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The Philosophy of Ortega y Gasset Reevaluated

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Ortega and Germany

1 Germany: A Country That Works

Ortega's philosophical training in Germany covers a period that goes from 1905 to 1911. At the beginning of the year 1905, the 22-year-old Ortega makes his first journey to Germany, where he spent two semesters in Leipzig and Berlin. He returns to Spain in February of 1906, but, at the beginning of the Winter Semester of that same year, he returns to Germany, this time to Marburg. A last journey will take place in 1910. The reason Ortega offers to go to Germany is the need to study Kant's philosophy. In fact, many years later, in 1924, at the beginning of a remarkable paper on the occasion of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Kant's birth, Ortega writes: "During ten years I have lived inside Kantian thought; I breathed it like an atmosphere and it was, at the same time, my home and my prison. I have very much doubts that who has not done a similar thing may clearly see the meaning of our times." It is a very clear and honest statement. It points out the two main reasons for those three journeys: to understand Kant's thought, as a representative of those modern trends in philosophy from which Spain was kept apart, and to understand the meaning of Modern Times, which was illustrated by the spirit of Kantian philosophy.

Instead of writing "Ortega and Germany," as I did in the title of the present chapter, I could have written "Ortega and Spain." In fact it is not Germany that is a problem for Ortega, but Spain. However it is Germany, i.e., what Germany meant from the philosophical, cultural, social, and political point of view, which will enable Ortega to identify the Spanish problem (which he will diagnose as constituting Spain's departure from modernity), as well as the means to remedy it. This is, however, still a very schematic way of presenting the issue and in the long run somewhat misleading. Because the issue "Spain" arises for Ortega on several levels simultaneously.

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1. In the first place, a departure does not mean a delay in every aspects of culture. Thus, if Spanish science is weak or even non-existent, as Ortega argues in a controversy with Menendez Pelayo in a juvenile essay (Ortega y Gasset, 2004a: 90), Spanish art, and not only that of the *Siglo de Oro*, is far superior to all artistic achievements of the European countries that entered modernity and participated in its cultural achievements.
2. Secondly, according to Ortega, modernity—from which Spain was always kept apart since the seventeenth century—is coming to an end, and, under such conditions, what, from a certain point of view, may be considered a delay may otherwise be an opportunity, not only for Spain but also for Europe.
3. Next, if Germany produced the quintessential philosophical systems of modernity (we may generically call them "idealistic systems") and the world-visions corresponding to them, it also produced the system which allows philosophy to come out of it by the time modernity is coming to an end.
4. Finally, the system that makes it possible to get out of modernity—we will see that for Ortega, at least between 1912 and 1929, it is phenomenology—needs the contribution of the Spanish spirit to develop what it just promises (without fully keeping its promises) in the rich analyses it made possible.

The following analyses will thus cover only a small period of Ortega's intellectual life, roughly the one between the 1910 essay "Adam in Paradise" and the Lessons entitled *What is Philosophy?*. I will not be able to speak of later works in which the influence of German authors is also felt, such as *Man and People*, where the presence of Max Scheler and Alfred Schütz is strongly felt,[1] nor to address the reaction to Husserl's essays of 1936 on the crisis of the European sciences, which Ortega mistakenly put under the authorship of Eugen Fink.[2] And even for the period considered, my references to German culture will have to be very limited. I can't say nothing about Nietzsche or Simmel, which are very important for understanding *The Theme of our Time*, or about Martin Heidegger, without which the *Principles of Metaphysics*, from 1932 to 1933, cannot be fully understood. Nor can I mention Ortega's wonderful essay entitled *Ideas and Beliefs*, in which—not always very successfully—intersect the influences of phenomenology and of Wilhelm Dilthey's historicism. There is also another reason why I don't address Dilthey's philosophy here. Although he was still philosophically active in 1905, when Ortega went to Berlin, Ortega seems to have not met him nor attended his Lessons. Later, acknowledging strong similitudes between himself and Dilthey, he will claim that he developed his own ideas independently of the German thinker, with whose works he only several years later took acquaintance. I think there is no serious reason to doubt his testimony.[3]

[1]The relation of Ortega to these two German thinkers will be addressed in chapter "Ortega's Aesthetics", about Ortega's anthropology.

