cases with my corrections/adaptations which are always indicated with italics. I refer to this book as 'Britton'. The quotations in original always refer to Francisco de Quevedo, *Los sueños*, ed. Ignacio Arellano (Madrid, 1991), p. 271: 'Es cosa averiguada, así lo siente Metrodoro Chío, y otros muchos, que no se sabe nada, y que todos son ignorantes, y aun esto no se sabe de cierto, que a saberse ya se supiera algo; sospéchase. Dícelo así el doctísimo Francisco Sánchez, médico y filósofo, en su libro cuyo título es *Nihil Scitur*, no se sabe nada.'

17. These subsequent works are not extant—or were perhaps never written—but rather formed part of Sánchez’s rhetorical strategy, as suggested by Emmanuel Naya’s subtle reading in ‘Quod nihil scitur: la parole mise en doute’, *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 7, *La Résurgence des philosophies antiques* (Saint-Étienne, 2003), p. 27–43. Francisco Sanches, *That Nothing Is Known (Quod nihil scitur)*, ed. Elaine Limbrick, transl. Douglas F.S. Thomson (Cambridge, 1988), p. 203. ‘Verum enim scire est, rei naturam primum cognosse, secundo loco accidentia, ubi accidentia res habet,’ (p. 112–113).
18. Britton 1989, p. 210–211. ‘Quien no ama con todos sus cinco sentidos una mujer hermosa, no estima a la naturaleza su mayor cuidado y su mayor obra.’ Quevedo 1991, p. 301.
19. Britton 1989, p. 213. ‘Hasta agora te juzgaba por ciego y agora veo que también eres loco. Y echo de ver que hasta agora no sabes para lo que Dios te dio los ojos ni cuál es su oficio. Ellos han de ver y la razón ha de juzgar y elegir; al revés lo haces, o nada haces, que es peor. Si te andas a creerlos padecerás mil confusiones: tendrás las sierras por azules y lo grande por pequeño, que la longitud y la proximidad engañan la vista.’ Quevedo 1991, p. 301–302.
20. Francisco de Quevedo, *La cuna y la sepultura. Doctrina moral*, ed. Celsa Carmen García Valdés (Madrid, 2008), p. 111.
21. Sanches, *That Nothing is Known*, p. 191. ‘Nil captare possis’ (p. 105).
22. Britton 1989, p. 217; ‘¿Qué te ha dado, mujer? ¿Eres tú la que yo vi allí?’; ‘ha desatado las coyunturas,’ Quevedo 1991, p. 499.
23. Romero-González, ‘La sátira menipea en España: 1600–1699’, p. 154.
24. Britton 1989, p. 223; ‘que el choque de tantas admiraciones y de tantos desengaños fatigan el seso y temo se te desconcierte la imaginación.’ Quevedo 1991, p. 502. (The pagination is correct, the end of the text of *El mundo por de dentro* is from the version of *Juguetes de la niñez*, printed in Madrid, 1631, and included in Arellano’s edition of *Los sueños*.)
25. See Pérez Magallón 2002, p. 23.
26. Twenty-nine percent of the occurrences in the period 1600–1649 are in narrative prose, while eight percent are in didactic prose. For the period 1650–1699 there are 361 occurrences in seventy-seven documents, with the majority still found in narrative prose. For the period 1700–1750 seventy-eight percent of the only thirty-four documents (with 240 occurrences) are in didactic prose and only five percent in narrative prose. Fourteen of these documents are works by Feijoo. See *Corpus diacrónico del español*. <http://www.rae.es> [Retrieved 15 July 2010].
27. Most recently by Pérez Magallón 2002.
28. Francisco Sánchez-Blanco, *La mentalidad ilustrada* (Madrid, 1999), p. 56.
29. *Apology for Medical Scepticism (Aprobación apologética del escepticismo médico del doctor Martínez)* (Oviedo, 1725), § 49, my translation. See the online edition of Feijoo’s work by *Proyecto Filosofía en español* at <http://filosofia.org/fejoo.htm>. All references to Feijoo’s work is to this edition, which is the only complete edition available of Feijoo’s works. The references

are to volume, discourse, paragraph and section. The *Teatro Crítico Universal* is abbreviated TCU in the notes.

