

# Notes on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Philosophy, Essay, Literary Criticism, and Theology

(1910-2017)

## Philosophy, Essay, and Literary Criticism

**José Vasconcelos** (José María Albino Vasconcelos Calderón; 1882-1959; México). He was a Mexican lawyer, politician, educator, and philosopher. He was president of the UNAM (National University of Mexico, 1920-1921) and Mexican Secretary of Public Education. His most important work is *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race; 1925).

**Alfonso Reyes Ochoa** (1889-1959; México: Poet, essayist, and diplomat, and he was one of the most distinguished Latin American philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was raised in a middle class family, and he was educated in Mexico City. Along with other young modern (not *modernista*) Mexican intellectuals such as Martín Luis Guzmán (see: => [20<sup>th</sup> century literature](#)) and José Vasconcelos (see below), he founded the famous Ateneo de la Juventud in 1909. This organization paralleled similar intellectual organizations in Europe and the Americas whose purpose was to foster advances in a broad range of cultural, scientific, and humanistic production and creativity including educational reforms in Mexico. The following year, Reyes published his first book, *Cuestiones estéticas*. (Aesthetic Questions), after which he began experimenting with literary works that foreshadowed the advent of Surrealism a decade later in France. Furthermore, at 24 years old he became the Secretary of the Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios (National School of Higher Studies) at Mexico's major university, the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico). And then, the same year (1913), three years into the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) he earned his law degree, after which he joined Mexico's diplomatic service in France. In 1914, he moved to Madrid, Spain, where he worked as a journalist, translator, literary critic, and creative writer. In 1915, he published one of his most well known essays, "Visión de Anáhuac (1519)". The novelist Carlos Fuentes took the title for his ground-breaking novel *La región más transparente* (1958) from this essay by Reyes. Between 1914 and 1939, he served in Mexico's diplomatic service in France, Spain, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1939, he was instrumental in creating what became Mexico's most prestigious university, the Colegio de México. Thereafter he wrote and taught. As a prolific literary critic he published major essays on Spanish literature (Spanish Golden Age, Baroque, Góngora), Mexican literature (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz), and French literature (Stéphane Mallarmé). He also published articles in major journals such as the *Revista de Filología Española*, *Revista de Occidente*, the *Revue Hispanique*. His complete works are published in Mexico in 26 volumes by the Fondo de Cultural Económica.

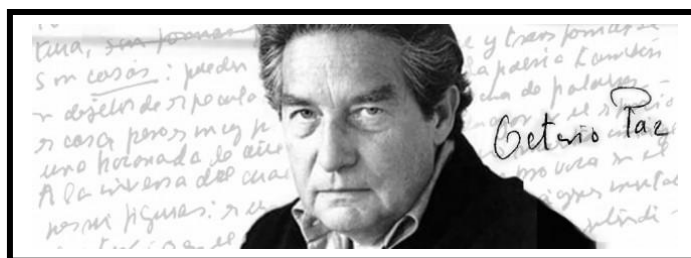
**Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre** (1895-1979; Perú). He was a Peruvian intellectual and politician, who was instrumental in creating the important political party Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA: it became the Partido Aprista Peruano). Haya de la Torre joined Mariátegui in shaping the populist political philosophy that continues to be significant in Perú.

**José Carlos Mariátegui** (Mariátegui La Chira; Peru; 1895-1930): journalist and political philosopher: *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (*Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, 1928). He was a Latin American (not Maoist or Soviet) Marxist.

**Afrânio Coutinho** (1911-2000; Brazil). Poet, essayist, philosopher. During the 1950s he was the instigator of Brazilian “New Criticism.” He also edited the Brazilian Portuguese version of Reader’s Digest. He taught at a number of Brazilian universities, and he published 30 works of essays, literary criticism, and literary theory. His principal books include *O humanismo, ideal de vida* (1938; Humanism, ideal of life), *Da crítica e da nova crítica* (1957; On Criticism and New Criticism), *Euclides, Capistrano e Araripe* (1959), *Caminhos do pensamento crítico* (Paths of Critical Thought, 1974), and *Do Barroco* (On the Baroque, 1994).