[2]Some sketchy references to this reaction will be made below, in chapter "Ortega's Social Philosophy", about Ortega and idealism.

[3]However, in a letter to his friend Federico de Onís, from 12 July 1912, Ortega already speaks of historical reason as an "extreme form" of pure reason. Javier Bonilla (2013: 95) calls this expression an echo of the philosophy of Dilthey. Perhaps the relations between Ortega and Dilthey need to be revisited. Anyway, in 1912 Ortega was probably acquainted with the problems of historical reason through the reading of Husserl's essay "Philosophy as a rigorous science." Of course, the fact that he read it doesn't mean that he agreed with Husserl's position regarding historicism.

2 The *Meditations on Quixote*

Basically, my purpose in the Part Two of this chapter is very modest and not very original: I intend, with the theme "Ortega and Germany," to shed some light on the genesis of the *Meditations on Quixote*, the first book Ortega published in 1914. What I aim to demonstrate is the following: the book of 1914 closes a first period of the debate between Ortega (at that time a partisan of the Europeanization of Spain) and the adversaries of the Europeanization, a debate that took place roughly between 1905 and 1912. Moreover, as I also intend to show, at the end of this period Ortega will slightly change his position and, although never departing from his initial purposes of redressing Spain, acknowledges the reasons underlying some of the arguments of his adversaries.

Since my subject is Ortega and Germany, perhaps readers would expect that I speak with some detail of the "Prologue to Germans," which Ortega thought of as an introduction to a German translation of a selection of his works in 1934, which was never published during his lifetime. But this text poses particular difficulties of interpretation, which make it, by itself, the theme for a chapter with more limited objectives than the present one. (Anyway, we will mention it in chapter "Ortega's Social Philosophy".) Although the "Prologue to Germans" is a very rich philosophical text, it contains a part of hindsight and self-interpretation that is not entirely accurate. By this I mean that Ortega attributes to himself ideas about Husserl's phenomenology as early as 1912, which in reality he will only come to express from 1929 onward, in part as a result of the reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. On the other hand, there is the problem of a non-coincidence between the original Spanish text, which is found in volume VIII of the critical edition of the *Complete Works*, and the text that was translated into German. In the latter, a few paragraphs have disappeared, in which Ortega makes an assessment about the historical significance of phenomenology and gives a wrong explanation for the relationship that exists between the Ego of the natural attitude—which performs[4] intentional acts directed at the things themselves—and the transcendental Ego, which, in Ortega's opinion, merely reflects about the former. This disappearance of a part which Ortega, however, did not erase in his own manuscript, can only have the following explanation. In 1934, during the time in which his text was being translated into German, Ortega paid a visit to Husserl and Eugen Fink in Freiburg, with whom he had lengthy conversations about phenomenology. One of the two must surely have pointed out to him the mistake he had made: reflection does not entail the loosing of executive consciousness. In consequence, Ortega must have decided to remove

[4]The Spanish word is *ejecuta* (executes). In chapters "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism" and "Ortega's Social Philosophy", addressing directly the relations of Ortega to phenomenology, we will see that "execution" is Ortega's successful attempt to translate the German word *Vollzug*.

from the German text that part which he then realized was not well. It would not be appropriate to address this very complicated issue here,[5] but in any case, I point out that the problem of the two Egos—not always identified by this name—is a constant problem in Ortega until his last writings. We'll meet him in a moment (and that's why I mention it now) on a small but important youth essay on the Spanish novelist Pío Baroja, one of the main representatives of the Generation of '98.

