

**Whose Nietzsche for Latin America?  
Rodó's or Mariátegui's?**

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**Introduction**

As much as the Utopias generated by Marxism in the 1960s, a different—yet equally worthy—kind of modernism generates its own Utopias now. Liberalism, a necessary and humanizing force against tyranny in much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, finds itself, at the dawn of the new millennium, as self-enthralled by its own devices and dreams as the admirable revolutionaries of the Left of earlier times.

The optimism about the power of reason and its ability to reshape ethical life Liberal political thought suffers from is commendable, but ill-advised.<sup>1</sup> No one would agree more with the aim of eradicating arbitrary authority than the vast majority of Latin American people, who endured seemingly endless years of military rule. However, the question must be asked whether the prescriptions for political life proffered by Liberalism, themselves becoming debilitated in North America, can in effect be adequately transposed to Latin America.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of this valuable conference, 'Toleration,' is unmistakably a liberal one, harking back to a concern by one of the founders of this school of thought, John Locke. Locke's ideas transformed the world, principally the world of Britain and the world of North America. The present paper is written by someone who, although Latin American by origin, writes about political theory from within the North American academy. As such, I am an external observer on the thematic concerns of Latin American intellectuals. As is often said, sometimes the view from outside can nevertheless be instructive. Let us hope so, for my sake at least.

The reason why I wish to propose some skepticism about the prospects of political liberalism on the ground and liberal political theory in the ivory towers is not based on the belief in an inherent problem in liberal political theorizing. As I said above, liberalism

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<sup>1</sup> By 'Liberalism,' I understand the predominant cluster of theories that exist in the political theory mainstream in academia in the US. These are those theories that are primarily grounded on Rawlsian neo-Kantianism and also on Locke's political philosophy. I opt to capitalize the term owing to its capital importance and its current existence not as one of many ideas in a pluralist market of ideas, but as the dominant, near-hegemonic paradigm in the field of political thought in American academia.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the US as 'North America' as is the norm in Latin American parlance, with due apologies to Canadians (especially to the large Canadian contingent in the discipline of political theory).

was, and perhaps continues to be, as much a progressive, or forward-looking set of principles as Marxism was, and for that reason it must continue to be studied and promoted where possible. Yet it appears that this issue of where it is possible to promote it has reached a cul de sac.

Francis Fukuyama's illusion of the end of history was more liberal than Hegelian. His was the spirit of the liberal times writ large: closed societies have collapsed, and it is up to the liberal state and free markets to bring openness to all corners of the world. Yet in addition to the backlash against liberal values from the East in the form of radical Islam, there is now a re-emergence of resistance to the liberal projects from the South, i.e. the global southern hemisphere, disenchanted with liberalism's empire of reason and morality.

This disenchantment, while grounded in the persistence of poverty as evidence of liberalization's failures, is in a deeper sense not an economic one.<sup>3</sup> The traditional left in Latin America, *pace* Alvaro Vargas Losa, is not idiotic. It has learned from the past and the present and no longer advocates total war against capitalism. The left in Latin America now fundamentally accepts that some kind of market system is necessary, yet the political organization of a society does not necessitate the translation of political liberalism into local political language.

Thus there *is* an economic aspect of the rejection of liberalism in the Latin American public, but this is not the whole story. Coupled to this is the current world situation in the aftermath of the war in Iraq. At the diplomatic level, there is no doubt that relations have been strained between the liberal powerhouse, the US, and its prospective liberal audience, Latin America. Having decided to largely go it alone, and without the support of Mexico or Chile in the Security Council of the UN, the US has willfully or inadvertently hurt its relations with its neighbors.<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, has implications for the deterioration of the possibilities of exporting or promoting political liberalism in the south.

Nonetheless, political disputes among like-minded regimes, as we all know, have very short life spans. Witness the rapprochement of France to the US after the formal ending of the war in Iraq. It is safe to assume that the governments of Lula, Kirchner, Toledo, Mesa, and others, perhaps not as much as that of Fox, will seek to get along with Colin Powell, whether for principled or convenient reasons.

## Why Nietzsche Now

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<sup>3</sup> One of the central problems of liberal political theory in the US academy is that it does not generally make explicit the link between liberal political order and the detrimental aspects of free-market, capitalist systems. The term 'capitalism,' in fact, has gone so much out of vogue that it would appear to the outside observer that the emergence of the political ideas of Mill, Locke, Rawls, et al. have nothing to with capitalism's goods and bads. The opposite, of course, is the case.

