

José Martí: Epochal Critique, Naturalistic Religiosity, and Deconstruction of the Western Modern Ethos

José Martí: Criticidad epocal, religiosidad naturalista y deconstrucción del ethos moderno occidental

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Abstract: The article proposes a heuristic analysis of the spiritual and philosophical formation of José Martí, focusing on the qualitative specificity of his religiosity and its critical reflexivity in response to epochal problems. Using a logical, dialectical, and historical-philosophical methodology, the article examines the processes of semantic inversion, semiotic complementarity, and sigmoidal interactions of philosophical-religious concepts such as “Dios”, “Alma,” “Amor” y “Naturaleza” in José Martí’s representative works, including “Prólogo al poema del Niágara,” “Cuadernos de apuntes” y “Emerson.” Additionally, the article reveals the transgressive social functions of Martí’s religiosity in historical context, viewed from an axiological, ideological, critical, prospective, and heuristic perspective.

Keywords: José Martí; Epochal Criticality; Naturalistic Religiosity; Cultural Ethos; Western Modernity.

Resumen: El artículo propone un análisis heurístico de la formación espiritual y filosófica de José Martí, centrándose en la especificidad cualitativa de su religiosidad y su reflexividad crítica en respuesta a problemas epocales. Utilizando una metodología lógica, dialéctica e histórico-filosófica, el artículo examina los procesos de inversión semántica, complementariedad semiótica e interacciones sigmoidales de conceptos filosófico-religiosos como “Dios”, “Alma”, “Amor” y “Naturaleza” en obras representativas de José Martí, incluyendo “Prólogo al poema del Niágara”, “Cuadernos de apuntes” y “Emerson”. Además, el artículo revela las funciones sociales transgresoras de la religiosidad de Martí en su contexto histórico, visto desde una perspectiva axiológica, ideológica, crítica, prospectiva y heurística. Palabras clave: José Martí, criticidad época, religiosidad naturalista, ethos cultural, modernidad occidental.

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1. Introduction

José Julián Martí Pérez (1853-1895), known as José Martí or the National Hero of Cuba, is widely regarded as the most influential Cuban of all time. His literary works, political vision, pedagogical and religious thought, and historical and sociocultural influence have transcended generations and established him as a seminal figure whose ideas retain their radical validity in the present day (Rodrigues, 2020).

Revisiting the cultural *ethos* of José Martí in the 21st century is both necessary and extremely risky. It is risky because the cultural and historical conditions of the present day have made Martí a subversive symbol in a post-metaphysical age (Habermas, 1985) characterized by emptiness and ephemerality (Lipovetsky, 2000). The question of the significance of Martí's legacy is highly complex, involving cognitive, evaluative, and praxiological considerations, and is further complicated by the context of our times, which Albiac (1986) has characterized as a "putrid, stupid time, of wretched and pygmies, of the decline of heroes, gallows of gods dead, celebrating stupidity and intellectual mediocrity." The triad of risk, aporia, and subversion, all carrying highly suggestive semantic resonances, have historically surrounded José Martí, an ecumenical, multifunctional, and intertemporal symbol.

Nonetheless, in present-day Cuba, the dominant ideology's excessive use of apologetics and propaganda, which has appropriated the contents of Martí's cultural *ethos*, appears to have diminished its semiotic and praxiological efficacy in various social strata. This has exacerbated a socio-spiritual issue that Cintio Vitier identified in the mid-1990s: a growing trend of worldviews that distance themselves from and devalue Martí's cultural and ideological heritage, not only in specific social sectors but also, fundamentally, in younger generations. In Vitier's view, "areas of disbelief and disenchantment among young people, both illiterate and belonging to intellectual minorities, are noticeable regarding José Martí, who is the center of our history and our revolutionary cultural project (...) our safest table of salvation" (Vitier, 1994). The historical and worldview status of José Martí in the contemporary hermeneutical horizon is paradoxical: as an original thinker and cultural symbol of Latin American modernity, he continues to generate dialectics of meaning regarding universal problems of current human civilization; however, in the national framework, he is increasingly becoming a signifier devoid of meaning.

Four historical conditions have contributed to this complex exegetical situation. Firstly, the media's continuous ideological instrumentalization of José Martí's thought. Different worldview tendencies, such as liberalism, nationalism, Latin Americanism, humanism, Marxism, Stalinism, anti-communism, annexationism, postmodernism, and his projects of cultural hegemonization have biasedly appropriated his thought. This fact has led to a historical erosion of the contents of Martí's ideology, which has lost its semiotic and praxiological efficacy among various population segments of the national community. Secondly, Martí's ideology has to coexist with the seductive signs of the overwhelming postmodern *ethos*, creating a complex and contradictory situation. Thirdly, Martí's high linguistic and semiotic complexity in his discursive contents poses challenges for the current reader, marked by creative intertextuality, semantic density, the resignification of heterogeneous symbolic universes, ideotematic hybridizations, and intra-epochal and inter-epochal polylogism. Lastly, recurring historical prejudices and ideopolitical myths have acted as hermeneutical obstacles among different generations of scholars and readers who have approached the praxis and thought of the National Hero of Cuba.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a creative reinterpretation of Martí's ideology. Such an approach can broaden the horizon of critical understanding of the historical weight of the current civilizational crisis, and the aporetic functional and qualitative state of the Cuban nation amid the complicated modern dialectics of the contemporary and modern world. This dialectic has led humanity to a historical existential limit situation, which has caused the contemporary human being

to become a desperate and inauthentic entity, subject to standardization, impersonality, and a lack of transcendence. Such an entity has fallen into a deep ontological abyss, subsumed in an acute awareness of emptiness (Heidegger, 2005). Thus, it is a fundamental methodological premise to understand the historical need for an inter-epochal reading of José Martí's spiritual and moral *ethos* to build a synoptic vision of the universe of conditioning factors and problems of the time in which this interpretive activity and process will be rooted and formative.