The *Meditations on Quixote*, published in 1914, is as I already said Ortega's first book, the first work of phenomenology in the Spanish language and probably, if we except (and only partially) Husserl's essay entitled "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," the first work to try a systematic application of phenomenology to the problems of culture. Hence its novelty, its exceptional importance, but also the enormous difficulties of understanding that it still offers today to the interpreter. Philosophy for Ortega, although a theoretical science, must have a practical side (San Martín, 1994: 22). This practical side—i.e., the way a philosophy is able to address the problems of culture and the solutions it can offer to redress it—is a kind of touchstone of its theoretical validity. We will soon see how an impressive and complex system of philosophy, like Neokantianism, failed in this regard and why Ortega thought that phenomenology had opened new possibilities.

3 Neokantian Aesthetics

We should bear in mind some fundamental traits of the Marburg Neokantian School of Philosophy, since, as Ortega received his philosophical training in Marburg, it is to a large extent about his Neokantian masters that he is thinking when he calls for a Europeanization program for Spain. This program is summarized in his well-known statement: "Spain is the problem; Europe is the solution" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004e: 404). On the other hand, Ortega's reaction to Neokantism and its slow departure from it, coinciding with his assimilation of the fundamental theses of Husserl's phenomenology, which he came into contact with around 1912—or perhaps a little earlier, in 1911, at the final stage of his second stay in Marburg—is perhaps the most significant event in his philosophical trajectory. Such a reaction, in strictly philosophical terms, was a reaction against idealism in its most extreme variant; but it probably began as a rejection of Hermann Cohen's aesthetic ideas expressed in his work *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*. The failure of Neokantian aesthetics, particularly regarding the possibility of understanding Spanish art, seems to have fueled the process of Ortega's farewell to idealism. It is therefore justified that we give this issue a thorough explanation.

Aesthetics is for Neokantism one of the three parts into which the total system of philosophy is divided; philosophy of knowledge and moral philosophy are the remaining two. In this tripartition we obviously recognize the content and

[5] I will make some further comments on this crucial issue in the next chapter, pp. 43 ff.

purpose of each of the three Kant's critiques. But Marburg Neokantism is not limited to the repetition of Kant's main tenets, or to pleading for a return to Kant, to a Kant that was not "contaminated" by the speculative interpretation of his philosophy by German idealism. Neokantianism also provides an original understanding of Kant's philosophy, based on the interpretation of certain significant passages of his works. In the context of the philosophy of knowledge, Hermann Cohen's interpretation will be supported, fundamentally, by the "Analytic of the Principles" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and more specifically by the principle Kant labeled "Principle of the Anticipations of Perception." From a cognitive point of view, Cohen argues that consciousness produces its own content, which anticipates the encounter with sense data, and sense data, from which knowledge is supposed to depart, is only the outer limit that consciousness encounters when it sees that its own cognitive work is done. We can compare this procedure with what happens in the process of solving an equation, where the unknown values are determined from previously known quantities. Seemingly, from the point of view of moral philosophy, consciousness produces the law that regulates its own action, a law that Kant called the categorical imperative. When consciousness, at last, produces a content that is not relevant neither to the knowledge of nature nor to moral action, we find ourselves in the presence of a work of art. But there is a problem here, as we shall see, since there are no other products that consciousness can offer other than those stemming from the knowledge of nature or from moral law. So, in this case, when we speak of the "production of a content," we speak, in the first place, of the production process and not of the contents produced. We are then, as Hermann Cohen said, within the realm of pure feeling, in other words, the realm of aesthetics.

The fact that a work of art is independent either of object-oriented knowledge or of a will focused on the conformity to moral law means that nature and moral law, from the point of view of aesthetics, only produce the material that art can use (San Martín, 1994: 262). But, for Neokantianism, this entails a consequence that Ortega will refuse to acknowledge. Cognition is abstract by definition in that each thing is seen as an instantiation of a general law that governs it. Moral law is also abstract, at least in the Kantian sense of morality; it legislates, not according to individuals and situations, but in view of the agreement of the will with the pure principles of action. Thus the principles of pure feeling, which govern the creation of a work of art, should, according to Neokantism—at least on behalf of the equilibrium between the three parts into which the total system of philosophy is divided—be so abstract as pure knowledge and pure will. Accordingly, a work of art should be judged by these abstract principles, and any representation, in order to be called artistic, must be in line with them.

