

## **Injustice and the Intellectual in José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere***

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### **Abstract**

José Rizal is not a widely known figure in the academy today and if he is acknowledged, it is for his criticism of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines. The dissemination of his two subversive novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, helped to galvanize Philippine nationalism. Although he had a considerable depth of knowledge, scholars have not adequately investigated Rizal's works or properly respected Rizal as a political thinker. Most recent Western scholarship is limited to either literary criticism or to perspectives of his historical impact during Spanish colonialism. Moreover, there are issues with the Philippine scholarship on Rizal because many writings approach the category of hagiography. Although some scholars have acknowledged the influence of French and other European Enlightenment sources on Rizal's work, he was also influenced by ancient Greek and Latin sources. In this paper, I investigate Rizal's references to ancient and medieval political thought in *Noli Me Tangere*. This analysis provides a more complete understanding of how Rizal saw the role of the intellectual when confronted with injustice and corruption. Furthermore, I contend that Rizal is confronting classical difficulties regarding the relationship between the educated, the philosopher, and the political community. Still, a comparison should be made with the notion of the "colonized intellectual." A serious examination of Rizal's works and his own life will be crucial to understanding Rizal's place in the global history of political thought.

### **Keywords**

injustice, intellectual, revolution, nonviolence

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### ***I. Introduction and the Current State of Political Theory***

Political theorists in the academy today have failed to adequately study the works and life of José Rizal. Yet, it seems like we are witnessing an opportune moment in the sub-field to expand the canon to include important figures like Rizal. In this study, I will make the case for why Rizal is an important figure for the emerging sub-field of comparative political thought and show why he has been hitherto misunderstood by previous scholars in other fields.

Historically, the sub-field of political theory within the overarching discipline of political science began with the older tradition of political philosophy that can be traced to the Ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, and refers to the study of works comprising the foundation of what many call Western civilization. The more recent tradition of political theory developed later and especially in the wake of Nietzsche's thought. The sub-field of political theory, especially as framed in the United States, remains predominantly a Eurocentric area of study, but we are now witnessing a notable revival in the sub-field with an increased openness to the consideration of non-Western thinkers and perspectives. To speak of Western and non-Western divisions, perhaps

perpetuates a kind of centeredness, but it remains, nonetheless, a somewhat useful categorization in order to describe what has not been centered, to delineate what has been invisible or forgotten.

Many scholars have raised questions regarding the utility of the traditional Western canon, they ask *what* ought to be studied, and *how* they should be studied. In particular, there is a wave of interest in thinkers who engaged with, or who continue to engage with, the effects of colonialism on political thought as well as what to do about those effects in political life. Here, I refer to anticolonial, postcolonial, decolonial, as well as many Native and Indigenous thinkers.

Furthermore, when it comes to the emerging sub-field of comparative political thought, there is much debate about whether a comparison between Western and non-Western thinkers along the traditional Western themes, concepts, or categories (e.g., democracy) is viable or useful. In this way, some contemporary political theorists challenge these very categories and the vernacular of Western civilization in determining the limitations of Western political thought.

## ***II. Cosmopolitan Political Theory, Decolonization, and José Rizal***

Some scholars readily admit that it is difficult to even describe the aim of a “comparative political theory.” In fact, Godrej calls for a “cosmopolitan political theory” rather than a “comparative political theory” simply. This approach would entail alternating between “internal immersion in the lived experience of the text” and “an external stance of commentary and exegesis of the text.”<sup>1</sup> From this approach, she states, “we might bring the ideas of Gandhi or Confucius to bear on our discussion of freedom or justice, in the same way that we would use Rawls, Marx, or Hobbes. Doing this well, however, calls upon us to grapple with the tough issues involved in “representing” these ideas within our own discourse, attempting to bring them to life without violating the existential insights they provide, nor assuming an authority or authenticity to our representations.”<sup>2</sup>

Godrej finds that this approach is neither Straussian (which interprets ancient texts with the goal of discovering universal political principles to ameliorate the decline of the West) nor Skinnerian (which attempts to understand thinkers as they understood themselves and denies the existence of perennial truths). The cosmopolitan approach, thus, alternates “among philosophical questions, historicity, and contemporary political relevance.”<sup>3</sup>

Getachew and Mantena further contend that, in the interest of decolonizing political theory, the strategies for producing new political theory include conceptual innovation (which generates new concepts, categories, and forms of analysis from postcolonial histories and predicaments) and conceptual reanimation (which begins from existing concepts and categories, interrogates them *vis-à-vis* diverse instances, and clarifies them accordingly). The latter, for example, might involve observing democracies in historical spaces removed from its ideal forms to discover something *truer* about the dynamics of democracy.<sup>4</sup>

I see Godrej’s existential hermeneutic as especially useful for comparisons across the more traditional categories in the history of political thought with Getachew and Mantena’s strategies as beneficial for generating *new* political thought from the postcolonial world.