30. The entries in the supplement volume nine of the TCU were inserted in the corresponding places in the preceding eight volumes from the 1756 edition onwards.

31. Alberto Medina Domínguez, 'Torres vs. Feijoo: "ensayos" y usos del escepticismo en el XVIII español', *Hispania* 83, 2000, p. 745–756.

32. Baltasar Gracián, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, 1642/1648, Discurso LI. See Juan Marichal 'El desengañador de las Españas', in José Miguel Caso González (ed.), *Ilustración y neoclasicismo*, Vol. 4 of Francisco Rico (ed.), *Historia y crítica de la literatura española* (Barcelona, 1983), p. 107.

33. See Caso González 1983, p. 71, and Otilia López Fanego, 'Algunas analogías entre Feijoo y Montaigne', in *II Simposio sobre el Padre Feijoo y su siglo : (ponencias y comunicaciones)* (Oviedo, 1981), p. 393–412, and especially Medina Domínguez 2000.

34. Maravall 1991, p. 329.

35. Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 200. Feijoo's work is here mentioned in company with Richard Simon's *Critical History of the Old Testament* (1678), Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), and Pierre Lebrun's *Critical History of Superstitious Practices* (1702).

36. TCU, Vol. III, Discourse XIII.

37. TCU, Vol. III, Discourse XIII, §. XX, 78–80.

38. TCU, Vol. II, Discourse XV, §. VIII.

39. TCU, Vol. III, Discourse XIII, §. XXIII, 86.

40. In TCU, Vol. III, Discourse XIII, §. XXIII, 87. See also TCU, Vol. II, §. I, I 'Guerras filosóficas'.

41. 'Si algún desengaño, o conocimiento cierto se ha adquirido en orden a uno, u otro teorema físico, no nació en al Aula; vino de afuera a beneficio de la experiencia.' TCU, Vol. III, Discourse XIII, §. XXIII, 87.

42. Feijoo, *Apología del Escepticismo médico*, § 71.

43. Sánchez-Blanco 1999, p. 54.

44. Cf. also TCU, Vol. III, Discourse XIII, §. XXIV, 88 and §. XXV, 94, 96, 97.

Summary:

### *The Changing Shapes of Knowledge in Spain 1627–1726: From Dreams and Discourses to Universal Critical Theater*

This article illustrates the changing shapes of knowledge in Spain in the period spanning from the Baroque (ca. 1600–1680) to the pre-Enlightenment (ca. 1730). Scepticism and the dichotomies *engaño* – *desengaño* (illusion – disillusion)

and *ser – parecer* (reality – appearances) were at the heart of the Baroque obsession with the foundations of knowledge, which culminated in an epistemological crisis. In the pre-Enlightenment, epistemological preoccupations were directed towards *error* instead of *desengaño*, notably in the writings of the Benedictine monk Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (1676–1764), who was a key figure in the divulgation of the ‘new science’ and ‘new philosophy’ in Spain. The epistemic value of the concept *desengaño* is examined here by contrasting Feijoo’s essay on philosophical scepticism in his *Teatro Crítico Universal. Discursos varios en todo género de materias, para desengaño de errores comunes* (Universal Critical Theater. Varied discourses on all kinds of matters to the disillusion of common errors, 1726–1739) with the use of scepticism in the Baroque author Francisco de Quevedo’s *Sueños y discursos de verdades descubridoras de abusos, vicios y engaños, en todos los oficios y estados del mundo* (Dreams and discourses on truths revealing abuses, vices and deceptions in all the professions and estates of the world) published a hundred years earlier (1627).

*Keywords:* Epistemology, scepticism, *desengaño*, Francisco de Quevedo, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, Spanish intellectual history.