In nature, which the physical-mathematical sciences take as their subject, there are no individuals, but only space-temporal objects ruled by universal laws; science deals only with generic cases. In art, by contrast, there are only individuals, who, not being governed by natural laws (in which case they would be the subject of science), can be governed only by themselves. However, this can only mean, since we have not left the level of the abstract universal, that in a work of art an individual

must be ruled by its idea. More precisely, the work of art is made up of individuals in tension with their idea; in other words, art is made up of symbols. Since this idea must be the same to all humanity, art gathers all individuals around their own humanity. Ortega, still in his Neokantian phase, will say that art represents the permanent conditions of vitality, man as inhabitant of the planet, or, in his own words, "Adam in Paradise," the title of an essay he wrote in 1910.

According to Julián Marías, this juvenile essay was the first formulation of Ortega's mature philosophy of vital reason. Marías, in my opinion, was wrong, and we will soon see why. Another Ortega scholar, Philip Silver, says more accurately that this Adam of the 1910 essay is a sort of surrogate of the "transcendental unity of apperception" of which Kant speaks in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Silver, 1978: 45). John Graham, on the other hand, attempted to find in this essay the presence of aspects common to Ortega and William James' pragmatist philosophy. As he himself states, it is not the properly aesthetic content of this essay that interests him in the first place (Graham, 1994: 116). This lack of interest, however, had consequences, since Silver is thus unable to see to what extent the overcoming of a philosophy of the abstract universal by a philosophy of concrete individual life is due to Ortega's contact with phenomenology. Ortega, who, in his own words, writes "Adam in Paradise" to understand the emotions that come from contemplating Ignacio Zuloaga's paintings,[6] will quickly realize that Neokantian aesthetics does not provide him with the concepts that would allow this understanding.

Now, concrete individual life has an "animal side," which is difficult to grasp in what Ortega calls its executivity with the help of the pure principles of knowledge and action. Ortega's experience with Neokantism, which I will obviously not develop here in full length, is a kind of testing of the limits of Neokantism, that is, of the points where it inevitably fails. A permanent thesis of Ortega—at least I believe so—is that the universal not only does not subsume the whole particular (which would be Kant's thesis) but also does not construct it entirely (according to Marburg's Neokantian thesis), but only touches it tangentially. We also find this thesis in a work of maturity (partly written in Portugal) entitled *The Idea of Principle in Leibniz*. For Ortega in individual things and persons we can always find something wild, that is, irreducible to thought. Ortega also calls it their intimacy (Ortega y Gasset, 2004h: 670). It is this intimacy that art gives us back: it gives us reality executing itself, which is what we can never grasp when we try to understand it with the help of pure thought, even when the thing that is thought is our own Ego. Therefore, the aesthetic object has this twofold characteristic: it is transparent and not opaque, unlike other things that give us back their surfaces when our eyes see them, and at the same time it does not show anything other than itself.

Now, in "Adam in Paradise" the issue is not yet the executivity of things that we can see as a result of the painter's work, but their unity. It should be borne in

[6]Ortega wrote several papers about Zuloaga, a Basque painter he deeply admired. The analysis of the meaning of these paintings helped Ortega to understand the failure of Neokantian aesthetics and theory of culture. We will address this issue more thoroughly in chapter "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism".