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<sup>1</sup> Farah Godrej, “Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other,” *Polity* 41, no. 2 (April 2009): 135–65.

<sup>2</sup> Godrej, 160.

<sup>3</sup> Godrej, 161–62.

<sup>4</sup> Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, “Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory,” *Critical Times* 5, no. 1 (2022): 372–79.

Keeping these, in my view, compatible approaches in mind, I will attempt to show that Rizal deserves a place among the world's greatest thinkers and is unduly neglected by Western political scientists. Moreover, that in order to understand his thought and place in the global history of political thought (viz., the history of both Western and non-Western thought), one must pay close attention to the influence of Western classical thought on his understanding of politics. This is evident through both an investigation of his writings and through observation of his life. I contend that the considerable depth of his knowledge makes him unique as a political figure and his novels particularly worthy of study as works of political philosophy. Lastly, I posit that we can learn much about how the intellectual may respond to injustice in the colonial context from the study of both Rizal's works and his own life. This also involves attempting to understand Rizal's place among other anticolonial thinkers.

### ***III. Anticolonialism and the Concept of the Colonized Intellectual***

As we proceed, we will have to keep in mind the concept of the "colonized intellectual" as described by certain anticolonial writers. Memmi in his landmark work, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, describes the colonized intellectual as one who lives in "cultural anguish."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* claims that the "colonized intellectual" initially adopts the "abstract, universal values" of the colonizer and is "prepared to fight so that colonist and colonized can live in peace in a new world."<sup>6</sup> Yet, he also finds, "colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence."<sup>7</sup> He later distinguishes between three stages in the development of colonized writers. In the first phase, the "colonized intellectual proves that he has assimilated the colonizer's culture." In the second phase, the "colonized writer has his convictions shaken and decides to cast his mind back." In the third phase, the "colonized writer...turns into a galvanizer of the people." This is the emergence of revolutionary literature. These writers may "find themselves in exceptional circumstances, in prison, in the resistance or on the eve of their execution, feel the need to proclaim their nation, [and] to portray their people."<sup>8</sup> From here, we can consider if Rizal falls within this category of a "colonized intellectual."

### ***IV. Rizal as a Case Study***

Despite having one of the greatest minds in recent history, José Rizal is not a widely known figure in the academy today. Rizal is commonly held to be *the* national hero of the Philippines and some past scholars extol Rizal as one of Asian history's foremost intellectuals. Blumentritt ends his 1898 biography of Rizal with the following statement, "Not only is Rizal the most prominent man of his own people, but the greatest man the Malayan race has produced."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Expanded Edition (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 120.

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 9–10.

<sup>7</sup> Fanon, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Fanon, 158–59.

<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand Blumentritt, *Biography of Dr. José Rizal*, trans. Howard W. Bray (Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, Limited., 1898), 17.

Rizal was born on June 19, 1861, in Calamba, Philippines. From the earliest days of his education at the hands of Jesuit Fathers at the Ateneo Municipal, Rizal cultivated a reputation as the “outstanding student of the day.”<sup>10</sup> As a youth, he excelled in “scholastic work, poetry, painting and sculpture.”<sup>11</sup> Rizal’s later academic accomplishments in Spain included achieving the “coveted grade of *sobresaliente* [i.e., the highest mark of distinction] in general literature, Greek, history, Greek and Latin literature, Hebrew, advanced Greek, and Spanish literature, while at the same time passing competently each of his medical examinations.”<sup>12</sup> Eventually, Rizal earned a medical degree in ophthalmology in order to obtain the necessary knowledge to perform cataract surgery on his mother and cure her failing eyesight. By the end of his life, he had mastered a wide variety of subjects and allegedly spoke twenty-two languages.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, if he is renowned, it is for his opposition to Spanish colonial rule of the Philippines. The dissemination of his two subversive novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* (commonly referred to as the *Noli* and *El Fili*, respectively), helped to galvanize Philippine nationalism. The colonial situation in the Philippines was as follows: Spain unified the islands, more or less, through the institution of religion and the creation of a common enemy (i.e., by their serving as the colonizer). Catholic friars and Spanish officials ruled by resettling the native population into larger villages.<sup>14</sup> The population centers eventually had both political and economic functions.<sup>15</sup> Their development led to social stratification (including the conversion of local chieftains into allies and incorporating them within a hierarchy).<sup>16</sup> The friars ascended to power and acquired many landholdings through royal bequest, purchase, or donation from pious Filipinos.<sup>17</sup> They outnumbered Spanish officials and in some cases were the only Spaniards in some villages. Needless to say, this situation was the source of much tension.

