ABSURDITIES, CONTRADICTIONS, AND PARADOXES IN
MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO’S AMOR Y PEDAGOGÍA

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Abstract. This essay reconsiders Miguel de Unamuno’s contribution to philosophy and education by focusing on his *Amor y pedagogía* ([Love and Pedagogy](#)) — a piece of fiction considered by many to be the transition point in his work from the documentary realism of the nineteenth century to what Unamuno called “viviparous” narrative for the twentieth century. Deron Boyles examines four central characters in *Love and Pedagogy* — Avito Carrascal, Marina Carrascal, Fulgencio Entrambosmares, and Apolodoro Carrascal — as symbolic representations of enduring conflicts in school and society.

At the Philosophy of Education Society meeting in 1968, Philip Phenix delivered a general session on Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) in which he pointed out that Unamuno’s *Amor y pedagogía* ([Love and Pedagogy](#)) had not yet been translated into English. As a result, few English-speaking students in philosophy of education were familiar with the work or Unamuno’s philosophy more generally. The good news, Phenix indicated, was that there were plans to publish a translation and that he was “hopeful that the book will before long become generally known to American readers and will contribute to the enrichment of the curriculum in the philosophy of education.”¹ *Love and Pedagogy* did not get published in English until thirty years later.² Twenty more years have passed and there are scant publications in the field of philosophy of education on Unamuno.³ This may be due to the fact that he is largely regarded as a literary figure rather than a philosophical one. It also may be due to the fact that Unamuno embraces paradox and contradiction antithetical to systematic philosophy. There further may be a concern about mixing literature and philosophical analysis, although there is ample precedent for doing so.⁴ Whatever the reasons, Phenix’s concern regarding the lack


of scholarship in philosophy of education on Unamuno, specifically \textit{LAP}, appears to be true. This essay is an attempt to fill a small part of that void.

To do so is difficult, in part, because of the nature of Unamuno’s writing, but also because my effort is to make links to contemporary debates about education. To be consistent with Unamuno, if that is even possible (he is repeatedly described as being consistently inconsistent), means achieving a defensible fidelity to key elements in his “roaming” narrative in \textit{LAP} while, at the same time, clarifying any possible relevance to contemporary society and issues in education. Interpreting Unamuno through his characters requires, first, that Unamuno be understood as criticizing the entirety of existence as a tug-of-war between reason and emotion. Our holistic “tragic sense of life” is a muddle of troubling and ironic particulars between what Unamuno called the “science of the head” and the “wisdom of the heart.”\footnote{Barry J. Luby, \textit{The Uncertainties in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Analytic Thought: Miguel de Unamuno the Precursor} (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2008), 135 ff.} For Unamuno, these particulars are neither logical nor sequential. When he talks, in \textit{LAP}, about a father’s adopting “science” as the guiding criterion for his son’s becoming a genius, Unamuno is indicating the risk of science turning into scientism: the view that empirical science provides the most accurate description of the world at the expense of all other viewpoints.\footnote{See, for example, Austin L. Hughes, “The Folly of Scientism,” \textit{The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society} 37 (2012), http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/number-37-fall-2012.} The father represents the idea that only science should guide our lives — emotion should not factor into decisions about, for example, our mates, our child rearing, or our teaching and learning. Differently, Unamuno uses the mother character as a caricature of the opposite extreme: overly emotive love that smothers her son in ways similar to the father’s scientism. In these competing polarities, Unamuno arguably favored emotion, but Unamuno was not endorsing the extremes as goals.

Second, Unamuno’s \textit{LAP}, while fictional, nonetheless gestures toward and relies on actual events and figures in the world as both daring illustrations of and humorous sarcasm about the various topics he raises. When Unamuno indicates that an epilogue was added to the original edition of \textit{LAP} for mercantile reasons, he is both poking fun at those who write for money and the publishing system itself that relies on moneymaking texts. Whether the works are provocative or profound matter less than whether they are profitable. We can justifiably abstract from Unamuno’s criticism that, as one illustration, the Common Core State Standards impel publishers to craft textbooks — all as part of a project of standardization that
Unamuno pillories. Accordingly, I am suggesting that we borrow from Unamuno’s absurdism to critique U.S. culture and schools that position scientism as the arbiter of what counts as legitimate and valued in society.

Third, if not finally, Unamuno uses his characters to represent the universal struggle between reason and emotion noted above. He does this by, again, using the father as the rationalist, the mother as the emotivist, the teacher as the arbiter of each, and the son as the recipient of both. What role do parents play in education or schooling? To what degree are their views of childhood so influenced by an unchecked, uncontested scientism that they hegemonically reinforce it rather than challenge it? Conversely, how much emotion — how much love — is too much so that it negates the value of scientific investigation? And the point of it all? Perhaps it is to balance and modify extremes by seeing the absurdity of the extremes themselves.

Phenix argued that the central feature of Unamuno’s work was his grappling with immortality. The grappling, mirroring Phenix’s own work on reverence, was between emotion and logic: “love — concrete, personal affection — triumphs over cold abstraction, though not without tragedy.” It is this tension between affect and reason that prompted Unamuno to seek unstable stability. Such wording is vital to understanding Unamuno’s project of paradox, irony, and angst because he is not only troubling the “givens” of our lives, he is challenging the troubling, too. Unamuno uses “irresolvable contradictions” to clarify the importance of human being. His project is what Jack Conrad Willers identified as fusing “the rational and affective forces of human endeavor and not to give in to their antithesis.” Indeed, much of Unamuno’s angst regarding immortality is reflected in his relation to science and religion. Raised a devout Catholic, he disavowed Catholicism in a mostly Catholic Spain because he believed parishioners did not question their faith. He valued science, but disdained scientism for being too professional and myopic. He advocated education, but lamented the forms of schooling that lead to unthinking discipleship. He argued for hope while maintaining that existence was doomed to tragedy: we all die. He also appears to have, as part of his push for both thinking about but also achieving immortality, an affinity for self-promotion.