mind that Ortega's concept of executivity, when it is not applied to characterize the acts of consciousness, is often the equivalent of Aristotle's *dynamis*; on the contrary, unity (before Ortega's contact with phenomenology) refers to the a priori synthesis of pure understanding. This is what Ortega explains nicely in this essay: to paint one thing is not the simple job of copying it, because it is necessary first to ascertain the formula of its relation to all other things, i.e., its meaning. But let us see: science and ethics seem to exhaust the domains of the activity of reason; in fact, what else will there be besides what is and what should be? Is there anything left that art has to deal with? What will Adam do in Paradise? Certainly not science or morality, for it does not yet need what these kinds of knowledge can offer him; and yet—since it is Adam, the first man, that is, man in general—his life will no longer be animal or vegetal life, for then he himself would be an animal or a vegetable, which live without taking notice of their own form of life. Paradise is not found anywhere either. It is only the mythical scenario of the permanent drama of human life, where one fights, wins, and loses, only to go on fighting. Adam is undoubtedly life, but universal life constituting a problem for itself (Silver, 1978, 44). Every artist, from Ortega's Neokantian perspective in 1910, must also be an Adam in Paradise, and art represents life in its fullest universality.

We will see in a moment how phenomenology will confirm Ortega in his suspicion that life is not universal but always particular, i.e., life is always "my life." This is what Julián Marías did not notice and, therefore, puts Ortega's philosophy of life, in the 1910 essay, where it cannot yet be found. However, we must reckon that there is much in the essay "Adam in Paradise" that points beyond Neokantian aesthetics. Although still within the conceptual framework of Neokantianism, Ortega says that in man life is reduplicated and that every human act—that is, every act of mine—is both accomplished in space and charged with affects. By means of the human body, thanks to light and color, painting shows everything that is not immediately related to space: human passions, history, and culture. What Ortega implicitly tells us in 1910 is that life, even in its utmost universality, can only be lived as "my life," i.e., the life of any of us. This is what the theory of phenomenological reduction will teach him, in 1913, in the Second Section of Edmund Husserl's of *Ideas I*. Indeed, the theory of reduction, as a methodological instrument which allows the philosopher to analyze the acts of consciousness proper to the transcendental subjectivity of each of us, in relation to their noematic correlates, will confirm Ortega in that suspicion that always hovered, like a shadow, in his relations with Neokantism. That's why he will say much later that his contact with phenomenology was "una buena suerte." But, accepting the assumptions of Neokantian aesthetics, the question arises as to the value of Zuloaga's paintings: are they really works of art or just a sociological document? Will not Zuloaga's paintings be too much attached to the Spanish circumstance? Will not they represent scenes and figures too much particular to be able to satisfy the demands of universality (San Martín, 1994: 268–269), without which, according to Neokantian aesthetics, art is not possible?

4 The Overcoming of Neokantianism

A clear understanding of Ortega's reaction from 1912 onward to the Neokantian theory of culture, which had been roughly his own until the previous year, is a key element in understanding the *Meditations on Quixote* and the way Ortega in this book brings to its conclusion a controversy that, for years, he had maintained with Miguel de Unamuno about the relations between Spain and Europe and the role of the "Europeanizers," in which Ortega himself was included (Ortega y Gasset, 2004d: 256). What is really at stake in the abovementioned book, as well as in the background of all Ortega's writings, is Spain and the problem of Spain, more precisely Spain's relationship with Modernity, from which it departed since the seventeenth century (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 770–772).

However, the problem of culture, which Ortega addressed until 1912 from the Neokantian perspective which was then his own, materializes in a program whose contours were relatively simple (San Martín, 1994: 23): "Europeanizing" Spain, or, as Ortega said, making Spain run, such as Germany, is to make it assimilate the culture of modernity and, above all, its culminating point—science. (This is not an absolutely original idea in Ortega, and some political and intellectual representatives of the so-called Restoration regime also defended it. Ortega's political program had some similarities with the program of Joaquím Costa, the only politician of the Restoration regime that he really admired.) However, the idea that Europe is the solution for Spain is precisely the idea that motivates Unamuno's mistrust. This becomes particularly evident in the last chapter and in the Conclusion of *Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida*, a work Unamuno published in the year 1912, shortly after Ortega, after returning from his third journey to Germany (the second to Marburg), starts writing his "The Agony of the Novel," the text, as I said before, from which will come the *Meditations on Quixote*.