**Octavio Paz** (1914-1998; México): *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*; 1950). Poet, essayist, philosopher, diplomat. He won the Jerusalem Prize for Literature in 1977, the Spanish Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 1981, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1982, and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1990. He was raised in a Mexican middle class family, and then, like many young Latin American intellectuals, he studied for a law degree, but he dropped that pursuit for letters and work for Mexico’s diplomatic service. He was deeply influenced by major 20<sup>th</sup> century poets from Spain and also by T.S. Eliot. From 1932 to 1998 he founded a number of prestigious journals including *Barandal* (1932), *Taller* (1938), *Plural* (1970), and *Vuelta* (1975-98). Due to his work teaching peasants in a school in Yucatán and his own evolving social and political views he published his first extended poem in 1941 about Mexican peasants, “Entre la piedra y la flor” (Between the Stone and the Flower). In 1937, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), he attended the Second International Writers Congress in Defense of Culture. He supported the Republican side in this war, and his politics tended toward the progressive, but not revolutionary side, through the rest of his life. From 1937 to 1943, he was married to the great Mexican writer Elena Garro. From 1943 to 1968, Paz worked for the Mexican diplomatic service in the following places: New York City, Paris, India, Tokyo, and Geneva. In Paris he wrote his most famous and influential book *El laberinto de la soledad* (1952; *The Labyrinth of Solitude*). Paz’s basic argument in this book is that Mexican culture is oriented around individual solitude (a key concept in Existentialism) which leads Mexicans to hide their identity and persons behind masks. In 1954, he wrote a great poem “Piedra de sol” (Sun stone), and in 1957 he published the book-length essay *Libertad bajo palabra* (Freedom under oath or word, a play on words). One of his most significant works is

a scholarly book on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, titled *Las trampas de la fe* (1982; The Traps of Faith). From 1965 until his death he was married to Marie-José Tramini, a French woman. In October 1968 he protested the Mexican government's massacre of students in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco square in Mexico City by resigning from the diplomatic service. In the 1970s he held distinguished teaching chairs at Harvard University and Cambridge University. The Mexican government closed down his journal *Plural* in 1975, so he founded a new journal, *Vuelta*, which he edited until his death. After having spent a life supporting progressive causes and writing cutting edge poetry, from Surrealism to vanguardismo, to concrete poetry, he became estranged from the leftist community of Latin American intellectuals in the 1980s because Paz opposed the radical leftist group of the Sandinistas, who were fighting a guerrilla war against the Nicaraguan military dictatorship, whereas his life-long friend Carlos Fuentes supported the Sandinistas, who eventually won the Nicaraguan civil war). In addition, since the 1950s Paz wrote articles critical of the Soviet Union and the communist regime of Fidel Castro in Cuba. Furthermore, in 1988 Paz's journal *Vuelta* published an article by Enrique Krauze (see below) in which the latter criticized Fuentes. This article caused the break in the friendship between Paz and Fuentes and in addition caused Latin American intellectuals to criticize Paz as if he were deeply conservative.



**Enrique Krauze** (1947-present; Mexico): He is a historian, essayist, head of the publishing house Editorial Clío (history books), and editor of the cultural magazine *Letras Libres*. For twenty years he co-edited *Vuelta*, a major literary magazine headed by Octavio Paz. Plus he is on the board of directors of both the prestigious Spanish-based Instituto Cervantes and Televisa, the biggest media company in the Spanish-speaking world, including Univisión. He has been a professor at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), the prestigious El Colegio de México, and Oxford University. His books include *Siglo de caudillos* (1987; English: Mexico: *Biography of Power*) and *La presidencia imperial* (1997). Among his awards are: member of the Mexican Academy of History (1989); National College award; and Great Cross of Alfonso X el Sabio, awarded by the king of Spain (2003). For an example of his quality as an essayist see: => [Enrique Krauze](#).

## Liberation Theology

Camilo Torres (Colombia)

Jean-Bertrand Aristide (Haiti)  
Ernesto Cardenal (Nicaragua)  
Leonardo Boff (Brazil)  
Hélder Câmara (Brazil)  
Gustavo Gutiérrez (Perú)  
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