Given these tensions, this essay specifically reconsiders Unamuno’s contribution to philosophy and education by focusing on his *Amor y pedagogía* (*Love and Pedagogy* [1902]) — a piece of fiction considered by many to be the transition point in his work from the documentary realism of the nineteenth century to

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9. This torment was, on one view, partly borne of his early life and the strife Spain endured. Another view is that Unamuno was a man “quite consciously bent on deception who parades his anguish for theatrical effect, a man who would win an audience by any means in order, as Unamuno once wrote, ‘to be seen, admired, and leave a name.’” See Frances Wires, *Miguel de Unamuno: The Contrary Self* (London: Tamesis Books Limited, 1976), xvii.
what Unamuno called “viviparous” narrative for the twentieth century. LAP is also considered by many, with Unamuno’s novel Niebla (Mist: A Tragicomic Novel [1914]) and his most well-known treatise Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos (On the Tragic Sense of Life of Man and Peoples [1913]), to be his most philosophical writing. I examine four central characters in Love and Pedagogy — Avito Carrascal, Marina Carrascal, Fulgencio Entrambosmares, and Apolodoro Carrascal — as symbolic representations of enduring conflicts in school and society. To do so is to interpret fiction informed by philosophy, humor, and absurdity. Apolodoro is pressured to study “science” by his father, Avito, in traditional bookish ways so he can become a genius. Avito goes so far as to hire a tutor, the “philosophical” Fulgencio, but, caught between Avito’s expectation of scientific method and Fulgencio’s own bluster and vagueness, Apolodoro is left confused and bored. At the same time, Marina emotionally smothers her son with adulation. Conflicts typical of adolescence end up overwhelming Apolodoro: difficult relations with his parents, bored and confused by his studies and his tutor, fights with his girlfriend (who chooses his foe over him), longing for fame and immortality (leading to impregnating the maid), and so on. The tragic result is that Apolodoro commits suicide by hanging himself.

By focusing on Unamuno’s characters Avito, Marina, Fulgencio, and Apolodoro, this essay explores key themes in LAP, with a particular focus on scientism and the perfectibility of method. Again, scientism, for Unamuno, was different from science. It was science “run amuck” insofar as it reduced human action to procedures and minutiae that narrowed rather than broadened inquiry. Similarly, the effort to perfect method was not the same as teaching, for Unamuno, since the result of wanting a perfect method was pedantry and consisted of telling, managing, and inculcating. The problem is the dehumanized externality: for scientism, characterized by an overreliance on objectivity, expertise, and method and an underreliance on intuition, inadequacy, and serendipity; for pedantry, characterized by an overreliance on procedure, memorization, and compliance and

10. LAP, vii; Marilyn D. Rugg, “Self and Text in Unamuno’s Amor y pedagogía,” Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea 17, no. 1 (1992): 347–364; and Paul R. Olson, “The Novelistic Logos in Unamuno’s Amor y pedagogía,” MLN 84, no. 2 (1969): 248–268. Much time and energy is also spent in the literature analyzing the structure of the novel. For the purposes of this essay, brief references are made to the form of the work, including the “stream of consciousness” Unamuno is said to have learned from William James. See Vande Berg, “Introduction,” in Love and Pedagogy, vii-xvii. Most of the essay, however, focuses on Unamuno’s symbolic uses of Avito, Marina, Fulgencio, and Apolodoro and the possible implications for education that follow.

an underreliance on impulse, inquiry, and experimentation. “Scientism,” writes Roger Hughes, “is marked by a demand for concrete solutions and a preoccupation with technology. This was part of Unamuno’s polemic against the apostles of industrialism who, according to Unamuno, thought that if there were a problem, there must be a solution.” Yet, and this is central to understanding Unamuno, each of the foregoing characteristics is subject to the very critique he is offering. After Unamuno details what he takes to be the problem, he problematizes the problem. He then sometimes maintains a critique of, say, compliance, but also reveals the need for compliance in particular, if contextual, situations. He loves origami and finds paper bird folding interesting and enjoyable, but also sees how it, like any hobby, can devolve into a step-by-step proceduralism that vitiates the joy of the pastime. His is a kind of language game in which he, according to Demetrios Basdekis, “frequently poetizes the alogical.”

**Unamuno’s Life: A Brief Overview**

Because Unamuno’s life integrally reflected the issues about which he wrote and because there is little scholarship on Unamuno in philosophy of education, a brief overview of his life provides important context. Unamuno was born into a lower middle-class family in Bilbao, Spain, the capital of the Basque region in the northern part of the country, on September 29, 1864. He was raised by his mother and grandmother, as his father died when Unamuno was six. Still, as Unamuno records in his *Recuerdos de niñez y de mocedad* (*Memories of Childhood and Youth* [1908]), he inherited two things from his father: (1) his library; and (2) his love of languages. When Unamuno was nine, Bilbao was overtaken by the Carlists, a monarchist clan opposed to female succession to the throne, and the actual smell of gun powder and sound of bullets from the battles would be sensations Unamuno...

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14. Most of the work on Unamuno is done, unsurprisingly, by Hispanists and Iberian literary scholars. One result is that, unless one is fluent in Spanish, most of the books and articles will not be accessible or fully comprehensible. See Nozick, *Miguel de Unamuno: The Agony of Belief*; and José Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno: A Philosophy of Tragedy*, trans. Philip Silver (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962), 9 ff.

never forgot, so connected to death these experiences were. Indeed, the strife he endured in his early years continued throughout his life, given the battles over control of Spain between the two Carlist wars, the rise of republicanism, the response to democratic elections by the dictatorship, the competing views of Catholic bishops, secessionist strife in Basque and Catalonia, the Spanish Civil War, and so on.

Unamuno was raised in a devoutly Catholic household. As a child, he was afraid of the dark and connected this fear with mortality, too, when one night a classmate of his died. His religious experiences in church point to early signs of strife and contradiction. On the one hand, he hated his first communion — preferring to go to a theatrical performance, instead. Yet, he also found comfort in being around the members of the church congregation. He was especially smitten with las seisenas, a service held at dusk and one that highlighted shadows and reflective meditation. According to Jan Evans, this was where Unamuno dreamed about becoming a saint, but where that dream was interrupted by the intrusion of an image of a woman — Concepción (“Concha”) de Lizárraga Ecenarro, his future wife.16

At the age of sixteen, in 1880, Unamuno went to Madrid to begin his doctoral studies. It was also the year his grandmother died, which is another episode in his relatively young life that underscored death. His loneliness at the university, coupled with what he took to be dull teaching and low expectations, is largely why he studied as much as he did. It was his experience at the university, specifically his study of Charles Darwin, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Herbert Spencer, that led Unamuno to criticize Catholic dogma. He spoke, according to Evans, “disparagingly of ‘la fe del carbonero,’ the unquestioning faith of the uneducated.”17 As he wrote in his diary, “through thinking about hell I began to rebel against faith; the first thing that I threw out was faith in hell.”18 Instead of attending the graduation ceremony, Unamuno petitioned the local government for the conferral of the degree. As Colette and Jean-Claude Rabaté point out, all graduates were obliged to swear an oath stating that they believed in God and would uphold the Catholic faith.19 That Unamuno would forego the ceremony might indicate the degree to which his skepticism had grown during his years in Madrid.

