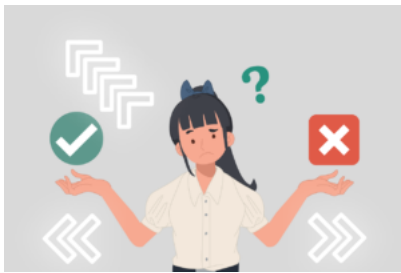


The False Dilemma Fallacy

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Discursive environments abound with logical fallacies, falsehoods posing as rational arguments in order to manipulate interlocutors. One of these is the “either-or” fallacy, or the false dilemma fallacy, frequently used in political debates because it is effective in persuading people to choose between two alternatives.

In general, the people proposing the alternatives are keenly aware that they are suppressing viable options, which is why this fallacy is also referred to as the “excluded middle.” In Spanish this is sometimes referred to as the “callejón sin salida,” or dead-end fallacy, since the people being asked to choose between alternatives can feel trapped in an unresolvable contradiction. Consider two examples of false dilemmas: “Either you are with us, or you are against us,” as George W. Bush said in September 2001. Or, this cornerstone of official discourse on the island: “Either you are in favor of the Cuban government or you are in favor of the U.S. blockade.”

The most recent false dilemma of Cuba’s official ideological apparatus involves two supposed alternatives: a sectarian, Stalinist left opposed to change and entrenched in superseded formulas, on one hand (represented by the group Telegram de La Manigua, Revolución pa’ rato, and certain individuals in this movement, like Rodrigo Huamachi), and on the other hand an “inclusive” left, open to dialogue, that strives to empathize with other options considered revolutionary (represented by the group La Comuna as well as other projects and platforms that include Pañuelos Rojos, the website Cubadebate, or even the television program Con Filo, and individuals associated with these projects).

The “excluded middle” in this case is enormous, since it comprises practically all types of dissent in Cuba, all of which are designated with absolute impudence as “counter-revolutionary,” in spite of the fact that many among the discredited camp are openly and emphatically part of what should be called the “critical left.” The manipulation in the official discourse is so self-evident that one is astonished to find many people actually believing that they are witnessing a battle between opposing points of view. Obviously, the objective of the official stratagem is to win over public opinion for the least bad, or “less evil,” of these two options.

The Apocryphal Left

When on September 11, 1789, a group of delegates from the National Assembly in France gathered

for a vote, assembling—as it happened—to the left of the dais, they were there to challenge the absolute right of the king and to vote for a monarchy limited by popular power. There were no organized political parties at that point, merely political tendencies.

To be on the political left does not mean, then, to wear a T-shirt with a slogan, an image of Che Guevara, or a quotation from Karl Marx. Nor does it mean wearing red handkerchiefs, using inclusive language, or assuming a performative attitude in public spaces. Leftist militancy is not conferred by one's own proclamation nor by a media campaign. Being on the left means positioning oneself against the established political powers who ignore matters of social justice and hinder the exercise of rights among the majority who have had those rights stripped from them.

Long before the word "left" designated a political posture, and even to this day, those rights have been won from below: plebeians versus patricians, peasant struggles for land, rebellions of enslaved people fighting for their liberty, universal suffrage, division of powers, worker struggles, opposition to child labor, eight-hour workday, women's suffrage, movements against racism and homophobia—without exception, these have been struggles against and victories over established political power.

If your unconditional loyalty is to a political power that subjugates the citizenry, discriminates, and impedes the exercise of economic, political, and social rights, then in such a case you are not *on the left* at all, however much you claim to be. It makes no difference if the power we square off against is an absolute monarch, or a conservative government, a military dictatorship, or an authoritarian political party, be it capitalist, socialist, or communist.

It is not necessary to be a Marxist in order to be a leftist. By the same token, calling oneself a Marxist guarantees no safe passage to the political left. In the twentieth-century experiments of so-called "real socialism," the bureaucratic class designated itself as leftist but constituted in reality a privileged group that supplanted the popular will. When a group in power—secured as an emergent new class—strips Marxism of its scientific method, reducing Marxism to its ideological dimension and transforming it into a state ideology, then Marxism ceases to be a revolutionary current and becomes a mechanism of domination. It is here that we have arrived in Cuba. This state ideology assumes a counter-revolutionary character, and it must be denounced.

The implosion of socialism, in both Europe and in Cuba, demonstrates that the inability to wage struggles from below effectively overburdened the social and economic evolution of these projects and compelled these political experiments to return to the path of authoritarian capitalism. One-party bureaucratic socialism renders impossible the development of a genuine left because necessary socialist criticism is replaced with an apocryphal left whose mission is to sustain the newly empowered class in its dominion over society at large.

In other words, the false dilemma—the *gato por liebre*, or the pig in the poke—they want to sell us is simply unacceptable. Neither of the two options that, as they assure us, compose the revolutionary camp is in fact "on the left." This much was made very clear when Michel Torres Corona, on the show *Con Filo* (a sort of Mouth of Sauron of the ideological apparatus), showed a video clip of a Raúl Castro speech in which he clearly delimits the so-called "diversity": the sole ruling party. This is the *only* thing that is beyond discussion as far as the power structure is concerned. Only people who recognize the legitimacy of one-party rule can be recognized by the ruling elite as genuinely *on the left*.

The two options presumably at odds employ the argument of the first uncaused cause, assuming uncritically the necessity of the existing Cuban political system and accepting the will of the party as fundamental to its existence. For this reason, these are false "lefts" that have done so much damage

to the cause. They have brought about a situation in which the very people defending social justice and advocating for popular rights fail to recognize themselves as part of the left, because they conclude that people in power are “on the left” and they therefore turn away from it as the devil turns away from the cross.

If we allow the people in power to continue with this false-flag strategy, presenting themselves as “unity within diversity,” this strategy could go a long way. As a friend recently told me, in a short time they could form two parties in order to create an impression of pluralism, just as the Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo did in 1942.

Please, don’t disrespect our collective intelligence. You would have to be naive indeed to imagine that the rest of us are naive as well. We are saturated with false lefts and false dilemmas, but in this “callejón,” or dead-end, there is indeed a way out.

This article is part of a symposium on the critical left in Cuba.

James Buckwalter-Arias, “Introduction to Marginalized Discourse: Voices from the Critical Left in Cuba”

Alexander Hall Lujardo, “The Historical Burden of Actually Existing Socialism”

Lisbeth Moya González, “Cuba and the World”

Alina Bárbara López Hernández, “The False Dilemma Fallacy”

Lynn Cruz, “The Cuban Reality”

Raymar Aguado Hernández, “The Cuban Left, More Critical and Decolonized”