The current era is characterized by a socio-historical context that presents a remarkably complex, ambivalent, and contradictory cultural and ideological face for human existence. The ideals, beliefs, and values that inspire it and the deep meaning that animates it is also subject to change. Axiological mutability, lack of worldview, existential emptiness, ideological disorientation, and spiritual dissatisfaction are distinctive features of the life projects of many inhabitants of the Cuban cultural-historical framework. This critical temporal situation is a mediated and complex response to classical Modernity's historical circumstances and sociocultural processes. These processes have evolved to condition and shape human life in contemporary societies, leading to the following socio-critical manifestations:

The current era is characterized by an acute crisis of the Western cultural *ethos* and its axial matrices of meaning, such as Christianity, anthropocentrism, humanism, rationalism, liberalism, Marxism, positivism, historicism, progressivism, universalism, scientism, and industrialism. Furthermore, a disproportionate expansion of scientific-technological development has resulted in a simultaneous impoverishment of the spiritual world in human beings. Additionally, there is an extreme accentuation of the absolute antagonism between the natural environment and the techno-economic development processes operating in the hegemonic social systems. Human life and its experiences are split into objective reality dichotomies, such as the real world, apparent world, concrete life, virtual life, real identity, fictitious or prefabricated identity, natural language, and artificial languages. There is a historical transition from a reductionist and exclusive *imago hominis* towards a more democratic representation of the human being that is open to the human race's objective complexity, diversity, and contradictions. Moreover, there is a progressive dismantling of enlightened reason and Western Modernity's socio-political ideals and values, including freedom, equality, fraternity, democracy, socialism, solidarity, altruism, humanitarianism, and progress. In recent decades, there has been an increase in the accelerated commodification of social productions and cultural creations of the contemporary being.

Other manifestations include the emerging hegemony of *imago* centrism and its pseudo-culture that displaces written culture and the living word in interpersonal relationships. There is a regression and impoverishment of creative thought in the face of dominant forms of reductionist and uniformizing thought. Furthermore, there is an uncritical acceptance and existential conformism to the stupefying effects on human life of products and practices predominating in kitsch pseudo-aesthetics. There is a homogenizing serialization of normative ideals of beauty, and the annual cultural differences standardize the time's existential projects and anthropological ideals.

The sustained crisis of the historical legitimacy of socio-humanistic knowledge and its models of understanding sociocultural reality is also a concern. An accentuated degradation of the moral *ethos* and the behavioral modus of political subjects of the present time persists, with the perception of existing in a situation of ethical and axiological obsolescence. Moral integrity is an anachronism in contemporary political praxis. Lastly, the contradictory coexistence and unbridled competition between the main centers of world power resulted in relationships of profound and lasting influence in historical-cultural regions and geo-economic and political scenarios of high strategic value in international relations in force at the time.

2. Methodology

The historical-logical method was one of the main methods used in this study, allowing for the cross-sectional analysis of the subject in question and the systematization of the most relevant elements under study (Torres-Miranda, 2020). The heuristic method helped develop the analysis, understanding, and explanation of the philosophical and religious spirituality of José Martí. The dialectical and historical-philosophical methods were also utilized, allowing for an analysis of the epochal problems that require the critical reflexivity of the National Hero of Cuba. These methods enabled the analysis of semantic inversion processes, semiotic complementarity, and sigmoidal interactions present in representative works such as “Prólogo al poema al Niágara,” “Cuadernos de Apuntes,” and “Emerson.” They also revealed the transgressive social functions that this form of spirituality and rationality fulfilled from an axiological, ideological, critical, prospective, and humanistic perspective.

To provide theoretical support for the study, a careful review of literary works by José Martí and other related authors was conducted. These works were determinants in establishing the philosophical and religious spirituality present in the cultural *ethos* of José Martí.

3. Results and discussion

Given the notable socio-historical contradictoriness and axiological criticality of the current era, the cultural *ethos* of Martí becomes more necessary and transcendent. Through its spiritual richness, authentic worldview, and prospective plurality, it provides historical perspective and axiological challenges for this critical contemporary existential historical situation while suggesting possible alternative solutions.

One significant element of José Martí’s spiritual and moral *ethos* is his original critical conception of the links between humankind, Nature, and liberating religiosity within Western Modernity. For Martí, one of the most distressing civilizing challenges for the modern human being was the alienating relationships of estrangement and destructive possession that his mediation with Nature signified.