16. Jan E. Evans, Miguel de Unamuno’s Quest for Faith: A Kierkegaardian Understanding of Unamuno’s Struggle to Believe (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 8–29, 11. They would have nine children together, though one of their sons suffered a serious illness and would be mentally and physically challenged for life.

17. Ibid., 12. Evans qualifies that (in what I take to be a classic posture for Unamuno) while he lamented the system of schooling, he nonetheless left the university “in love with learning” [11].


Unamuno, by age twenty, had learned eleven languages, ostensibly to be able to read the original texts of authors and philosophers.\textsuperscript{20} In 1890, he returned to Bilbao and became a tutor and writer, soon after which he gained the position of professor of Greek and Latin and moved to the University of Salamanca in 1891. He later became familiar with [and ultimately a figure connected to] a literary movement that promoted Spanish heritage and ideas, known as the “Generation of 1898.”\textsuperscript{21} In 1897, however, Unamuno suffered a serious mental crisis — one that would alter his outlook and his thinking. It was both a spiritual crisis and a philosophical one that, at first, led him to reconnect to Roman Catholicism but which ultimately showed him the severe limitations of formal religion and “systems thinking.” No longer would he look for “answers” in various “isms.” Instead, he would embark on a life of anguished reflection and pronounced provocation. Unamuno epitomized Ortega y Gasset’s point: “reason, science, culture, need to be vitalized; they are neither autonomous nor sacrosanct; above all, man [sic] did not create these things out of a masochistic urge to be tyrannized by them.” To counter such oppressiveness, Unamuno provoked those around him, sometimes rudely and sometimes vainly.

Some of this provocation can be seen in his early years when, at age six, he sent a letter of protest to King Alfonso XII. Once he established himself as a scholar and public figure, as Willers clarifies, Unamuno’s provocation took place this way:

\begin{quote}
The disposition to stimulate inquiry by irritation serves as the basis for Unamuno’s philosophy of education. … When addressing the clergy, Unamuno praised the heterodox and glorified the heretic. If speaking to Communists, he would ostentatiously cross himself and shout, “Christ be praised!”\end{quote}

Unamuno’s passion is an important characteristic to underscore. Much later in life, in 1924, after serving as Rector of the University of Salamanca for twenty-three years, Unamuno was so critical of King Alfonso XIII and the regime of Primo de Rivera that he was stripped of his rectorship and exiled to Fuerteventura, Canary Islands. He escaped to France and lived as a refugee there until 1931, when the Rivera administration was toppled by unrest and democratic elections were held for the first time in sixty years. Surprisingly, Unamuno regained his position at

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  \item Unamuno actually learned Danish in order to read Kierkegaard at a time when hardly anyone, outside of Denmark, knew Danish.
  \item Although the specific year may not reflect all of the work produced by the group, the “Generation of 1898” is constitutive of luminaries like Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Pío Baroja, Eugenio d’Ors, José Ortega y Gasset, Pablo Picasso, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and José Augusto Trinidad Martínez Ruiz [also known as Azorín, who actually coined the phrase “Generation of 1898”]. See Gerhard Masur, “Miguel de Unamuno,” The Americas 12, no. 2 (1955): 139–156; and Mora, Unamuno: A Philosophy of Tragedy. The concept “Generation of 1898,” however, is not without serious controversy. Priscilla Pearsall, among others, argues that the phrase represents a historicizing myth that vaunts Spanish identity after El Desastre, the colonial loss of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. See Pearsall, “Azorín’s Myth of the Generation of 1898: Toward an Esthetic of Modernism,” Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos 11, no. 1 (1986): 179–184.
  \item Willers, “Unamuno Centennial,” 319.
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Salamanca, but in what can only be described as a defiantly heroic act, directly challenged the emerging Francisco Franco dictatorship when he passionately responded to a speech in Salamanca given by the nationalist, pseudo-fascist general José Millán Astray. At the gathering, Astray extolled the virtues of fascism and military control and indicated that select people, from particular geographical regions and intellectual positions, should be eliminated. There were, he suggested, “cancers” to kill.

On the same dais, Unamuno confronted Astray, who had also earlier whipped the crowd into the radical chant, “Viva la muerta!” (“Long Live Death!”). Astray’s point was that Spain should rid itself of Catalans and Basques and “remake” Spain in line with Franco’s despotic vision. Unamuno actually valued both the Catalans and Basques and, with dramatic seriousness, said the following:

> Just now, I heard a necrophilous and senseless cry: “Long live Death!” To me it sounds the equivalent of Muera la Vidal — “To Death with Life!” And I, who have spent my life shaping paradoxes which aroused the uncomprehending anger of the others, I must tell you, as an expert authority, that this outlandish paradox is repellent to me. Since it was proclaimed in homage to the last speaker, I can only explain it to myself by supposing that it was addressed to him, though in an excessively strange and tortuous form, as a testimonial to his being himself a symbol of death.

> And now, another matter. General Millán Astray is a cripple. Let it be said without any slighting undertone. He is a war invalid. So was Cervantes. But extremes do not make the rule: they escape it. Unfortunately, there are all too many cripples in Spain now. And soon, there will be even more of them if God does not come to our aid. It pains me to think that General Millán Astray should dictate the pattern of mass-psychology.

> That would be appalling. A cripple who lacks the spiritual greatness of a Cervantes — a man, not a Superman, virile and complete, in spite of his mutilations — a cripple, I said, who lacks that loftiness of mind, is wont to seek ominous relief in seeing mutilation around him.

General Millán Astray is not one of the select minds, even though he is unpopular, or rather, for that very reason. Because he is unpopular. General Millán Astray would like to create Spain anew — a negative creation — in his own image and likeness. And for that reason he wishes to see Spain crippled, as he unwittingly made clear.

As Unamuno delivered his response, Astray grew angry and altered his earlier exclamation to “Muerta la inteligencia!” (“Death to the Intelligentsia!”). At that, Don José Maria Pemán, a journalist from Cadiz, is reported to have shouted “No!”

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Long live intelligence. To death with bad intellectuals.” Franco’s fascist Blue Shirts surrounded Astray, robed academics surrounded Unamuno. After rising tensions momentarily settled, Unamuno concluded the event in characteristically dramatic fashion by claiming that Astray and Franco would likely win the current struggle over leadership and control of Spain, but only through force and not through persuasion, reason, and intelligence. Unamuno proclaimed:

This is the temple of intellect. And I am its high priest. It is you who are profaning its sacred precincts. I have always, whatever the proverb may say, been a prophet in my own land. You will win, but you will not convince. You will win, because you possess more than enough brute force, but you will not convince, because to convince means to persuade. And in order to persuade you would need what you lack — reason and right in the struggle. I consider it futile to exhort you to think of Spain. I have finished.