<sup>4</sup> See C. Marquis, 'Latin American Allies of US: Docile and Reliable no Longer,' *New York Times*, Jan 9, 2004.

If neither the economic nor the political disenchantment with the prospects of liberalism are central to the uneasiness about this political philosophy as a way of life, what is at the core of the skepticism? I wish to argue that, while not evident, the fundamental *problematique* lies in the field of culture.

Why is this the case? One does not have to espouse a Marxist view of the capitalist class or the dominant class to see that the richer segments of Latin American society believe it is in the interest of their country as a whole to go with the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus. This is natural, since the children of these classes are often educated in places such as Princeton and Harvard. The middle and popular classes, on the other hand, have grown increasingly detached from market-oriented parties, but are often outside of the policy-making process. Hence, the basic problem with liberalism is not essentially economic because Latin Americans, even on the left, have accepted the need for markets; and, the problem is not fundamentally political, because of the weakness of both Latin American states and the weakness of the promotion of liberalism by the US in a new age, an age of defensive, conservative antiliberalism even within the US state.<sup>5</sup>

The problem lies, first and foremost, in culture. At the heart of this is the concern over whether there remains a 'Latin American Identity' that can be autonomous and independent in the face of an undeniable global hegemonic expansion by the US. This identity cannot be constructed economically (*contra* Marx, persons do not see themselves fundamentally as economic actors) nor politically (since there is no single political perspective that may unify all Latin Americans in the present). Can the intelligentsia in Latin America proffer a way to retain Latin American identity?

One way to do so, I argue, is to look at the reception in Latin America of perhaps the most important philosopher of culture in the modern era. Friedrich Nietzsche's influence in Latin America has been deep, even if not thoroughly comprehended or studied. Nietzsche's fundamental aim is apropos for Latin Americans, for it sees parallels today. He sought to change the nature of German and European culture, not that of its economy or political system. What he saw was a penetrating, encroaching, and corrosive infusion of the wrong values into what he considered to be a potentially healthy entity, his *Europa*. Chiefly, the viruses that were deteriorating the mind and body of Europe were the emasculating ethics of Christianity and the dumb pragmatism of British philosophers. While the viruses for Latin America's body politic may not be the same as those of Nietzsche's Europe, there is a parallel in the way that free market liberalism and cultural pragmatism, both fomented by the US, were critiqued by two leading interpreters of both Latin American reality and of Nietzsche: José Carlos Mariátegui and José Enrique Rodó. Their two concerns, over the way that political economy and a particular kind of morality can corrode what is understood to be a potentially viable and vital body, is what should be of interest for us today in terms of Latin American identity.

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<sup>5</sup> In spite of calls for the promotion of 'democratization,' one could argue that the US administration favors the installment of democratic regimes not so much for the benefit of those who live in them as much as for the help they provide to US homeland security.

Following Mariátegui, I believe nothing of Latin American identity is lost by looking at, and learning from, a German or European philosopher. Who we are as Latin Americans has, from the very beginning of the term, been allied to the intersection of Europe and the New World.<sup>6</sup> As Mariátegui tells us, we can learn much from Europe.<sup>7</sup> From a different perspective altogether, Rodó would agree, as he found in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* the template to understand the fundamental problems of Latin America. How does each thinker see Nietzsche? What can we learn from their analyses? And, more importantly, whose Nietzsche should we take as our lesson for this new, dawning era that began on September 11?<sup>8</sup>

### **Nietzsche's Ghost**

Some would say that the ghost of Nietzsche is not pervasive either in Rodó or in Mariátegui. In their works, he is not an explicit central preoccupation. Some would go so far as to say that in fact, Rodó repudiates Nietzsche, and Mariátegui's Marxism must be opposed to the anti-socialist Nietzsche.

The textual evidence is more complex, however. Even as Rodó critiques Nietzsche, his concerns mirror those of the German thinker. And, in the larger arc of intellectual history, it is in the confrontation with Nietzsche that Rodó's ideas are most valuable. At the same time, while it is true that Mariátegui was a Marxist and socialist and Nietzsche abhorred socialism, Mariátegui acquired much of his own personal and intellectual inspiration to forge a new brand of Marxism from some central ideas of Nietzsche. It is in this complex picture of things that we must examine their reading of the German author.