In the 19th century, critical voices emerged that delegitimized these alienating tendencies of Western Capitalist Modernity, and José Martí is one of those transgressive voices. From a subversive hermeneutic that inverts the dominating subjectivism over the natural, he builds a dialectical model of understanding Nature that astonishes for its great futurity and exceptional axiological projection.

Martí represents Nature as a polyphonic text of significant structural complexity, linguistic density, biotic potential, and recurring semantic virtualities. It is a dialogical and multisystemic macro-subject, generator of various entities and languages, representative of the abiotic, the living, and the numinous, as he affirms:

[We witness] (...) the titanic dialogue between impatient man and Nature; the desperate cry of the son of a great unknown father who asks his mother (...) for the secret of his birth (...) [we contemplate] (...) the prophetic and gentlest understanding of the rebellious and ignorant man and the destructive and revealing Nature, (...) his tender marriage with the eternal (...) (Martí, 1997).

For this reason, “The word of God is nature, and nature has not yet favored any man with the full revelation of its mystery” “Tito Vignoli: The myth and science” (Martí 1997). This, then, is a semiotic linguistic *organum* that, with its plural communicative languages and codes, opens up horizons of understanding for readers enrolled in different temporalities and cultural loci, “The poem is in nature, mother of provide breasts, a wife who never despairs, the oracle that always responds, poet of a thousand languages, a magician who makes one understand what she does not say, comforter

who fortifies and embalms!” “El poema del Niágara” (Martí, 1997). Nature appears, thus, as an encompassing metaphysical entity that acts from its integrating historicity as a generating source of ontological harmony, aesthetic experience, and moral perfection and as a peculiar theophanic topo: a specific place of manifestation, internal reflection, and reciprocal communication of the divine, the human and the cosmic, as expressed in his Guatemalan philosophical notes:

Invisible, then, God; Contradictory the judgments of men, and permanent and solemn Nature, the testimony of that is not adducible, nor the existence of it detailed; It is not wise to go to the trials of men, because they exist to try to destroy themselves; let us get closer to the great mother; let us open the excellent book, [Nature] whose pages the centuries have written, whose acts and deeds are oceans, whose august knowledge is lost in the intangible and invisible “Apuntes y fragmentos sobre filosofía” (p. 205) (Martí, 2001).

In his article, Melchor Ocampo states:

Nature is limitless, and man desires the limitless and vast. The small is the synthesis of the great; every creature is a summary of the created. Because all forces agree in Nature, all social forces must live together in humanity. The universe has sublime concord; thus, concord is the law for those who live on earth (Ocampo, 1979).

In one of his Guatemalan fragments, José Martí articulates his cognitive concerns through a conscious investigative attitude as he questions where to critically investigate “the origin and knowledge of the causes of things in themselves”. He argues that God cannot be the answer but is not the God of dogmatic religions. According to Martí, “(...) they have taught us to believe in a God who is not the true one” (Martí, 2001). Martí also rejects the “paralyzing faith of human reasoning” because “in the name of faith much has been lied to” (Martí, 2001). Martí then poses the question, who shall we ask? He answers himself and affirms that we should look towards Nature, which he considers an objective source of knowledge about what exists. Martí asserts that Nature manifests, in a mediated way, the dialectical tension between the human, finite, and contingent, and the infinite, necessary, and absolute, as seen from the diversity of entities and forms that structurally constitute it.

Let us examine this unique definition of the natural that José Martí presents:

What is Nature? The wild pine, old oak, the rough sea, the rivers that go to the sea as we men go to Eternity: Nature is the ray of light that penetrates the clouds and becomes a rainbow; the human spirit that approaches and elevates with the ideals, clouds of the soul, and becomes blessed. Nature is everything that exists, in all forms, spirits, and bodies; slave streams in its channel; slave roots in the earth; feet, enslaved people like roots; souls, fewer enslaved people than feet. The mysterious, intimate world, the wonderful external world, how much it is, deformed or formed, luminous or dark, near or far, vast or rickety, liquefied or earthy, regulate everything, measured everything except the sky and the soul of men-virtue is Nature (Martí, 2001).

According to José Martí, the nature category functions as a theoretical representation worldview with a highly fluid structure, vast epistemological breadth, and considerable semantic complexity. It creatively integrates heterogeneous contents from multiple areas, such as theosophy, philosophy, ontology, aesthetics, axiology, and more. As a result, there are links of elective affinity between José Martí’s post-reductionist modus of presenting the natural and classical figures in the European intellectual tradition of natural interpretation, including Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, San Francisco de Asís, Maister Eckhart, Nicolás de Cusa, Baruch Spinoza, JJ Wagner, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei, and especially Fichte, Schelling, and Krause.

Moreover, it is important to note that the term “transcendent naturalism” is used by José Martí from a philosophical-aesthetic perspective. It is understood as a worldview and hermeneutical attitude where Nature and its constituent elements are valued positively as entities of high spiritual significance for human beings, their socio-historical essence, and the meaning of life and existential projects. This naturalistic worldview historically involved the glorification and exaltation of the

natural in aesthetic-philosophical trends and movements such as pantheism, romanticism, transcendentalism, Krausism, and symbolism in modern Western culture.