Here, again, is the passion — the love — of a kind of intellect and view of scholarly pursuits that cannot allow fascist, bureaucratic interference. Unamuno is literally speaking to those who control not only his career, but his life. Demonstrating both bravery and intelligence, Unamuno had to know the risks. He faced them down, anyway — which is much of the point. He was once again removed from his position at the university, in 1936, and placed under house arrest. He died two months later at the age of seventy-two.

Structure, Characters, Symbolism, and Meaning

When Unamuno wrote _LAP_, he broke a long tradition of descriptive fiction writing. Prior to _LAP_, the instances of fictional characters that are aware that they exist in the literary work go back to William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, and Søren Kierkegaard, but Unamuno twists the point to include the author’s own self. As Martin Nozick argues:

Just as it may be said that the father derives his paternity from his child and is therefore in a sense his child’s creation, and just as we have no knowledge of God divorced from the existence of the men [sic] He created, so also are we in no position to understand the novelist or playwright except as we interpret the beings he has projected from himself. The public performances of Unamuno himself — whether prepared at his desk or acted out on the podium — created the figure of Unamuno just as truly as Unamuno created his Avito Carrascal.

Unamuno devised the neologism “nivola” to describe stories in which the characters and the author would often reflect on themselves, their roles, and the ideas expressed within the pages of the work in both tragic and comic senses.

25. See Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 353–354. Unamuno escaped harm (possibly even execution), ironically, by being led away from the event by Dona Carmen Polo de Franco — Francisco Franco’s wife.


27. Nozick, *Miguel de Unamuno: The Agony of Belief*, 149. Here Nozick is endorsing the idea Wires noted, specifically that part of Unamuno’s life was given over to building or making his persona. See Wires, *Miguel de Unamuno: The Contrary Self*.

28. Hence “tragicomic,” but not “tragicomic novel,” as the form and content do not rise to the qualifications of a novel. For the most thorough treatment of this point, see Armando F. Zubizarreta, *Unamuno y su “nivola”* (Madrid: Taurus, 1960). Florence May Weinberg disagrees. She notes that “Amor
Considering the role of Unamuno’s reader, too, Luis Álvarez-Castro explains that it is twofold: on the one hand, the reader is an autonomous subject who is faced with new literary conventions and daring alterations of the traditional realms of reality and fiction. On the other hand, the reader becomes subjugated in the sense that his or her ability to create meaning is restricted by an “existential blackmailing”: the reader’s identity and [his or her] hope for eternal life [are] strengthened or weakened depending on his or her interpretation. Thus Unamuno’s prose offers a unique blend of ontology and hermeneutics.29

If LAP were to be read quickly, it might seem more like a comedic essay than a philosophical treatise because Unamuno often takes ideas to the extreme and, in doing so, uses mockery, absurdism, and stream of consciousness to lead the reader inside the characters themselves.30 The philosophical elements are often embedded in the text — sometimes deeply and sometimes superficially — as will be illustrated shortly. Unamuno uses his characters to work out concerns he personally faced, and the way the book is structured provides insight into how he contemplates those problems. Indeed, the overall format of the book is as important to understand as the internal structure and symbolism of the characters in it. Like Arthur Schopenhauer before him, Unamuno continued to add appendices to the work after the initial publication.31 In addition to the fifteen chapters that comprise the main body of the book, the final iteration of LAP also includes a prologue, a prologue/epilogue, an epilogue, “Notes for a Treatise on Cocotology” (the study of paper bird folding), an appendix, and [more] “Notes.” One of the additions Unamuno lightheartedly made was the “Epilogue,” ostensibly because

\[ y \text{ pedagogía} \] defies classification: it is a piece of comic prose with serious undertones and a tragic ending — in this, the polar opposite of \textit{tragicomedia} — a satire against superficial pseudo-science, and a revelation of human nature as an overwhelming and inexorable force, unchangeable by any puny effort on the part of reason.” See Florence May Weinberg, “Unamuno and the \textit{Quijote}” (Master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1963), https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0302303. The question of whether calling LAP a “comitragedy” would alleviate the concern is beyond the scope of this essay. Unamuno uses the term “\textit{tragicomedia}” when he has Fulgencio and Avito talking obliquely about religion, aphorism, and ad libs [see LAP, 53–54]. The important point is that Unamuno is fully aware that LAP uses a caricature of characters, not substantive enough in its content to be called a novel, and that the extreme qualities he uses to define the characters serve as a vehicle for commenting on the problem [as he sees it] of modernization, scientism, and the perfectibility of method. See also Paul R. Olson, \textit{The Great Chiasmus: Word and Flesh in the Novels of Unamuno} (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2003), 51–99.


30. For more on William James and Unamuno, see Michael Vande Berg, “Unamuno’s \textit{Amor y pedagogía}: An Early Application of James’s ‘Stream of Consciousness,’” \textit{Hispania} 70, no. 4 (1987): 752–758.

the publisher paid the author a stipend and wanted more pages. Like students asking how long their assigned papers have to be, the arbitrary [and mercantile] logic behind adding the treatise allowed Unamuno to pillory the logic in and by the epilogue itself. He wrote that the publisher “plans to publish a series of more or less uniformly edited works, and with this in mind, he asks that each novel consist of a certain number of pages because everything, including literary works, must be subject to weight, number, and measure” (LAP, 141). He later notes that “at the same time that I drag out this epilogue, I’ll leave the story hanging so as to be able to add a second part to it, if the first part is successful and is well received” (LAP, 150). He ends the epilogue by stating that “now I bring this epilogue to a close, ending it, as I promised, with the last line from Lope de Vega’s sonnet: ‘Count and see if there are fourteen lines, and it’s done’” (LAP, 159). Extending the interpretation of the additions, Marilyn Rugg suggests that they are entirely in keeping with Unamuno’s quest for immortality because, by including the extra sections, the text “declares itself an incomplete text, a text in process of creation. [They are], along with the novel of which they are a part, the all-inclusive, never-ending text that bestows on its author immortality.”

For LAP, the major characters are actually caricatures, rife with symbolic names and exaggerated roles. There is the father, Avito Carrascal, whose fascination with science and improving the human species not only factors into his decision regarding the woman he marries, but also strongly influences the pressure he places on Apolodoro to become a scientific genius. Avito represents “futurists” who put their “faith” in science instead of putting their faith in faith and in questioning faith. Avito wants certainty and hierarchical status. In his response to Sinforiano, a character described as being enrolled in “Natural Sciences” (capitalization symbolic here and throughout LAP) and who suggests humans will be created in test tubes in the future, Avito indicates his support of such a process of perfecting when he claims that “I’m not saying that they couldn’t be [created in test tubes], because man, who’s created the Gods in his own image and likeness, is

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33. Carrascal, the surname Unamuno uses for his central characters, translates from Spanish as “plantation of evergreen oaks,” suggesting perennial certitude.