The framing of their views on Nietzsche must be acknowledged for their main characteristic: an aesthetic appreciation of the nature of politics. Both Rodó and Mariátegui think and act (through their words) as *aesthetic* political philosophers, that is, in the manner of Nietzsche. For them, cold reason or formal moral duty are not the currency of politics. Aesthetic categories such as emotion, representation, and form, coupled with their artistic presentation of their ideas and their personal concern with aesthetic theory and practice, is what aligns them squarely in the Nietzschean tradition. Rodó's chief work *Ariel* drew inspiration from Shakespeare, one of Nietzsche's favored authors, and Mariátegui opens his masterwork, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, with a dictum from Nietzsche. We must bear this in mind as we observe their pictures of the European writer.

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<sup>6</sup> From Las Casas to Dussel, this is a central problem, yet one that does not seem to go away even after vehement *indigenismo*.

<sup>7</sup> Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, p. 14 (Mexico: Era, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> As Derrida tells us, we can call a date such as '9/11' an event because, for us, at least for those who must face its existence, it has gained a political weight that can be characterized as the marker of a new world-historical period (See Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*).

## Rodo's Aristocratic Nietzsche

*Ariel* was first published in Montevideo in 1900, the year of Nietzsche's death. By this time, the cultural and literary, if not philosophical or political, impact of Nietzsche was already being felt. Rodó chose to think about Latin American spirituality by looking to Shakespeare's *Tempest*. This may strike many of us Latin Americans who come from mostly indigenous countries as bizarre; yet, as a Uruguayan who had received an exceptional education, this was not at all out of the ordinary for the time.

The great genius of the work lies in its Nietzschean transvaluation of values. Rodó may have been racially and even ethnically closer to Europe than to the mestizo or indigenous inhabitants that peopled the rest of Latin America outside of the Rio de la Plata area, but his moral identity was Latin American. From the *Tempest*, he did not accept the image of Ariel as the European, cultivated, spiritual, sophisticated, and above all, rational, person. He did not accept either the view of Caliban as the personification (if it can be called that) of the irrational savage from the non-European periphery. More than a personification, Caliban in the eyes of Shakespeare is the bestialization of characteristics seen in some apparently 'savage' humanoids, beings somewhere between man and animal who lacked in reason. No, for Rodó, Ariel and Caliban were to be transposed in central ways.

This effort, like Nietzsche's attempt to reverse the moralities of master and slave (where, in the modern time slavish ethics prevail) are both forms of transvaluation. This is a core of Rodó's Nietzschean project, even if there is an explicit critique of Nietzsche in the pages of *Ariel*. Rodó tells us that he does not accept Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism:

The antiegalitarianism of Nietzsche—which has cut so deeply through what we could call our *literature of ideas*—has imbued his staunch defense of the rights he believes to be implicit in superior human beings with abominable reactionism. Denying all fraternity, all piety, he places in the heart of his deified *superman* a satanic scorn for the helpless and the weak. For those favored with will and strength, he legitimizes the measures of the executioner. And as the logical consummation he observes that “society does not exist for itself, but for its elect”<sup>9</sup>

This statement, seems to place Nietzsche and Rodó on opposite ends. However, in fact the two thinkers share more than it would seem.

Rodó is right that Nietzsche is deeply anti-egalitarian.<sup>10</sup> For Nietzsche, no two human beings are equal. Each individual is unique, that he calls a 'thing of beauty.' This in itself is not so much an indictment by Rodó but a critical observation. But we have to ask, how egalitarian is Rodó himself?

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<sup>9</sup> *Ariel*, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> The attempt by liberal, democratic theorists to rescue Nietzsche for their projects cannot adequately face this textual fact.

The question of equality in *Ariel* is not self evident. Rodó seems to say that Nietzsche's antiegalitarianism is abhorrent. Inequality itself, however, is not unacceptable to Rodó. Between Rodó's Prospero and his students there is a chasm as great as that between Zarathustra and the fellow-spirits he meets in his journeys. There is nothing abominable in difference of rank and order as such for Rodó. The authority of Prospero is an authority of wisdom, much like Nietzsche's view of the moral superiority of the philosopher who is willing to 'live dangerously' by questioning all forms of theoretical, moral, spiritual, and scientific 'truth.'