Rizal’s apparent criticism over the power of the friars<sup>18</sup> led to charges of treason and he was executed by firing squad in 1896 at the age of 35. Coates states, “Rizal...was regarded by educated Filipinos as a genius, the architect and embodiment of their country’s aspirations. By the uneducated he was regarded more simply as a kind of demi-god. By all he was recognized as the greatest Filipino who had ever lived.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Austin Coates, *Rizal: Philippine Nationalist and Martyr* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1968), 32–34.

<sup>11</sup> Coates, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Coates, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Augenbraum, “Introduction,” in *Noli Me Tangere*, by José Rizal, trans. Harold Augenbraum (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), xxiii. Augenbraum notes that Rizal eventually operated on his own mother’s cataracts.

<sup>14</sup> Renato Constantino, *A History of the Philippines: From the Spanish Colonization to the Second World War* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 78–79.

<sup>15</sup> Constantino, 59–60.

<sup>16</sup> Constantino, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Constantino, 67.

<sup>18</sup> According to Augenbraum, the friars dominated both “secular and religious life” to create a “friorocracy” in the Philippines. Augenbraum, “Introduction,” xii–xiv.

<sup>19</sup> Coates, *Rizal: Philippine Nationalist and Martyr*, xviii.

Although he evidently had a first-rate mind and considerable depth of knowledge, both past and recent scholars have not adequately investigated Rizal's political thought. Most recent Western scholarship pertains to either literary criticism of his two novels or to perspectives of his historical impact during Spanish colonialism. Moreover, there are several issues with the Philippine scholarship on Rizal because many writings approach the category of hagiography. According to Augenbraum, "One should be judicious in reading about Rizal, since many books about him are more encomium than history."<sup>20</sup> A comprehensive study of Rizal's political thought would need to identify the unique aspects of his thought, while also further exploring the complete range of his intellectual influences.

In brief, the *Noli* is the story of Crisóstomo Ibarra, a young and wealthy Filipino, who returns to the Philippines after studying abroad in Europe for seven years, to find severe corruption in his home country. He attempts to effect change peacefully by building a school for the children in town. Unfortunately, his enemies frame him for an attack on the barracks, so he is arrested. By the end of the novel, he has lost almost everything and finally considers avenging himself. *El Fili* is a continuation of this story and addresses similar themes revolving around the character of Simoun.

Some scholars have acknowledged the influence of French and other European Enlightenment sources on Rizal's work.<sup>21</sup> Yet, Rizal was deeply influenced by both ancient Greek and Latin sources, and I contend that this aspect has been woefully understudied. In a recent book, Claudio makes a single passing reference to Rizal's excellence in Greek literature, claims *El Filibusterismo* "poses Socratic questions about how a people should earn their liberty," but focuses on Rizal's political thought as "defined by liberalism."<sup>22</sup> A cursory survey of his novels reveals that Rizal seamlessly switches from references to Cicero<sup>23</sup>, Plutarch<sup>24</sup>, Sophocles<sup>25</sup>, Plato<sup>26</sup>, Virgil<sup>27</sup>, Dante<sup>28</sup>, Herodotus<sup>29</sup>, Terence<sup>30</sup>, Aristotle<sup>31</sup>, Horace<sup>32</sup>, Sappho<sup>33</sup>, Tacitus<sup>34</sup>, and

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<sup>20</sup> José Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, trans. Harold Augenbraum (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), xxvii.

<sup>21</sup> Augenbraum, "Introduction," xviii; Lisandro E. Claudio, *Jose Rizal: Liberalism and the Paradox of Coloniality*, Global Political Thinkers (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), ix; Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London, UK: Verso, 2005), 29–31. There seems to be a consensus that Rizal was particularly influenced by Voltaire, Hugo, and Dumas.