34. Ironically, and contradictorily, it is not “the blond” Leoncia who is “the deductive one” with “ample hips, high, firm breasts, tranquil gaze” and “awash in the waters of science within the upper strata” who Avito marries, but “the brunette” Marina who has “a flourishing shrub about her form” and “emerges in splendor from the fires of instinct, like a broom plant growing at the rim of a volcano” (LAP, 27). Note the binaries that are already in tension and the [obvious] contrasts Unamuno is making between “deductive” and “inductive,” and, later, “water” and “fire.” Novell extends this list of binaries to include progress/tradition, freedom/discipline, individual/societal, rationalism/irrationalism, and so on. See Novell, “Unamuno’s Use of Contradictions in Love and Pedagogy.” In terms of other, pervasive symbolism, note that “Leoncia” is derived from the Greek “Leon,” a masculine form of lion, but also of saints and martyrs. The feminized “a” instead of “o” suggests Unamuno’s caricature of supremacy of place.
capable of anything; but it’s certain that we’ll succeed in creating geniuses through sociological pedagogy" (LAP, 22). If only we could find the best methods for teaching, we could produce a great product/child. Avito represents scientific rationality as superior to existential or normative questions. He wants “facts,” a term uttered repeatedly in the text. Indeed, he is described in the first chapter as one who “walks according to the law of mechanics, digests according to the laws of chemistry, and has his suits cut according to the principles of geometric design” (LAP, 21). As for schooling, his reverence for “sociological pedagogy” is an indication that he sees teaching and learning as scientific method, too.

When, toward the end of LAP, Avito tries to rectify the discord between science and love, he jousts again with Apolodoro. In highly symbolic references, Avito demonstrates the closest he can come to relinquishing his blind faith in science when Apolodoro asks, “why not make pedagogy out of love itself, father?” Avito concedes that “that’s an idea that hadn’t occurred to me, and although it seems absurd, it might lead to something, just as Lobachevski was led to create a geometry out of that apparent absurdity which maintained that from a point beyond a straight line, one could descend more than a perpendicular to it. Look, dedicate yourself to developing this idea and maybe you’ll reach a metapestalozzian pedagogy and the fourth educational dimension; there you’ve got a field open to your genius” (LAP, 128). Avito simply cannot conceive of rejecting the supremacy of science or method. In referring to Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevski, the Russian mathematician, and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the Swiss educator, Avito still clings to the idea of “named” or “famous” figures in history — figures whose work has been studied again and again, immortalizing them and arguably reifying their theories as models or methods for replication. Avito is the stand-in for Unamuno’s concern that society was operating on a blind faith in modernization; where reductive proceduralism pushes contemplation about process to the margins and minimizes the important, if unanswerable, questions of human existence, perhaps especially love, faith, and immortality.35

Marina, the mother, is a caricature of emotion — not an uncommon, but no less problematic, gender stereotype that Unamuno uses to full dramatic effect. Marina, the term itself, suggests the practicality of mooring and the commerce of fishing and boating. Nozick suggests that Marina represents Matter and Avito represents Form, thus indicating, on another level, the degree to which Unamuno pushes binaries to problematize existence.36 Marina has Apolodoro baptized behind Avito’s back. Indeed, Apolodoro was baptized “Luis” and Marina only calls him by that name in LAP. When Avito realizes what Marina has done, he confronts her and ultimately turns angry when she calls him a “brute.” As an aside, Avito then remarks


in front of Marina and Apolodoro, “I’ve been stupid, unreasonable, unscientific; the animal’s decided to rebel on me again, this animal I had tamed, and who woke up again when I fell in love; it’s not the fault of this poor gullible woman. … Has she baptized him? So what? Women’s superstitions!” [LAP, 44–45]. With Marina, emotion and love, and Avito, logic and reason, the interaction brings into fuller relief the tensions between affect and science. Avito is in a constant struggle to remind himself that cold, hard scientific reasoning is his goal, even when he is tripped up by his own loving emotions. Marina presses Apolodoro “against her breast” and exclaims:

“You're mine, mine, mine, mine, my Luis, my little Luis, Luis mine, mine, mine, mine, my light, my soul, my king, my Luis, Luis mine, mine, mine, mine,” while the child serenely looks at her, in the way that someone looks at the sky while taking a walk. During these furtive meetings his mother talks to him about God, about the Virgin, about Christ, about the angels and saints, about heaven and hell, teaching him to pray. And then: “Don’t say anything about this to papa, Luis; all right, honey?” And when she hears his father’s footsteps, she adds, “Apolodoro!” [LAP, 61–62]

As a result of their secret religious interaction, Apolodoro once crosses himself in front of his father. To fully clarify the difference between religion and Darwinian science, Avito responds to Marina as follows:

I suspected as much, Marina, I suspected it, and I’m not going to scold you, since I’ve already talked about it with Don Fulgencio. The embryo passes through all the stages that the species has passed through, the ontogenetic process recapitulates the phylogenetic; first it’s a protozoan, next it’s almost a fish, then it’s a lower-order mammal. … Humanity passed through fetishism; very well, then let each man pass through it. Later on I’ll be in charge of bringing him out of this state, converting his present fetishes into ideal energies. Go ahead and talk to him about the Bogeyman, you’ll see what this Bogeyman will eventually get converted into. [LAP, 62]

Part of Unamuno’s point is to denigrate Marina’s blind faith in faith. He uses Avito to mouth a different point, however. Avito underscores the importance of facts, Marina religiosity and emotion. Where Marina repeats “Holy Mother of God” throughout LAP, Avito tries to stick to scientific reasoning. In his attempt to make his son a scientific genius, he hires Fulgencio to help with Apolodoro’s schooling. Unamuno appears to use parody to emphasize the limits of expertism and perfectibility of method. At the same time, he uses Fulgencio as a tragic figure who is caught between binaries that define as well as confound him.