This view of authority has a common forefather: Plato. Both Nietzsche and Rodó build on Plato's valuation of the philosopher whose moral authority is derived from his capacity to see the good. They have differing concepts of the good, but both posit a radical inequality among classes of people. Moreover, like Plato, they portray the inequality through the metaphor of age: the philosopher for Rodó is old, wise and thus builds on historical experience. For Nietzsche, the proper metaphor is that of the young philosopher: someone willing to take risks, be flexible, and seek independence. The interpretations are different, but the metaphor the same.

Rodó's relationship to the idea of equality is further complicated by his espousal of the idea of meritocracy, an idea that he initially deplores only to later characterize as a necessary step towards fuller, more realized democracy. He denounces the triviality and thinness of the North American model of life, its *Weltanschauung*, but then accepts its espousal of the merit system as a way to find the best and the brightest to lead the nation.<sup>11</sup> It seems that for Rodó the nation is to be forever divided into elite and masses, a division that requires a particular disposition in the hearts of the elite in the nation as a whole is to move forwards in its own path to a kind of peculiar perfectionism, both at the personal and the national level.

This image of the elite's view of the mass is not altogether different from Nietzsche's view of the slave-master dichotomy. This struggle is too often seen as an all-out war to the death between two irreconcilable value systems. It is true that they are irreconcilable, but that does not mean that they do not coexist, depend on each other, or produce a kind of uneasy germ of symbiosis that generates the culture of a nation or peoples. Harking back to Homeric Greece, the wrestling or agon between opponents is what makes them stronger. There cannot be improvement without struggle between two almost-equal foes. Nietzsche utilizes the metaphor of the agon for the philosopher: he must engage with strong and redoubtable opponents if he is to become more robust. If we take this idea as a sign of Nietzsche's view of social or political philosophy, it would seem this cultural agon between master and slave morality would have to continue in some capacity if a culture is to be generated and to grow. A culture entirely dominated by a master morality has nothing to dominate, and thus is empty of substance.

The Hellenic ideal is also a point admired by Rodó. The idea that Rodó links to Athens is the pre-Socratic ideal, where reason and matter are both objects of perfectionism. The

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<sup>11</sup> *Ariel* p. 66.

distinction between mind and body, where the former stands in clear superiority over the latter, an idea that gains power through Plato, is here rejected by Rodó and finds an affinity with Nietzsche. The ideal is Homeric: the spirit/mind and the body must together move forwards towards greater perfection and refinement. For Rodó the Athenian model is that of the man who can coalesce the aims of the citizen, intellectual, athlete and the spiritual being. Similarly to Nietzsche's critique of Plato, Rodó's is an attempt to provide a holistic view of man. For Nietzsche, man is a hybrid of 'plant' and 'ghost,' that is, of an organic, growing being that also possesses a nonmaterial, spiritual life.

The final point of culmination in the fundamental similarities between Rodó and Nietzsche is in their own practice: that of the art of writing. Rodó is correct that Nietzsche's works are works of art; his writings are not along the lines of logical treatises, but poems and novels. But novels with moral and ethical ideas, as Rodó affirms. This is clearly a point of commonality with Rodó's own *Ariel*, since it is a story about a teacher, Prospero, who imparts his knowledge upon young students on his last day of 'work.' This metaphor of youth, present in both authors, point to the idea of the new, which is the essence of modernism. The young in both Nietzsche and Rodó prefigure a future world where things are to be different and are open to radically new configurations. Neither Nietzsche nor Rodó opt to present their ideas in clear cut, programmatic or pragmatic form. This is owing to their common rejection of what they see as the Anglicized method of philosophy, which reduces complex ideas to simple, shallow formulas. For Nietzsche the rejection is that of the British empiricists and utilitarians; for Rodó it is a rejection of the US model of pragmatism. Both find one exception: Emerson.

Beneath their common aesthetic appreciation of the nature of existence and aesthetic nature of politics (where rhetoric, not numbers are convincing), there is one central point of disagreement. Rodó's ideal set of values is a marriage between Homeric Hellenism and Christian love. It is not the Hellenic-Christian alliance of Platonism and St. Augustine.<sup>12</sup> But, it cannot be denied that Rodó seeks to rescue something from the Spanish past of Latin America, and even though he finds little to retain, he ultimately believes the Catholic, universal tradition, which is built on love and compassion, must be safeguarded.

