

# Fidel, a Year Later: Fidel Castro's Insistence on Ideas, "Media Lies and How We Accept Them"

By [Prof Susan Babbitt](#)

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Theme: [History](#)

*Nicolas Maduro is a dictator although he was fairly elected. He has improved the situation of the poor and for this alone should be considered democratic. Saudi Arabia's Muhammad Bin-Salman, on the other hand, sacked scores of his opponents, almost overnight. He is not a dictator.*

*The Crown Prince has brought the economy, the security and military forces, the media and the religious establishment totally under his control. He'll make sure millions starve in Yemen or die of cholera. But he opposed the "old guard". He's considered bold and enterprising, modern.*

On the anniversary of Fidel Castro's death, the connection matters. It has to do with lies and how we accept them. If there's one thing to remember about Fidel Castro, it is his insistence on ideas. He insisted on philosophy. He talked about what it means to be human. It has to do with how we get truth.

We notice the lies, of course, but we don't see the connection to how we think about who we are and how we live. José Martí did. He said a major barrier to Latin American independence was a false idea of how to know. A philosophical idea.

"We want truth, not dreams", he wrote.

When I mentioned Martí at a solidarity meeting for Venezuela, the chair suggested he was irrelevant, or at least his philosophy was. What matters is economics and politics. Venezuelans must eat. Many admire Cuba's revolution and don't bother with the ideas. They talk about Castro's charisma as if it had nothing to do with his philosophical vision, centuries old.<sup>[i]</sup>

The separation of philosophy and politics is part of the ideology Martí opposed. Fidel followed. He dedicated his life to opposing that ideology. He said people suffer because of a "nicely sweetened but rotten idea" about how to live: an idea about what it means to be human.<sup>[ii]</sup>

In philosophy classes, students engage in a thought experiment. Suppose you could enter a happiness machine that makes it appear that your desires for your life are satisfied. Once you enter the machine, you won't know it is a machine. You will have a happy, fulfilled life, within the machine.

Few choose to enter. They are not sure why. They say,

“I know there is something wrong but I am not sure what.”

Some point to the importance of struggle. They want to work for their happiness. But the machine can make it *seem* as if they did, and they won't know the difference.

The thought experiment is supposed to refute hedonism, the idea that pleasure is the only value worth pursuing. If you don't opt for *feeling* happy, there must be more to life than pleasure.

One might think, though, that the pursuit of happiness itself is the delusionary machine. Concern for happiness – my happiness – obscures the distinction between truth and reality: real lives are irrelevant.

The ancient Chinese philosopher, Chuang Tzu, said: when the shoe fits, you don't feel it. He meant that when you live well, by which he meant realizing your unique human potential, you don't wonder about it. The question doesn't arise. We ask questions when there is doubt.

Happiness involves a paradox, at least as understood in North America: When you pursue it, you don't find it. Those looking for happiness are not happy. The Buddha, of course, said “May all beings be happy” but his idea of happiness was quite different. He meant *absence* of ego, not fulfillment of it.

The self-help industry is instructive. Many realize that material gain does not satisfy. They seek elsewhere – in yoga, meditation, travel, art, creativity, “sharing circles”, nature. Self-help books and life coaches give guidance. And then there are self-help books to help you deal with the self-help industry.

A simple truth is missed. It was known to Marx, Lenin and José Martí. It is known within indigenous traditions that motivated José Carlos Mariátegui. It was known to the Buddha and Chuang Tzu. It was expressed by Fidel in its myriad dimensions and applications.

Human beings are interdependent. Like every other part of the universe, we are dependent upon other people and upon the natural environment. This includes for thinking. Marx said human beings are herd animals not because of how we live but because of how we think. We do not think alone.

And we cannot be happy alone. The self-help industry in the North tells us to “get the most out of yourself ... in a job that is spiritually fulfilling, socially constructive, experientially diverse, emotionally enriching, self- esteem boosting, perpetually challenging and eternally edifying”.<sup>[iii]</sup>

For what? It is for me, all about me. And it doesn't work.

I am surprised when activists in the North tell me philosophy is irrelevant. There's no time for that, they say. Cubans cannot afford tomatoes, and Trump is preventing US tourists from going to Cuba.

But Juan Marinello, one of Latin America's great thinkers, said Martí left an important legacy: the idea that if you want to flourish intellectually, you should commit yourself to the major

causes of your time.[iv] In other words, if you want to think well, to distinguish truth from lies, you need to act well, for others. You need to sacrifice.

We won't know the lies if we're living them. And if we don't *know* we're living them, we don't ask about those lies. Fidel Castro opposed such lies: some philosophical. He did that as part of the struggle for a better world, politically and economically. Those who don't see that in his legacy aren't looking.

Ana Belén Montes opposed lies.<sup>[v]</sup> She's in jail, in the US, having hurt no one. Please sign [petition here](#).

*Susan Babbitt is author of Humanism and Embodiment (Bloomsbury 2014).*

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## Notes

[i] Nelson P. Nelson, "El contenido revolucionario y político de la autoridad carismática de Fidel Castro", *Temas* 55 (2008) 4-17

[ii] "A revolution can only be born from culture and ideas" (Master lecture at the Central University of Venezuela, February 3 1999). Havana, Cuba: Editora Política, 9.

[iii] David Brook, *Bobos in paradise* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[iv] *Cuba: Cultura* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989) 287

[v] <http://www.prolibertad.org/ana-belen-montes>. For more information, write to the [cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca](mailto:cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca) or [cincoheroes@listas.cujae.edu.cu](mailto:cincoheroes@listas.cujae.edu.cu)

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