Despite its enunciative complexity, José Martí's definition of Nature is original for the modern era, which is characterized by its dominant scientific semiosis. Unlike the modern era's focus on empirical data and scientific facts, Martí attempts to encompass the diversity of constitutive elements present in poetic, philosophical, religious, and scientific languages. He does this through his poetic and artistic sensitivity and philosophical-religious reflexivity, recognizing the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all elements in Nature.

According to Martí, Nature is a totum complexus that consists of elements with degrees of relative autonomy, complex concatenations, and relationships of analogy and constant personal reflexivity. This approach recognizes the dialectical totality of Nature, which means that Martí's rationality covers more areas than just the terrestrial human. He believes that Nature has sacred, axiological, and cosmic meanings that are significant beyond empirical data and scientific facts. Therefore, José Martí's definition of Nature is unique because it encompasses multiple expressive and semantic resources from various languages, recognizing the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all elements in Nature, and acquiring sacred, axiological, and cosmic meanings beyond empirical data and scientific facts

It is now understood why, during his prolonged exile in the United States in the 1880s, this dialectical perspective with a panentheistic view on the links between the natural and the divine was sustained as a consistent worldview in his ontological conception of reality. He stated that "(...) God (...) is in all of Nature (...)" and that "(...) God does not need to be defended: nature defends him (...)" and further declared that "(...) You love a God who penetrates you and prevails over everything. It seems like a profanation to give the Creator of all beings and all that he has created, the form of only one of the beings" (pp. 162, 327) (Martí, 2001).

The previous fragment exhibits a dialectical and panentheistic bias, as José Martí uniquely portrays a set of progressive philosophical and religious presuppositions, including the worldview of the sacred, the dialectical unity between the natural world and God, the omnipresence of the divine in the plurality of natural and cosmic entities, and a polyvalent image of the man-God nexus. These ideas were present in European dialectical thinkers such as Amalrico, Juan Escoto Erígena, Paracelsus, Nicolás de Cusa, Herder, Goethe, and Fichte from the early Middle Ages to the incipient Modernity, who began to challenge the prevailing image of Nature as a corrupting context within Euro-Western Christendom. Additionally, other heterodox assumptions of Martí's worldview that support his ideology, as well as the image and model of the world it presupposes, include critical questioning of ecclesial mediation in the man-God nexus and denial of the principle of religious authority as a source of absolute validity in the theoretical activity of human beings.

Martí does not exhibit a negative attitude of estrangement towards Nature. Rather, his dialectical panentheism enables him to critique and overcome instrumentalizing ideologies and quantifying behaviors towards Nature that were prevalent among his contemporaries. One classic example of these contradictory tendencies in modern epistemic attitudes towards Nature is the British positivist Herbert Spencer, who José Martí criticizes for his reductionist anthropocentrism, desacralizing objectivism, and atomizing vision of reality. In one lucid fragment, Martí questions Spencer's worldview and highlights its limitations:

From paying too much attention to the part, his eyes have become so vitiated that he no longer encompasses the whole with natural ease; therefore, with so much studying human harmonies, he has come to lose interest, and faith, consequently, in the vastest and most fundamental of Nature. [To Spencer] (...) the study of the extra-human seems to him a thing of luxury, distant and infertile, to which man can surrender when he has already achieved his fortune, in what he errs, because if they are not fed in the sincere faith spiritual that the love, knowledge, and contemplation of Nature originate, men will

come to earth, despite all the props with which reason reinforces them, like statues of dust. “Herbert Spencer” (p. 47) (Martí, 1997).

The dynamic correlations and structural complementarity between the anthropocentric attitude, the will to power over Nature, and the historical emergence of modern Western subjectivity have been widely discussed. The consciousness of the unconscious impulse or the will to power over Nature is the *primum movens* of the individual modern being and structurally precedes modern science and technology. It is a pre-analogical antecedent to scientific thought and intuition. Nature is experienced a priori by an organism inclined towards domination and therefore susceptible to being dominated and controlled. As a result, work is perceived as a power and a provocation in the struggle with Nature, and it is viewed as the exertion of resistance. In such an attitude towards work, the images of the objective world appear as symbols for points of aggression, and action is presented as domination, while reality is viewed as resistance (Scheler, 1948).

To overcome this critical spiritual situation, modern subjectivity must, according to Martí, reconnect with its original matter, Nature, from a relational perspective and a dignifying axiological sense. This perspective transcends the absolute oppositions, instrumentalizing mediations, and historical degradations established between humanity and the natural environment by western bourgeois sociality and its pragmatic commodification rationality. According to him, focusing solely on peoples’ fortune and terrestrial ends corrupts them, even with the best intention of healing them. Peoples who do not believe in the perpetuation and universal meaning, the priesthood, and the glorious ascent of human life crumble like a crust gnawed by mice. As Martí critiques Herbert Spencer’s worldview, he highlights the importance of reconnecting with Nature and finding meaning beyond material pursuits (p. 47) (Martí, 1997).