Nietzsche famously rejects pity. He rejects it principally because it is an emotion that not only seems to seek to deny the nature of things (the inevitability of pain, suffering, and exploitation, which for Nietzsche are ineluctable) but it also debilitates an otherwise healthy, and self-regarding, spirit. It is an emotion and a value that is part of the heart of post-Augustinian Christianity. Because of his Hispanic roots, Rodó finds that the harshness of Nietzsche's words are not only anti-Christian, but also dehumanizing. There is nothing in Nietzsche that points, in his philosophy, to the idea that pity or compassion should be a core value. Nothing, besides his own attempt to save a horse's life from his master's flogging.

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<sup>12</sup> Arendt takes up similar concerns in her work.

Is this a fatal disagreement? As we have seen Rodó and Nietzsche think, write, and act alike. They are both elitists who nevertheless, in a Platonic fashion, see the necessity to think of a culture as an organic whole where different parts do different things for the totality. They are at the same time critics of Plato, for their view of Hellenism is that of Homer's. Moreover, they reject the 'Anglo-world' of British and US utilitarianism and pragmatism, which they see as the bane of spirituality and the beginning of the end for the ideal of a cultivated, profound, multifaceted human being. It is on the matter of compassion and pity that they disagree and this cannot be resolved.

If the matter of pity were as central to Nietzsche as the problem of nihilism, then the critique would be devastating. It would mean not the failure of Nietzsche's philosophy, but its failure as a potential way of looking at a particular culture, that of Latin America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet the object that Rodó wants to attain by referring to the centrality of pity is two-fold: to not deny the Hispanic, Catholic past of Latin America; and to have some sort of bond that will strengthen the connection between the elite and the mass. As an astute student of Machiavelli, Nietzsche would probably agree that religion can serve to unify a state.

Nietzsche's political philosophy is ancillary to his moral philosophy. As such, it is difficult for us to see what his ideal, future Europe would look like as a political unit. But if we take his ideas as parallels to the concerns of Rodó, we see that they can be largely applicable to the project of trying to define and retain power over the capacity to identify oneself. It is this power that is at the heart of Rodó's project and it is one that, despite the Catholic strain, shares much with Nietzsche's.

### **Mariátegui's Popular Nietzsche**

Quite appropriately for the locale of this conference, the other major Latin American thinker that incorporates the ideas of Nietzsche in his political thought is Mariátegui. The Peruvian not only stands on the pantheon of South America's men of genius, but also as one of the preeminent world thinkers of the modern era.

Mariátegui, like Rodó, is a Nietzschean thinker properly understood. Nietzsche, like Marx, never desired to have his name associated with any kind of "ism," something too vulgar for them. For Nietzsche, any sort of systematization of thinking into easy formulas was anathema. He opposed most modern ideologies and religions in large part owing to their mechanistic logic, and their ability to attract people who would not be able to think by themselves. Thus, if there is any sense in which the term 'Nietzschean' can be used it is not in the sense of copying Nietzsche's ideas verbatim or applying them as a carbon copy to another set of concerns. To be properly Nietzschean means to adopt the spirit of the man: the spirit of flexible and independent thought that is at once critical and tied to life itself.

It is for this reason that Mariátegui opens his magnum opus, the *Seven Interpretive Essays*, with a dictum from Nietzsche. Taking the words from *The Wanderer and his*



*Shadow*, Mariátegui quotes the German thinker as saying that “I do not want to read any author in whose work one can see the intention of writing a book, but rather those authors whose thoughts spontaneously become a book.”<sup>13</sup>

Although the majority of the seven essays deal with economic and political matters in a way befitting an orthodox Marxist who aims to understand the class foundations of social problems, the spirit of the work is Nietzschean. In the ‘Warning’ or ‘Caution’ (“Advertencia”) that follows this dictum, Mariátegui tells us that the driving force behind his written words are his own life-force itself: Mariátegui explains to us that for Nietzsche the writer or author is not a detached, calculating ‘planner’ or designer of things; he must be, or should be, one who lives and breathes every word he writes as if it were a molecule of oxygen penetrating his pores. The true author is an author of a lived worldview, in his actions and in his words (which together are the same praxis).