<sup>22</sup> Claudio, *Jose Rizal: Liberalism and the Paradox of Coloniality*, ix–xii, 15, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 20, 145, 203; José Rizal, *El Filibusterismo*, trans. Harold Augenbraum (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Rizal, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Rizal, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Rizal, 83, 348; Rizal, *El Filibusterismo*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 145.

<sup>29</sup> Rizal, 224.

<sup>30</sup> Rizal, 348.

<sup>31</sup> Rizal, 384.

<sup>32</sup> Rizal, *El Filibusterismo*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Rizal, 210.

<sup>34</sup> Rizal, 58, 240.

Augustine<sup>35</sup>. In order to understand a thinker as complex as Rizal, one must also take these passages seriously.

Moreover, previous scholars have neither completely understood nor identified all of Rizal's references. This task is necessary and made all the more difficult because Rizal does not always directly quote from his sources. For example, in *Noli Me Tangere*, Rizal extracts a fragment from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* on the topic of truth, piety, and Plato. However, one may not recognize this passage because Rizal paraphrases Aristotle in Latin rather than quoting from the original ancient Greek source. Compare Rizal and Aristotle here.

Rizal:

'Friend?' the Latin exclaimed, surprised and getting up from his chair. '*Amice, amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas* [*My friends, Plato is a friend, but truth is a greater friend*]!<sup>36</sup>

Aristotle:

Yet it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers or lovers of wisdom; for, while both are dear, piety requires us to honour truth above our friends [δόξειε δ' ἂν ἴσως βέλτιον εἶναι καὶ δεῖν ἐπὶ σωτηρία γε τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὰ οἰκεία ἀναιρεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ φιλοσόφους ὄντας· ἀμφοῖν γὰρ ὄντων φίλοι οὔσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν].<sup>37</sup>

One should also consider that Aristotle does not mention Plato by name in this passage. Again, compare Rizal with Aquinas and Aristotle in another instance.

Rizal:

These truths, most excellent sir, the Divine Spirit has told us, in his supreme wisdom, which human intelligence has never understood from the time of Seneca and Aristotle...these truths are not only that small things are small things, but they are great things, not only next to the little ones but next to the largest things on the earth and in heaven and of the air and the clouds and of the waters and of the span of life, and of death!<sup>38</sup>

Aquinas:

Hence the fact that some happen to doubt about articles of faith is not due to the uncertain nature of the truths, but to the weakness of human intelligence; yet the

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<sup>35</sup> Rizal, 311.

<sup>36</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 384; 443 n. 263.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. W. D. Ross (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2001), 1096a13-16; Aristotelis, *Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. I. Bywater, Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1920), 1096a14-17.

<sup>38</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 203.

slenderest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things, as is said in de Animalibus xi.<sup>39</sup>

Aristotle:

Of things constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable, and eternal, while others are subject to generation and decay. The former are excellent beyond compare and divine, but less accessible to knowledge...The scanty conceptions to which we can attain of celestial things give us, from their excellence, more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live...On the other hand, in certitude and in completeness our knowledge of terrestrial things has the advantage. Moreover, their greater nearness and affinity to us balances somewhat the loftier interest of the heavenly things that are the objects of the higher philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

Tracing the origin of the above quotation by Father Dámaso requires some familiarity with both Aquinas and Aristotle because Aquinas refers to book “xi” of de Animalibus, which does not exist in our extant catalogue. The source is brought to light by exploring “Parts of Animals,” which in our extant catalogue is placed after Aristotle’s “History of Animals.” In light of this practice, it seems like many crucial allusions have eluded previous scholars. Pascual, in a book on the philosophy of Rizal, only makes three references to Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato.<sup>41</sup> Anderson also mistakenly asserts, “Rizal does not mention Plato.”<sup>42</sup>

If we consider the inclusion of substantive classical themes in the *Noli*, we need look no further than the opening dedication, “To My Country”:

Recorded in the history of human suffering are cancers of such malignant character that even minor contact aggravates them, engendering overwhelming pain. How often, in the midst of modern civilizations have I wanted to bring you into the discussion, sometimes to compare you to other countries, so often that your beloved image became to me like a social cancer.

Therefore, because I desire your good health, which is indeed all of ours, and because I seek better stewardship for you, I will do with you what the ancients did with their infirmed: they placed them on the steps of their temples so that each in his own way could invoke a divinity that might offer a cure.

With that in mind, I will try to reproduce your current condition faithfully, without prejudice: I will lift the veil hiding your ills, and sacrifice everything to truth, even my own pride, since, as your son, I, too, suffer your defects and shortcomings.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, “The Summa Theologica,” trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New Advent, 2017, I, qu.1, a.5, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, “Parts of Animals,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. William Ogle (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2001), 644b29-645a2.