In the face of growing axiological deficits, modern humans have only one effective survival alternative: to generate a debate of affinity and reconciliation with Nature that overcomes the dialectics of obsessive accumulation, petrifying estrangement, and destructive possession prevailing in modern bourgeois society. According to Martí, there is a moral character in all elements of Nature as they all enliven this character in humans since everyone produces it and has it. Thus, truth is beauty in judgment, goodness in affections, and sheer beauty in art. Art is nothing more than Nature created by humans; this intermix never leaves. Nature prostrates itself before humans and gives them their differences so that they may perfect their judgments, wonders, will to imitate, and demands, educating their spirit at work, setbacks, and the virtue that overcomes them. Martí draws on Emerson’s ideas and highlights the importance of connecting with Nature and its beauty to lead a fulfilling life (p.29) (Martí, 1997).

In the preceding fragments, Martí challenges the chrematistic aura and reifying imaginary established by capitalist modernity concerning Nature. He portrays it as a valuable subject per se, transcendent to its inert and instrumental thingness. Martí represents Nature as a constant need for self-transcendence in human beings, akin to a particular situation of realization, mediation, and mutual inter-understanding of the cosmic, the sacred, and authentic human spirituality. The all-encompassing entity enables humans to affirm and express their complex essence and multiple identities by dialoguing and inter-recognizing themselves with the infinite and eternal from their contingent and biologically finite existence. As Havel notes, Nature is a means of self-transcendence for humans, and Martí similarly highlights its importance in facilitating this process:

Nature gives man his objects, which are reflected in his mind and govern his speech, in which each object is transformed into a sound. The stars are messengers of beauty, and the sublime is perpetual. The forest returns man to reason and faith, and it is perpetual youth. The forest rejoices like a good deed. Nature inspires, heals, consoles, strengthens, and prepares man for virtue. Furthermore, man is not complete, nor does he reveal himself, nor does he see the invisible, but rather in his intimate relationship with Nature. Thus (...) the perfect religion is in Nature. Religion and life are in Nature. “Emerson” (p.29) (Martí, 1997).

Martí does not conceive of an alienating relationship between humans, Nature, and God. He believes that each quality of humans is represented in an animal of Nature, and that trees speak to us in a language that we understand. When something leaves the night in the ear, the heart tormented by doubt dawns in peace. The appearance of truth suddenly illuminates the soul, much like the sun illuminate's Nature. The morning makes the birds chirp and speaks to humans, while the evening twilight gathers the wings of birds and the words of humans. Virtue, to which everything conspires in Nature, leaves humans alone, as if they had finished their task, or as a curve that re-enters itself, and they no longer have to walk and finish the circle. Martí draws on Emerson's ideas, emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, Nature, and spirituality, and how they all work in harmony to create a sense of peace and fulfillment (p.29) (Martí, 1997).

According to José Martí, the problems discussed above are a specific manifestation of the critical axiological situation experienced by modern humanity. This situation is a complex expression of the abrupt epochal changes, which implies profound changes in existential attitudes and spiritual references to the traditional. As Martí notes, modern humans are faced with a unique set of challenges, and they must adapt their attitudes and spiritual beliefs accordingly to navigate these changes:

Bad times, in which love and the exercise of greatness are outstanding and unusual merits. Times of re-establishment and reshaping (...), where all the images that were previously revered are discredited and naked (...), where God is confused, and the woman is out of control and stunned (...), times of tumult and pain (...) of anxiety of spirit (...) for the confusion that the change of states, faith and government brings (...) "El poema del Niágara" (pp. 136-165) (Martí, 1997).

In other words, this is an era where the increasing value of the material world directly corresponds to the devaluation of humanity itself (Marx, 1984). Martí offers a lucid and challenging critique of this intra-epochal issue, highlighting the detrimental effects of modernity's focus on materialism and the consequent devaluation of human beings:

The decomposition and, consequently, the uncertainty is characteristic of this time: there is nothing that stands firmly on its feet, with severe faith in itself: they live for tomorrow because the day after tomorrow is doubtful. Everything in our path is slippery and dangerous, and the ice sheet that holds us down has become even thinner; we all feel the warm and fearful breath of the thaw; where we tread, soon no one will be able to pass (Nietzsche, 1980).

Western modernity is a contradictory temporal space marked by sociocultural alienation and fetishist investment processes, particularly in its regressive tendencies. As Marx noted, "everything solid vanishes into thin air" in the face of the powerful and dynamic historical praxis of the Western bourgeois subject. This praxis has destroyed ancient worlds of life, sacralizing worldviews, and pre-modern cultural *ethos*, thereby exacerbating the contradictions within Western modernity.

Wherever it has conquered power, the bourgeoisie has destroyed feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations (...). He has drowned the sacred ecstasy of religious fervor, chivalric enthusiasm, and sentimentality of the petty-bourgeois in the icy waters of selfish calculation. / Has made personal dignity a simple exchange value. / The bourgeoisie has stripped family relationships of their veil of tender sentimentality and reduced them to superficial money relationships (Marx & Engels, 2004).