Mariátegui is aware that to bring Marxist orthodoxy from Europe to Latin America is a feat both chimerical and quixotic. Chimerical because Latin America is the hybrid beast of *América india* and Europe. Quixotic because the conditions for which a Marxist revolution was to occur were, as Mariátegui clearly knew, not present in his lifetime. Thus to make the leap between Marxist theory, entrenched in the millennial development of capitalism in Europe, and the conditions of a continent barely five hundred years in the making is a fantastical one. It is an act of both great imagination and desire to transform the world.

This act is thus aesthetic, since it understands the role of creative imagination in the political author and actor, and it is also an exercise of a will to power, for it aims to implant one’s will on the world. Thus more than Lenin, it is Nietzsche that provides Mariátegui the impetus to make the leap between volition and reality. Lenin’s influence can be visible in Gramsci, a kindred soul, almost a *Doppelgänger* of Mariátegui’s, but it is less evident in the Peruvian. This is underscored by the tremendous interest in matters literary by the founder of *Amauta*.

Three central points must be recovered from Mariátegui’s Nietzschean spirit in addition to the general attitude that seeks to marry the author’s ideas and life. They are his understanding of socialist activity as heroic, creative, and mythical. And it is also his reconceptualization of Nietzsche’s idea of will to power as a politico-historical force that drives global transformation.<sup>14</sup>

The socialist task, for Mariátegui, is inherently heroic. What does this mean? It means that unlike the classical, orthodox Marxists of Europe, he sees the role of the individual revolutionary in heroic terms. This conception of the hero is Nietzschean, not liberal or political per se. The individual intellectual or political leader that does in fact enter the

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<sup>13</sup> My own translation from *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, p. 12 (Mexico: Era, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Mariátegui understands the idea of will to power as a social, creative capacity with political ramifications, as when he repeatedly describes the spirit of the US ‘pioneer’ as fundamentally a will to power (vide *Siete ensayos*, p. 100, 146, 163).

realm of the political, for Mariátegui, in a sense must abandon his attachment to other aspects of his life. Further, this leap into the political is like a leap in the dark; more often than not, as Nietzsche believed, failure is likely to result. Thus, it is a tragic conception of the hero. Like the Homeric heroes that Nietzsche admires, the hero of Mariátegui's socialist imagination embarks on a long, arduous, life-defining journey that itself becomes the individual's essence. There is no separation between the actor and the deed, as Nietzsche tells us in his critique of the way that language is misunderstood when one separates the subject and the predicate.

At the same time, the task of bringing about what Mariátegui wished for his country, socialism, must be creative. Here the transformative imagination of the man of action/man of words must come into full play. There is nothing given in terms of historical determinacy for the case of Peru or other 'backward' areas of Latin America, for the historical period in which these nations were born was that of Spanish medieval feudalism, not of a nascent capitalism. Culturally, the ideas of socialism were already present in the minds of Mariátegui and his contemporaries. Socially, the conditions were inadequate. Here is where Mariátegui employs the full range of his intellectual abilities to explode the inadequacies of liberal-bourgeois-democratic order in a society characterized by racial, ethnic, cultural, and moral rifts, as well as class rifts. Whereas for Lenin and Gramsci the task of the *engagé* intellectual is to become a leader of the political vanguard, for Mariátegui the role is to transform society culturally, and this requires all manner of creative activity—from literary journals to dancing on graves.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, for Mariátegui the socialist task is Nietzschean in spirit in its mythical aspect. For Nietzsche, the health of a culture depended largely on the extent that common myths could feed the desires, ambitions, fears and anxieties of a people. The myth—by definition partly based on truth and partly on lies—is for Nietzsche a vital component of a life-affirming culture because it allows for the existence of a commonly-held source of authority justified by a narrative that explains the fate and past of a people. Contrary to some commentators who err in believing Nietzsche is a radical individualist, the texts he writes about the nature of culture and art (e.g. *Birth of Tragedy*) and the nature of value-creation (e.g. *Zarathustra*) contain important social dimensions. For Nietzsche values do not exist in vacuums, they are always matters that either strengthen or loosen human bonds. Like gravity, it is always there, even if it appears sometimes to be so faint as to be nonexistent. This is the role of myth for Nietzsche: to maintain a sense of commonality and common purpose, even if there are radical class distinctions within society (and I do not mean economic class).