Fulgencio Entrambosmares’ last name translates to mean “flash of light between both seas,” indicating both the fleeting swiftness of life, perhaps important because he is an older man, as well as his “in-between” role as teacher to Apolodoro. Fulgencio is, by virtue of living a long life and achieving academic standing, given credit for being without illusion and the producer of otherwise banal, but plentiful aphorisms. He is a caricature of professors who think the length of their curricula vitae reflects their intellect. Unamuno describes Fulgencio as someone who stares into the future:

37. Olson, The Great Chiasmus, 56.
[A] man of a gentle mien and a manner of speaking so given to emphasis that his admirers say that he speaks in italics. ... Aphorisms are in fact one of his fortes, and the Book of Aphorisms or Pills of Wisdom is his exoteric book, the one that he'll publish for the enlightenment of common mortals. Because the other one, his Ars Magna Combinatoria, his great esoteric work which will be written in Latin or in Volapük, he's saving for a more fortunate age. He works on it constantly, but he's made up his mind that he'll have it buried, unannounced, in a hermetic coffin of iridium or molybdenum when he dies, arranging for it to be interred with him and trusting to Fate that in the course of the centuries it will one day surface among his desiccated bones, in an age when the human species will be worthy of such a gift. \(\text{LAP}, 49–50\)³⁸

There are multiple points to be gleaned from this passage. One is that Unamuno is using Fulgencio to satirize philosophy in general and systems thinking in particular. As Paul Olson points out, “although its title [Ars Magna Combinatoria] directly recalls those of works by Ramón Llull and Leibniz, the Ars magna combinatoria is critical of every rationalist systematizer, including thinkers as diverse as Hegel and Herbert Spencer.”³⁹

Fulgencio is, as another point, a walking contradiction. As a parody of Hegel, Fulgencio intends to write his magnum opus because, in the age of Enlightenment, that is what immortal philosophers were supposed to do. His goal is no less than to “map the universe.” This is what Hegel tried to do in his Encyclopedia — list all the bases of his entire philosophical system in one book. Unamuno uses him to foreground the tensions thinkers face when, on the one hand, they are attracted to the ideas of philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Nietzsche, but are also faced, on the other hand, with the certitude of reason, as expressed by Kant and Hegel. As Thomas Franz notes,

Unamuno goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate that all human actions, including the creation of philosophies, are the product of irrational motivations. The most fundamental of these motivations is ... the desire for immortality, and its principal symptom amid the intimidating threats to faith which science was then making in Europe is shown to be erostratismo (i.e., the attempt to achieve historical transcendence by associating one’s name with a monumental act).⁴⁰

Avito wants Apolodoro to achieve genius status so that he can take credit for his son’s success and achieve a level of immortality as a result.

Where Avito represents Herbert Spencer’s commitment to a narrow, rigorous scientism, Fulgencio echoes Kierkegaard when he questions whether all empirically based conceptions of truth are but speculations themselves. Indeed, the only way to avoid a recurring skepticism is to realize and accept that one’s spirituality is contingent on the absurdity of faith. It is likely that Unamuno is using Fulgencio

³⁸. Volapük was a language invented circa 1880 by a Catholic priest named Johann Martin Schleyer. Similar to this arcane reference, both molybdenum and iridium are chemical elements, but not usually ones remembered from the periodic chart.


to work out the kind of philosophical and religious contradictions he repeatedly faced. Indeed, the character Fulgencio might be the one that most closely represents Unamuno himself. Fulgencio decries “common sense” (like Hegel) but writes aphorisms and “pills of wisdom.” He chases the dream of cataloguing every aspect of the universe, but (like Kierkegaard) does so knowing that the task is both herculean and impossible. We are supposed to admire the intent, even if the project subsumes Fulgencio and impedes all other possibilities for a life that is rich and personally and socially meaningful. In ordering the universe, Fulgencio’s project is divorced from the very universe of constant change that defines it. It is directly within such an overwhelming contradiction that Fulgencio situates Apolodoro’s “learning,” tragic though it also turns out to be.41

For his part, Apolodoro (named after Apollo, the Greek god of music, poetry, etc.) is more interested in Clarita, the girl he pursues to become his girlfriend. He is confused by his father’s insistence that science is the only legitimate field in which to demonstrate his intellect. He is interested in drawing and writing poetry, not memorizing scientific facts. Apolodoro, then, is like many high school students: prone to sweeping, romanticized verse, creatively imagining their (necessarily wealthy?) futures, and utterly dumbfounded by organic chemistry. In what I think is a telling exchange between the father and son, consider the scene in which Avito enters Apolodoro’s room to confront him about his school work:

“We have to talk, Apolodoro.”

“Whenver you like.”

“I’ve observed for some time that you’ve been acting strange, and that you correspond less and less to my expectations.”

“You shouldn’t have formed them.”

“I didn’t form them; science did.”

“Science?”

“Yes, science, to which you, and all of us, owe everything.”

41. Note that Avito, who is so consumed by the idea of scientific genius, is nonetheless the one who hires Fulgencio, someone so influenced by Rousseau and Kierkegaard that he debases “science” and promotes Apolodoro’s freedom to inquire, at least within the commonsense limits that even Fulgencio places on him. Perhaps Fulgencio is a tragic figure as teacher because he realized the call, from Avito, for a perfect method to produce a scientific genius (that is, Fulgencio’s “job”), but also realizes the absurdity of chasing after imperfect perfectibility. Fulgencio may also be tragic in the sense that he claims to be tortured by the idea that a childless philosopher regards academic works as children [see LAP, 122]. In the following passage, Fulgencio is imploring Apolodoro to have children: “Those of us who don’t have children reproduce ourselves in our works, which are our children; in each of them is contained our entire spirit and he who receives it receives the whole of us. And how do I know if when I die and my body decomposes that some of my cells won’t be liberated and, converted into amoeba, propagate themselves and propagate with them my consciousness? Because my consciousness is completely within me and completely within each one of my cells, Apolodoro; this is the mystery of the human eucharist … But … the surest way is to have children … to have children… Have children, have children, Apolodoro. How beautiful! Isn’t it?” (LAP, 122). Given that Apolodoro fathers a child before he kills himself, it is possible that Unamuno is warning us not to take what a teacher says too literally.
“And what do I want science for if it doesn’t make me happy?”
“I didn’t beget you or raise you so that you’d be happy.”
“Ahh!”
“I haven’t made you for yourself.”
“Then for whom?”
“For Humanity!”
“Humanity? And who is that lady?”
“I don’t know whether we have the right to our own happiness or not.”
“The right? But it’s all right to destroy other people’s happiness, especially our children’s?”
“And who asked you to fall in love?”
“Who? Love, or if you prefer psychic determinism, all that nonsense that you’ve taught me.”

His father, cut to the quick by this argument, exclaims:

“Love! It’s always love blocking the path of the great enterprises. … Love is anti-pedagogical, anti-sociological, anti-scientific, anti- … everything. We won’t make progress until man propagates himself through budding or through cellular division, since he has to propagate himself for civilization and science.”
“What nonsense is this, father?”
“All right, I see that we’re still not ready to listen to stern Reason,” and Don Avito takes his leave. ([LAP], 124–125)

This exchange concentrates many of the conflicts Unamuno puts forward in the overall dialogue. Avito is subsuming Apolodoro under the dictates of Science and Apolodoro cannot understand how love can exist in such a world. The stream of consciousness of the conversation also illustrates how Unamuno carries the reader with him to see the absurd elements in Avito’s ironically passionate embrace of impassionate science. We also see the naïveté of Apolodoro concerning his overblown sense of “humanity,” at the same time seeing his acuity in determining that his father’s fixation on science is “nonsense.”