For Martí, Marx, and Nietzsche, the modern age is marked on the ethical, axiological, and worldview planes by three highly contradictory socio-historical manifestations of spirituality and human existence: disturbance, instability, and aporetic permanence of existing socio-spiritual relationships. There is an emerging crisis of ideological legitimacy and deficit of meaning in current historical and moral values and ideals, resulting in spiritual dissatisfaction, vital boredom, and worldview uncertainty in the subjectivities and existential projects of the time. These issues are the main matrices of the meaning of the Western cultural *ethos*, which are subjected to fierce criticism, including Christianity, liberalism, humanism, rationalism, scientism, and progressivism. In light of these complicated and problematic times, José Martí offers insightful commentary and critique:

This age has no belief - that it has no ideals: that one religion has been overthrown without raising another on its ruins; that the soul needs an object for its indomitable religious sentiment. This must be answered. It does. We are bruised but close to the cure. Twenty centuries are not thrown down without our eyes being clouded by the dust of the ruins (Martí, 2001).

Conscience and *duty* already seem so hollow of meaning and unusual –that I, who sacrifice everything to the divine spirit that they enclose– say them with fear, and I hesitate to use them as one who does not want to tarnish his thought with words empty of meaning. –This fear of the abuse they have done to themselves (...) Since the purest and most serious words have become farmers’ cries, virtuous men are afraid to show they are virtuous (Martí, 1953). The conclusion that such an epochal state of spiritual, moral disorientation and critical axiological transition leads to The two most severe faults of our modern moral life; the ease of adultery; the weakness of conscience (Martí, 1963).

The modern age, civilization, affects inverse errors. It separates the objective essence of man as something material and external to him. Although it is radically different, it contains a fundamental error: it does not give due importance to the factual content of human life. It does not perceive that it constitutes the actual reality of man because, through it, his life is mainly determined (...) (Marx and Engels, 2004).

Thus, due to this ambivalent spiritual and historical situation:

The antagonism in the social relations of our time is a palpable, overwhelming, and incontrovertible fact (Marx & Engels, 2004). (...), [then:] a continuous revolution in production, an incessant upheaval of all social conditions, a constant movement, and insecurity distinguish the bourgeois age from all previous ones. All close and moldy social relations, with their train of beliefs and ideas accepted and venerated for centuries, are broken; the new ones become old before they can ossify. Everything stagnant and stagnant disappears; all that is sacred is desecrated, and men, in the end, men are forced to calmly consider their conditions of existence and reciprocal relationships (Marx & Engels, 2004).

That fellow Prometheus of Trier, who is (the aporetic) Frederick Nietzsche, will say that it is the time of radical revaluation –that of the investment of values–, within “(...) our [Western bourgeois] civilization that is agitating as if he wanted to provoke a spiritual catastrophe (...)” (Nietzsche, 1980) “Don’t you hear the rumor of the gravediggers who bury God? Do we not yet perceive anything of the divine decomposition? (...) The gods also decompose (...)” (Nietzsche, 1980) for this situation, “(...) there is something fundamentally frustrated in man (...)” since life passes “(...) tremendous tension of contradictions, (...) in a world devoid of meaning (...), a false world, which represents a constantly changing falsehood that never approaches the truth” (Nietzsche, 1980) because “(...) God succumbed to his compassion for men (...) God is dead!” (Nietzsche, 1955), at the hands of the impersonal rationalization and the overwhelming desacralization and secularization of the natural world and human life, prevailing in classical Modernity.

On the other hand, there are emerging socio-anthropological tendencies, pathological symptoms, and acute effects of this antinomic and convulsive temporality in human existence. These include the fetishizing quantification and pedestrian salability of human creations, the continuous dynamization and schizoid dissociation of social existence, the prevalence of an impoverished pseudo-spirituality of money accumulation and quantifying possession, the depersonalization and desensitization of human individuals, the profound alienation and commodification of interhuman relations, and the contradictory requalification and homogenizing serialization of human life. Martí will reveal more about these issues in the following fragments, particularly about the existential emptiness and prevailing worldview uncertainty, as well as the challenge of finding an authentic meaning amidst the deep axiological mutability (Heidegger, 2005):

I feel like anguish in the marrow (Martí 2001). / What anguish-what restlessness, what inability to sit? –It is the visit of the unknown! / What a hit in the brain! What a scare in the chest! To demand what does not come! That not knowing what one wants! That to feel at the same time delight and nausea in

the spirit, nausea of the day that dies, the delight of the dawn! (...). / My whole life has been an hour of anxiety. "El poema del Niágara" (p.160) (Martí, 1997).

Thus, historical life is suddenly suspended, and the nascent institutions are still new and confused, unable to give of themselves. We contemplate the pains of modern man amid a reworking of the world of men, where new life goes like spirited steeds on the roads, pursued by barking dogs. This is a time of doubting, alarm, questioning, restless and warlike personal life, febrile intimate life, not well-fired up, amidst the blinding of the sources and the cloudiness of the gods. In this ambivalent epochal context, as Martí writes in "El poema del Niágara" (pp. 164-170), "No one today has their faith secure. Even those who believe are delusional. The same people who write faith bite, harassed by beautiful interior beasts, the fists with which they write (pp. 164-170) (Martí, 1997).

Bad times, in which there is no more art than that of filling the barns of the house well, and sitting on a golden chair, and living all golden; Without seeing that human Nature does not have to change how it is, and by taking the gold outside, one does not do but run out of any gold inside, (...) In bad times, in which priests no longer deserve praise or veneration of poets, not even poets have yet begun to be priests! "El poema del Niágara" (pp. 163-170) (Martí, 1997).