Thus we can see that Mariátegui's form of Marxism would not have been possible without the Nietzschean spirit. This spirit, which makes Overmen of both Nietzsche and Mariátegui, is rooted in (paradoxically) the firm belief that there are no firm beliefs. To live dangerously, as Nietzsche urged, is to test different kinds of philosophies and to not believe in the perfection of any single one. While Nietzsche himself abhorred socialism,

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<sup>15</sup> The famous episode is emblematic of Mariátegui's aesthetic, hence Nietzschean worldview. It is one that seeks to break moral codes, transgress values, and go beyond good and evil towards a new, modern lifeworld.

his spirit of living dangerously is what allows Mariátegui to take parts of diverse European philosophies and make them his own. In this we can see that he means when he defends his “Latin Americanism” against the charge of Europhilia:

In Europe I gained my most worthwhile education. And I do not believe there is any salvation for Indo-America without European or Western thought. Sarmiento, who is still one of the creators of ‘Argentinian-ness,’ was in his time a ‘Europeanizer.’ He couldn’t find a better way to be Argentine.<sup>16</sup>

For Mariátegui to be Latin America means, in a Nietzschean sense, to know and to accept who one is. This means accepting that one is Amerindian as well as European. That is simply the fact that Mariátegui wants to confront, in the same manner that Nietzsche believes a man must confront the way that nature made him. The hybridity of Latin American man is part of his nature, of the way that history made him. To deny this by ensconcing oneself in ‘pure’ European culture or ‘pure’ Amerindian culture is a dangerous illusion. Mariátegui wants to acknowledge this intertwined nature of Latin American peoples, and thus seeks to apply the Nietzschean spirit to popular problems.

## Conclusion

As we have seen from the above, what links Rodó and Mariátegui together is their common Nietzschean spirit. To be sure, Nietzsche would have ardently detested Rodó’s quasi-sentimentalist brand of Catholicism. Similarly, he would probably have been nauseated by Mariátegui’s love of socialist egalitarianism (although we must admit that in Nietzsche’s physical condition he would have been nauseated by most things).

Because there is no one set of principles whose totality can be determined to be *the* ‘Nietzscheanism’ of the modern era, and because Nietzsche himself would have rejected the very notion, his legacy lives principally in the task of the ‘great author’ as he saw it. As we saw, it is a way of life that marries mind and body. Every breath is at once for respiration and for uttering ideas. And the spirit that Nietzsche urges, to think for oneself and to live dangerously, leads to an almost childish mischief of seeking to challenge established “moral” norms.

This spirit is shared by Rodó and Mariátegui even if it leads to widely diverging roads. Rodó’s Catholic-Nietzschean impulse and Mariátegui’s Marxist-Nietzschean instinct are perhaps the two most significant manifestations of the rebellious Nietzsche in Latin America. Rodó’s and Mariátegui’s abhorrence of North American crassness is akin to Nietzsche’s invective for British pragmatism. All three thinkers saw a decline in culture and of the proper moral way of life in the growing influence of liberal-democratic, bourgeois life. A nation of newspaper readers, middle class values, and myopic goals is what Nietzsche feared in liberal society. For Rodó, spiritual poverty would ensue from

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<sup>16</sup> Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos*, p. 14.

material affluence; whereas for Mariátegui the progress of free markets would raze Amerindian culture and its socialist, Inca roots.

So whose Nietzsche for Latin America at the dawn of the twenty-first century? Never Manichean, the spirit of this essay urges us to learn from both. While Rodó stresses the aristocratic side and Mariátegui the social side of Nietzschean thinking (two aspects that are often ignored; the former for its elitism and the latter for its opposition to the idea that Nietzsche is a thinker mainly for individualists) it is possible to find value in both.

The fact that Latin American societies, particularly those like Peru, are deeply divided by class (socioeconomic as well as cultural) points to the benefits of learning from both the aristocratic Rodó and the popular (not populist) Mariátegui. The intelligentsia and educated classes of the continent could do well by reading *Ariel* again and seeking to find the benevolent attitude Rodó urged towards the unfortunate. At the same time, Rodó urged deep caution against the encroachment of the neighbor to the north, especially in matters of culture and values. From Mariátegui, the popular classes must learn again the lesson of hybridity as Indo-America's innate nature. The radicalism of movements such as Pachakuti or of that of Felipe Quispe in Bolivia, which dream of a return to pre-Columbian idylls, are more likely to end in horrific dystopias if fully realized. Let us learn from Mariátegui's emulation of Nietzsche: to accept differences within our own constitution, and to engage with them with a view to a healthier, more robust future.