In the end, Apolodoro loses his girlfriend, Clarita, impregnates the maid, Petra, and finds himself standing on his desk with a noose around his neck. On his [tragic] view, he notes,

I’m despicable; I’ve committed an infamous act; everybody’s laughing at me; I’m not worth anything. They’ve tried to completely turn me into grey matter without leaving anything to chance! Even when they left me to my own devices it was part of the plan. Now I’ll find out where we’re going … the sooner, the better! Even if only of curiosity, for the love of learning, this really ought to be done. This way we’ll clear up all doubts about the fatal question. And what if there’s nothing there? ([LAP], 135)

At least three points follow from this passage: (1) foreshadowing neuroscience and the pharmacological control of children’s brains; (2) the strictures of curricula — even, or especially, those which appear “progressive” or open to student interests; and (3) the still open-ended question about whether anything follows death.
With regard to the first point, we might wonder whether Unamuno, in 1902, was prescient in thinking about how scientism might reduce humanity, childhood, to mere microbiological schema. Without protecting and asserting the value of the vicissitudes of life, we face increased control from biological, psychological, and neuroscientific predeterminants. There is no human will, only scientism. Writes Unamuno:

that ill-fated Don Fulgencio, the mystifier who for so long has held him captive with his evil spell, those bright ideas like the one about the cure for common sense, that obstacle to all genius, through histologic massage of the brain carried out by a certain electrical vibration which would force the nerve cells to interweave differently than their pseudopodic prolongations normally do; the one about psychic microsurgery, from which one can deduce the pedagogical utility of the slap on the head as soon as it causes the brain and its 612,112,000 cells to vibrate; or the other one about curing mental monotony through gelatin injections. ([LAP], 129)42

As regards the second point, even when Apolodoro is “free” from the clear external dictates of both his father and Fulgencio, he astutely wonders whether “freedom” is commodified and structured into the overall process of “learning,” thus modifying an otherwise authentic freedom into another prepackaged part of the program. Finally, concerning the third point, on the precipice of hanging himself, Apolodoro still wonders if suicide will lead to nothingness. His otherwise “certain” assertion that “we’ll clear up all doubts” is actually in doubt.43

**Cocotological Implications for Schooling**

While thematically broad and varied, I argue that LAP allows us to reconsider what constitutes and is problematic about contemporary schooling. Through parody, irony, absurdism, and object lessons, we might better understand the limits to what we otherwise strive for as certainty of method, goals, outcomes, and other accountability-imbued notions? Perhaps Unamuno’s “Notes for a Treatise on Cocotology” is the best representation of the point. It is, in fact, a kind of miniature restatement of the larger work. It was added, as indicated before, after the first publication of LAP and ostensibly is written by Fulgencio. Within the treatise, Unamuno pillories philosophers of science by using eleven subtitles and nine illustrations in eighteen pages — indicative of the self-aggrandizing manner in which “systems” philosophers and scientists often wrote.44 Under the subheading “Importance of Our Science,” Unamuno writes that


43. Vande Berg puts it differently: “like trying to wake up to see what sleep looks like” (“Unamuno’s *Amor y pedagogía*,” 755).

44. The subheadings are Prolegomena, History of Cocotology, Rationale for the Method, Etymology, Definition, Importance of Our Science, The Position It Occupies among the Other Sciences and Its Relationship to These, Division, Embryology, Anatomy, and The Origin and Purpose of the Little Bird.
It is extremely important that the importance of the science to be discussed be established a priori, lest the duller readers fail to realize it. This is as important as what certain didactical orators do, who, after developing their argument, add: “We have, then, clearly demonstrated... such and such a thing,” for fear that their listeners won’t have realized it. The importance of cocotology is, as we’ll later see, that it can become a perfect science. (LAP, 165)

What is vital about this passage is that Unamuno takes an otherwise enjoyable hobby and turns it into something ridiculous.

He criticizes the rush toward science by overusing scientific terminology in a reductio ad absurdum of the “important problems posed by cocotology”:

I should next focus on those sections which the little bird viewed in lateral projection presents to us, there being eight such sections, as the accompanying figure illustrates: two in the head, three in the feet, and three in the tail, since the exterior of the little bird is made up of only a head, feet, and tail. The two sections of the head are, respectively, the protocephalus, or anterior head (no. 1), the metacephalus, or posterior head (no. 2); the three parts of the feet are: the protopod (no. 3), the mesopod (no. 4), and the metapod (no. 5); and the three sections of the tail are: the protocircus (no. 6), the mesocircus (no. 7), and the metacircus (no. 8). All eight sections are triangular and of equal size, right-angled isosceles triangles, the little bird in consequence being an essentially and eminently triangular being, a triangular-rectangular-isoscelic being. (LAP, 170)

Unamuno concludes: “And here we have a new, admirable, providential, and teleological harmony as we behold the supreme perfection of our little bird, composed, as it were, of primary elements of cells of sixty-four right-angled isosceles triangles, just exactly as is illustrated in the accompanying figure on which are marked those sixteen triangles that form the exterior part of the well-folded bird” (LAP, 170). By taking paper bird folding to such extremes, Unamuno is pointing out the perversion that science can yield, if considered the exclusive purview for making meaning in the world. He projects “cells” and “exteriority” onto deconstructed parts of a little paper bird in order to show the farcical limits of scientism. The illustrations and figures he includes only further this critique, calling attention to the idea that the inclusion of a diagram or a picture is no guarantee that it represents anything meaningful. When he writes that we are now able to see, as a result of the long-winded “scientific” explanation, “how the anatomical emerges out of the histological, the macroscopic from the microscopic, and how every being depends, where his [sic] organization and form are concerned, on the primary elements which form him” (LAP, 170), he is continuing his assault on our quest for certainty via scientific reductionism. He closes the treatise in typical fashion:

Here ends abruptly the manuscript of the Notes for a Treatise on Cocotology by illustrious Don Fulgencio, and it’s a pity that this our first cocotologist, the first in order of time and of preeminence, has not after all been able to carry out his project of writing a complete treatise on the new science. He’s assured me that he plans to revise it in his great work, the Ars Magna Combinatoria, and it even seems to be the case that cocotology was what originally suggested to him so considerable a monument of wisdom. (LAP, 170)

45. For a playful interpretation of the treatise, see Benjamin Fraser, “Why Don Fulgencio Enrambosmares del Aquilón’s ‘Apuntes para un tratado de cocotología’ belongs in the Spanish Cultural Studies
While it is true that Unamuno enjoyed paper bird making, and commissioned portraits of himself that included folded birds, I agree with Juan Pablo Cruz, and others, that in LAP Unamuno used paper bird folding specifically to parody scientism. Indeed, summarizing what he takes to be the point of the paper bird folding illustration in LAP, Gordon Minter concludes that “Unamuno is pointing up the limitations of a scientific pedagogical method which claims to be based on the example of Nature and the precedents of the natural world, but in reality, albeit in subtler ways, overlooks the human dimension and needs of those being educated just as surely as the imposition of received ideas by rote learning does.”