With the preceding works, Martí complements and enriches the lucid epochal diagnoses of his contemporaries through an original style of thought, which he apprehends and interprets in a poetic-philosophical key. This style captures what Marx calls the actual movement of the Modern Era: its disturbing dialectical fluidity, sterile acceleration of the adequate time of human life, anguishing ontological complexity, overwhelming axiological mutability, anarchic rhythmicity of social production, enormous techno-scientific potentiality, and psychotic structural mediativity. Martí recreates the distinctive signs of this remarkable epochal dynamism by dialectically correlating three classic symbols of the Western cultural *ethos* in the following sentence from "El poema del Niágara": "Ya Luzbel, Ya Prometeo, Ya Ícaro. It is our time in front of our Nature. (p. 170) (Martí, 1997).

On the other hand, José Martí's demystifying understanding of the modern era, along with his complex socio-anthropological, economic, and axiological intermediations, spiritually unite him with other masters of suspicion such as Baudelaire, Yorck von Wartenburg, Kierkegaard, Grillparzer, Emerson, and Thoreau, in a common aspiration for emancipation. Their goal is to reveal the historical despair, psychological anguish, and existential uncertainty experienced by modern human beings who are trapped in a reified and inauthentic ontological situation. Martí describes this situation as one where life becomes discolored, encased, catchy, post-acquired, dolled, frozen, metallic, and a light war:

Human life, due to the moral straits to which it condemns, loses greatness and significance every day in my eyes. What existence is this, where unique gifts to do good and a determined will to do it are not enough? -Where do random conditions of coloration and atmosphere decide the transcendence and usefulness of the noblest human forces? -where the absence of all vices, and fervent love and austere practice of all virtues, are not enough to achieve peace of the soul, nor to leave behind-for the immense pleasure of doing good-not for childish vanity to achieve fame-a visible and lasting mark?- (Martí, 2001).

Baudelaire, the tremendous subversive and the cursed poet, was deeply affected by the profound sense of vital boredom. He shared José Martí's critical understanding of the devastating and anguishing spiritual existential situation that afflicts modern humanity. Baudelaire once stated: "Except for Chateaubriand, Balzac, Stendhal, Mérimée, Vigny, Flaubert, Banville, Gautier, and Leconte de Lisle, all the modern rabble horrifies me. The horror virtue: the horror vice. The fluid horror style. The horror progress (Del Casal, 1963).

Count Yorck von Wartenburg, who was marked by a deep anthropological pessimism, complemented the previous judgments by making a statement of his own:

The waves caused by the eccentric principle that gave rise to a new epoch more than 400 years ago

seem to me to have been extended and leveled to the extreme, knowledge to have progressed to the abolition of itself, man to be torn from himself to the point of that he no longer sees himself. Modern man, that is, man since the Renaissance, is ready to be buried (...)

Likewise, in deep spiritual affinity with our Anahuac, the Danish Kierkegaard will say: “Not only in the domain of commerce but also in the world of ideas, our age is organizing a regular liquidation sale. Everything is put up for sale, so it can be doubted if in the end there will be someone who wants to offer a price (...)” (Kierkegaard, 1950) The entire existence distresses me (...) everything becomes inexplicable and above all, myself (...) then:

Worldliness is the product of those men who (if we can use this expression) pledge themselves to the world. They use their talents, accumulate money, carry on worldly businesses, cleverly calculate; they are perhaps mentioned in history, but they are not; Spiritually understood, they have no being of their own, no being of their own for the sake of which they could venture everything, no being of their own before God - no matter how selfish they may be (Kierkegaard, 2017).

Of this dramatic dehumanizing situation in which modern subjectivity exists -and its concomitant utilitarian individualism, the poet Franz Grillparzer will alert in his classic *Libussa*: Self-interest becomes your idol, / Egoism in the expression of your Nature; / You will sail through unknown seas / Looking for valuable everything that the world has to offer you / And you will consume everything and be consumed by all things (Grillparzer, 1968). In complete ideo-thematic agreement with Grillparzer, the philosopher-poet Emerson –Martí’s spiritual brother– will recreate the irrational fetishist investment, which for socio-spiritual relationships means modern alienation, because, due to it: The knight serves the horse, / and the Gentleman to the beef, / the merchant serves his bag, / and the diner the steak / It is the day of the property, / weave cloth and corn to grind, / In the mountain are things, / riding humanity (Emerson, 1960).

For his part, the transcendentalist Thoreau, in Walden, will warn:

Get up free of care before dawn, and seek adventure (...). That is making a living is not your business but your sport. Enjoy the Earth, but do not own it. For lack of faith and spirit, men are where they are, buying and selling, consuming their lives as servants: (...) most men lead lives of quiet despair (Thoreau, 1945).

The lucid National Hero of Cuba addressed the “modern human problems” that give rise to an apparent, schizoid, and pseudo-human existence in modern life. He discussed the reifying historical conditions and alienating social forces that shape this existence, giving it an absurd and irrational sense. Regarding these issues, he stated:

More, how much work does it cost to find oneself! The man hardly enters the enjoyment of reason from his cradle obscures him; he has to undo it to truly enter himself (...)