<sup>41</sup> Ricardo R. Pascual, *The Philosophy of Rizal*, First (Manila, Philippines: Pedro B. Ayuda & Company, 1962), 207, 271.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, 36 n. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*.

Rizal is evidently considering an ancient solution to corruption. He will lift the veil in his writing, his novel about this colonial reality. Recall that Benardete once referred to the novel as the Platonic dialogue without Socrates.<sup>44</sup>

There are other classical arguments within the arguments of the action, in the drama of the novel. Ibarra appears to display several of the virtues as described by Aristotle (greatness-of-soul in his concern for honor, courage in saving another important character, Elías, from being killed, magnificence in building a public school).<sup>45</sup> In one crucial scene, Father Damáso, insults the memory of Ibarra's deceased father and Ibarra knocks him down and produces a knife as if to kill him, but is stopped when his love interest, Maria Clara, touches his arm.<sup>46</sup> This confrontation recalls Book I of Homer's *Iliad* where Agamemnon insults Achilles who then proceeds to draw his sword but is stopped when the goddess of wisdom, Athena, grabs his hair.<sup>47</sup>

More clues to understanding Rizal's thought may be found in his correspondence. For example, in purportedly one of Rizal's most important letters, he makes two significant references to Socrates and Plato.<sup>48</sup> In this striking excerpt, Rizal places the Catholic Church firmly within the context of his own political and theological understanding,

[The Catholic Church] is a more perfect institution than the others, but human nevertheless, with all the defects, errors, and vicissitudes inherent in the work of man. As the direct heir of the political sciences, the religions, and the arts, of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, it is more wisely and ably managed...but like all other religions, it has its dark points, which veils under the name mysteries; it has its puerilities, which it sanctifies as miracles; it has its divisions or dissensions, which it calls sects or heresies. Nor can I believe that before the advent of Jesus Christ, all the peoples were in the abyss you speak of. Precisely, there is Socrates who dies for proclaiming the existence of only one God. There is divine Plato...Neither can I believe that after Christ everything has been light, peace, and happiness; that the majority of men have become just.<sup>49</sup>

At this point, it is clear that Rizal contemplated not only modern political thought but that he continually reflected on classical thinkers and the substantive themes of their thought.

## ***V. Rizal and the Question of Revolutionary Violence***

Rizal was put to death on December 30th, 1896. His last words were, “Consummatum est.” (“It is done.”) The same last words as Christ. It is important to note that while Rizal was

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<sup>44</sup> Seth Benardete, *Socrates and Plato: The Dialectics of Eros / Socrates Und Platon: Die Dialektik Des Eros*, ed. Heinrich Meier, trans. Wiebke Meier (München, Germany: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2002), 31–33.

<sup>45</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 17, 147-149. 157.

<sup>46</sup> Rizal, 229–31.

<sup>47</sup> *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), bk. I. 188-222.

<sup>48</sup> Pascual, *The Philosophy of Rizal*, 271.

<sup>49</sup> José Rizal, “Fourth Letter to Fr. Pastells,” *Jose Rizal* (blog), March 1, 2016, <https://iamjoseprizal.wixsite.com/lifeandworks/single-post/2016/03/02/Fourth-Letter-to-Fr-Pastells>.



critical of colonial governance, he sought reform and never assented to revolutionary violence, although the question over the use of violence or force remains throughout both novels.

By the end of the *Noli*, Ibarra has been radicalized by the colonial experience. A formulation of his initial position is stated here in Chapter 50:

I will never be the one to lead a multitude to get by force what the government does not think opportune, no. If someday I see this multitude armed, I would place myself on the side of the government and fight it, because I cannot see my country in this type of chaos. I want good for it, which is why I built a school. I seek it in education, for forward progress. Without light, there is no path...I greatly deplore our condition, but...evil is not cured by other evils and we all share the guilt of our unhappiness.<sup>50</sup>

Later, Ibarra says this in Chapter 61:

Now misfortune has ripped off my blinders. Solitude and the misery of prison have shown me. Now I see the horrible cancer gnawing at this society, rotting its flesh, almost begging for a violent extirpation. They opened my eyes, they made me see the sores and forced me to become a criminal! And so, just what they wanted, I will be a subversive, but a true subversive. I will call together all the downtrodden people, everyone who feels a heart beating in his breast...No, I won't be a criminal, you aren't a criminal when you fight for your country, just the opposite! For three centuries we have held out our hand to them, asked them for love, eager to call them brothers, and how do they answer us? With insults and mocking, denying us even the status of human beings. There is no God, no hope, no humanity, nothing more than the rights of power!<sup>51</sup>