It should not be a stretch to think of recurring contemporary examples of the absurdity to which Unamuno refers. As José Novell writes, “Unamuno seems to choose a tragic end for Apolodoro in order to point out the failure of pedagogical excesses.” The pedagogical excesses that I suggest we are currently facing reify scientism; moreover, their continued perpetuation indicates that if criticism of these excesses exists, it is failing to restrict their totalizing subjugation.

If we take Apolodoro to be the symbolic “stand-in” for most students, I may have to contradict myself, too. While I may hope or have faith that most students would demonstrate agency and/or be distrustful of scientism or the pursuit of certainty, it appears increasingly evident that many, if not most, students are so overwhelmed by the discourse of scientism and the perfectibility of method that they do not consider the potential of both to kill inquisitiveness. This is not to say that no inquiry exists in schools. It does. But it is often so subsumed under the logic of scientism that it perverts Unamuno’s notion of humanity. There is nothing preposterous, in other words, about sending students home with notes detailing the number of hours of sleep they should get the night before testing, the kinds of food they are to eat the morning that the testing regime begins, or the exact temperature to which the thermostat should be set in the classrooms in which they are to take such tests. Ours is increasingly a world where testing is a ubiquitous expectation and where such testing is rarely thought about in...
terms of absurdity, irony, or tragedy. While an “opt-out” movement has formed in response to some of these tests, there remains a clear mandate from federal and state bureaucracies that tests accurately reflect student learning and teacher instruction. Accordingly, schools absurdly function as machines that operate to negate student and teacher identities and interests, subsuming them under hyper-competitive regimes of scientism and control. Yet, as Michael Weinstein interprets Unamuno,

He acknowledges that the proletarian in bondage to a machine has little or no opportunity to make himself [sic] irreplaceable. Far more serious, however, is the fact that many positions in modern society are immoral in the “tragic” sense that the worker gains subsistence by selling his soul, that he labors in full awareness of his uselessness, and that he produces “the poison that will kill him, the weapon that will, perhaps, assassinate his sons.”

Here there is an acknowledgment that students and teachers (and administrators?) are aware of their uselessness — of the mind-numbing drudgery that comes from externally imposed methods and procedures. This laboring in uselessness is understood to be of a piece with that experienced by those fast-food workers who have recently been picketing for higher wages. Does their awareness of economic exploitation mean that their picketing will save, not “assassinate,” their children? That is, even when they achieve a higher minimum wage, the wage is still minimum and the job is still structurally mindless — the procedures for heating up prepackaged, processed food are standardized and are to be followed, regardless of where the fast-food chain exists. It is a fast-food chain, after all. So, too, schools?

Put differently, is the functioning — the enactment — of scientism and the perfectibility of method at risk of killing students and the teachers of those students? Here I mean to apply both Unamuno’s sense of extremism and his seriousness of purpose. Might schools be killing students in the sense that they negate individual interests, subsuming them to cocotological-like recipe formats that so benumb students (and teachers) as to kill the joy of the hobby as well as their interest in inquiry, hence killing the students and teachers themselves? Perhaps there is no more “them” because they are “policied” out of existence. They are subordinated to a form of being — of merely existing — whereby they have no other place in the functioning of the school than as the “peths” and “widgets” to which they were long-ago reduced by the likes of Unamuno’s U.S. contemporaries Franklin Bobbitt, W. W. Charters, and David Snedden. If paper bird folding is illustrative of the risk of scientism and the perfectibility of method, does this underscore Unamuno’s agonizing over what it means to live and die? Had Apolodoro had his interests nurtured — neither smothered by Marina’s overbearing emotion nor stunted by Avito’s dedication to producing a scientific genius — might he have found hope or agency in continued being?

49. Weinstein, “Unamuno and the Agonies of Modernization,” 50. In this passage he quotes from Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life, 446.
It was a coincidence that the September 2014 issue of *Smithsonian* almost literally dovetailed with my rereading of Unamuno’s cocotological treatise. The magazine reported that one hundred years ago, on September 1, 1914, the last passenger pigeon died in captivity at the Cincinnati Zoo. Most important for this essay, the magazine also included a paper bird–folding insert. It came with step-by-step instructions and resulted in a paper bird to be perched in a prominent place to raise awareness of the plight of the passenger pigeon and the environmental implications of human actions uninformed by possible consequences. There are eleven steps to making this paper bird and the magazine included the icon of a pair of scissors to be sure readers knew where and how to cut out the instructions. Unamuno would have surely noted this absurdity.

Beyond the process of folding paper, the story of the passenger pigeon is part of a growing debate about “de-extinction.” From the woolly mammoth to the Carolina parakeet, some modern naturalists and molecular biologists are considering the possibility of re-engineering animal genomes such that they could bring extinct species back to life. But, as William Souder notes, “because avian behavior results from a mix of genetics and the imprinting of parental actions, no one knows how a re-engineered passenger pigeon would learn to be a passenger pigeon.” Nonetheless, given Unamuno’s preoccupation with immortality, might he find comfort in the possibility of de-extinction? I doubt it, because de-extinction further reinforces science as the controlling power. It also reopens the issue of genetic engineering and raises the specter of a “master race.”

If paper bird folding is used as an object lesson, one where students are challenged to think about the implications of following directions, it might provide an opening for rethinking schooling as humanistically emancipatory, not preparatory for a global economy. Is this what the magazine had in mind? Again, I don’t know, but I doubt it. Useful in illustrating a key point of Unamuno’s *LAP*, the cocotological exercise nevertheless offers another means to explore the many insightful and confounding areas Unamuno’s work sets out for us.

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51. As the article makes clear, passenger pigeons numbered in the billions in the early nineteenth century, making up as much as 40 percent of the North American bird population, and suffered a historic reduction in numbers until the only remaining specimens were held in zoos. The last recorded wild passenger pigeon was shot on March 24, 1900 in Pike County, Ohio.