There is no more difficult task than this of distinguishing in our existence the catchy and post-acquired life from the spontaneous and pre-natural; what comes with man, what those who have come before him add to him with their lessons, legacies, and ordinances. Under the pretext of completing the human being, they interrupt him. As soon as he is born, the philosophies, the religions, the passions of the parents, and the political systems are already standing next to his cradle with large and robust bandages on their hands. Furthermore, they tie it and anger him; man is already a bridled horse for all his life on earth. So is the land now a vast abode of masked men.

It comes to life like wax, and chance empties us into ready-made molds. The created conventions deform actual existence, and true life becomes like a silent current that slides invisible under the apparent life, not felt by the same person he does his cautious work (...) The first work of the man is to win back. It is urgent to return men to themselves: it is urgent to get them out of the bad government of the convention that suffocates or poisons their feelings, accelerates the awakening of their senses, and recharges their intelligence with a flow, pernicious, alien, cold and false (...) It is up to each man to rebuild life: as soon as he looks at himself, he rebuilds it. “El poema del Niágara” (p. 168) (Martí, 1997).

4. Conclusions

José Martí possessed a penetrating intra-epochal estimate, which made him one of the most transgressive and authentic critical voices of what Habermas referred to as the philosophical discourse of Modernity. (Habermas, 1985). Martí exhibited an explicit hermeneutical attitude as a creative individual, actively and committedly interpreting the process of self-understanding that this temporal stage, ideological process, and sui generis cultural sensitivity generate about themselves. He manifested a coherent desire to dialectically overcome the automythologizing epochal circumstances, which he perceived as enslaving reifying mediations, seductive fetishes of the profit-seeking spirit, and imaginary praise for mystification and concealment. In his opinion, we exist in this context:

(...) At a time when there are no high ideals, a time of criticism, ignorance of the definitive, lost in the constant change of ideas, a time of blindness. It is not believed, or there is no courage to say that it is believed, or it is believed little and with fear of believing wrong, in superhuman and great things. The general cult of wealth paid for by all brings everyone dazzled. The man believes, in deception, that his primary, if not his only object on earth, is to accumulate a fortune. Furthermore, anything other than selfish dedication seems very reprehensible wrongdoing. (...) I cannot think without anger about such degradation of human dignity” (Martí, 2001)

From this interpretive obsession, Martí, concerning his epochal framework, his persistent desire to understand critically, “(...) the unusual combination of greatness and danger, of grandeur *et misère*, that characterizes the Modern Age (...)” (Taylor, 2006), and of the hermeneutical challenges that this evaluative attitude of Martí implies, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor will say:

This question, (...) that of obtaining a renewed understanding of Modernity, and with it, managing to understand the impressive transformations of society and culture in the course of the last three centuries (...) continues to worry us. Modernity is (...) part of the ambitious undertaking that involves articulating and writing a history of a modern identity because (...) it is not possible to understand ourselves if we do not address that history (Taylor, 2006).

To fully grasp the complexity and richness of the Modern Age, which gives identity history its full meaning, we must first recognize the extent to which we are immersed in it, despite any attempts to reject it. Secondly, we must acknowledge how superficial, partial, and biased our judgments about it tend to be (Taylor, 2006). Thanks to this subverting attitude towards Western Modernity, Martí was able to apprehend and reveal its ambivalent concrete identity as a contradictory temporal space, with multiple and schizotypal historical faces. He also understood its irrational and hegemonic bourgeois sociality based on a critical understanding of the practical possibilities, objective contradictions, and socio-historical forces that sustain and configure it as a singular epochal framework.

From this existential attitude, marked by a deep commitment to real human emancipation and a critical stance towards human objectification, which, in its modern and contemporary evolution, reproduces coercive functions and alienating senses, José Martí’s prosecution emerged and developed within the Western religious hegemony and the modern capitalist *ethos*. His criticism encompassed multiple purposes present in his thought and writing, ranging from the well-known political criticisms to those of a philosophical, religious, poetic, or scientific nature. This confirms his intellectual greatness and the constant futurity present in his texts.

Finally, José Martí was a prominent Cuban thinker and writer who lived in the 19th century and was known for his critique of modern Western society. Martí’s ideas were centered around the concept of epochal critique, which involved a critical analysis of the values and beliefs that underpin Western modernity. Martí advocated for a naturalistic religiosity, whereby individuals can connect

with the divine through Nature and daily life. Martí also proposed the deconstruction of the Western modern ethos, which involved dismantling power structures and modes of thought that perpetuate modern society. Martí's ideas remain relevant today and have influenced contemporary thinkers.

Limitations

In the study “José Martí: Epochal Critique, Naturalistic Religiosity, and Deconstruction of the Western Modern Ethos”, it is important to consider some limitations. Firstly, the study focuses solely on the ideas of José Martí, which could limit the understanding of other historical and cultural contexts related to the critique of Western modern society. Additionally, while the study provides a valuable interpretation of Martí's ideas, no empirical research is conducted to verify their validity and applicability. Lastly, the study focuses on Martí's specific historical context, which may limit the applicability of his ideas in contemporary contexts..

Authors' contribution

Ariel Zaldívar Batista: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Writing the Original Draft, Review, and Editing.

Aldo Enamorado Rodríguez: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Review, and Editing.

Competing interests

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