Yet, recall that novels are dialogues and the theme regarding the use of violence is an explicit theme throughout both the *Noli* and *El Fili*. In the *Noli*, Ibarra as a representation of the intellectual or the philosopher continually engages in conversation with the character of Elías as a representation of the mass or *hoi polloi*. While Ibarra eventually shows an openness to the use of revolutionary violence for the sake of justice, Elías develops an apprehensiveness. His initial position is a call for revenge and by the end of the novel he questions Ibarra's desires and goals. His initial response to Ibarra is as follows:

Without struggle there is no freedom...without freedom there is no light...You say you know little about your country, I believe. You don't see the preparations for struggle, you don't see the cloud on the horizon. Combat begins in the sphere of ideas, to descend into the arena, which will be colored with blood. I hear the voice of God, woe to those who resist it! For them, history has not been written.<sup>52</sup>

Still, his reply to Ibarra in Chapter 61 expresses his newfound reluctance:

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<sup>50</sup> Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, 332–33.

<sup>51</sup> Rizal, 400–401.

<sup>52</sup> Rizal, 333.

In this fight you intend to undertake, the defenseless and innocent will suffer most. The very sentiments that a month ago made me come to you seeking reform are the same ones that motivate me now to tell you to think this over. This country, señor, is not about to separate itself from the mother country. It seeks only a bit of freedom, justice, love. I'll support the malcontents, the criminals, the desperate, but the people will back off. Seeing everything so darkly, you are wrong if you believe this country is desperate. The country is suffering, yes, but it still has hope, it believes, and it will rise up only when it has lost all patience, that is, when those who govern it want it that way, which is still far off. I myself will not follow you. I will never accede to those measures as long as I see men hope.<sup>53</sup>

The *Noli*, and the novel itself, is a dialogue between characters, but it is also Rizal's dialogue with himself about the use of force against injustice. The drama is the argument of the action in his own mind about how the intellectual should respond to colonial injustice and corruption.

## **V. Conclusion**

Rizal's final stance appears to be that, however seemingly justified, however tempting the option of violence or the use of force may be, it is not the answer. "Evil is not cured by other evils." In the words of the Platonic Socrates, "it is not the work of the just man to harm either a friend or anyone else, but of his opposite, the unjust man."<sup>54</sup> Consider also Morihei Ueshiba's understanding that that "the art of peace is medicine for a sick world."<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, Castellví claims Rizal could be regarded as a new Cervantes (i.e., the greatest writer of the country), a new Christ (i.e., the messiah), and a new Bolívar (i.e., the liberator, even if Rizal was not pro-independence, his works still led to revolution and history portrays him as such).<sup>56</sup>

Could Rizal also be considered a new Homer? Instead of the maker of Greeks, is he the maker of Filipinos? The nation's greatest poet and one who brought unity to thousands of islands? Is Rizal, also perhaps, a new kind of Socrates, the nation's greatest political philosopher? One who challenged injustice and the sophistry around him but would not advocate for violence and paid for these actions with his life? Is Rizal the "colonized intellectual" according to Memmi and Fanon? By now, should we ask is Rizal the colonized intellectual *par excellence*? Yet, if Rizal ultimately falls upon the side of nonviolent means of reform, perhaps, the better comparison is with another anticolonial thinker who was also influenced by the Socratic tradition, Mohandas Gandhi.<sup>57</sup> Are these comparisons viable or useful? For me, at least, the answer is definitively yes.

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<sup>53</sup> Rizal, 402.

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato, Translated, with Notes, an Interpretive Essay, and a New Introduction*, trans. Allan Bloom, Second (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1991), 335d.

<sup>55</sup> Morihei Ueshiba, *The Art of Peace*, trans. John Stevens (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1992), 16.

<sup>56</sup> Luis Castellví, "Jose Rizal: Filipino Polymath and National Hero" (Cambridge Spanish Centre, Cambridge, UK, January 24, 2018), [https://youtu.be/rI0TZ2SkSdY?si=DkI\\_\\_ttDCmzL-C4n](https://youtu.be/rI0TZ2SkSdY?si=DkI__ttDCmzL-C4n).

<sup>57</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *"Hind Swaraj" and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel, Centenary Edition, Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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