I think that one should not overlook the role Miguel de Unamuno played in the evolution of Ortega's thinking on the problem of culture. The *Meditations on Quixote* culminates a passionate debate that Ortega engages with Unamuno's idea of Spain, which is evident in numerous essays and in the correspondence between them. And although Ortega continues to reject Unamuno's overall position, something the latter had argued in *Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida* will since then mark Ortega's new philosophical position. Unamuno's book is written at a time when he was just reading a book of Hermann Cohen, who was at the head of the Marburg Neokantian school, the *Ethik des reinen Willens*. Unamuno does not understand the "purity" of Kantian morality, considers it apart from the reality in which men live and act, and refuses the underlying conception of culture (which he disdainfully spells with an initial K). Unamuno's rejection of the German philosophical way of addressing cultural issues will have great repercussions on Ortega in the subsequent years. Unamuno asks whether the idealistic systems—of which the Neokantian is just an example—which are the quintessential philosophical systems of modernity, will not end drying up the sources from which human life gets its meaning (de Unamuno, 1982: 256–257).

The critique of Neokantism and its idea of culture, the understanding of cultural life as an immediate reality, or as a part of one's individual life, constitutes, in Ortega, a reaction to Unamuno's critiques, but also the most visible outcome of his early contact with phenomenology, which happens precisely at the final stage of his second journey to Marburg. However great the reasons of Unamuno's claims that culture is the immediate reality of the life of a nation, he still lacked (Ortega thought) the philosophical concepts needed to think this fact and to address this immediate reality with the necessary conceptual distinctions. Immediate reality must not be rejected altogether, but it may need to be saved.[7] Phenomenology will provide Ortega with the needed concepts to bring about this task.

For Neokantism, culture was primarily represented by science. It is science that allows us to overcome the contingency of sensible knowledge, which is passive in relation to impressions coming from the outside. In 1910, Ortega still shares this thesis, as is evident from the distinction he makes, in the aforementioned essay on Baroja's novel, between the barbarian man and the man who lives on the basis of ideas. But if one turns to § 11 of the "Preliminary Meditation" of the *Meditations on Quixote*, one may easily see how Ortega can no longer accept this distinction or at least needs to formulate it in different terms (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 785–786). Ideas—or concepts, as he says there—are not opposed to the spontaneity of life, to the emotions we feel at events that may undermine our security and our certainties, such as, for instance, those emotions that are represented in Goya's paintings. Nevertheless, all emotions are changeable and momentary, and that is the reason why we need concepts to think them; concepts don't replace emotions in their vital spontaneity—as Neokantism might imply—but give us the assurance that enables us to think about what we feel. A concept means safety, as Ortega says by taking up a Plato's expression in the *Phaedon* (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 786). Providing security amidst uncertainty is the task of culture.

Let us look at a passage from a letter that Ortega, during his first stay in Marburg, wrote to his fiancée, Rosa Spottorno, in June 1907, and how her early adherence to the Neokantian standpoint is expressed:

> The discovery of Galileo is of great value to us; you do not know it yet, but you will know that my philosophy is his: Plato, Galileo, Descartes, Newton and Kant; there you have the great stations of my philosophy; they all carry within themselves the great thought: reality does not exist, it is man who produces it. Reality is not what you see, hear, feel - but what you think; what is seen, heard, touched, is only appearance. An example: the earth seems to be motionless; *eppure si muove* - said Galileo: and yet she moves. That is, for the eyes, the earth is motionless, but for reason, for science, it moves. The earth looks flat, but it is round. Where is it round? In the eyes? No, in the eyes it is flat. So where is it round? In astronomy, in geography; your eyes and mine, the eyes of the flesh that does not think, see it flat; but the eyes of science see it as round. (Ortega y Gasset, 1991: 552)

[7] The concept of salvation has two different but closely connected meanings. On the one hand, it has the same meaning as in Plato's *Phaedon*: to save a phenomenon means to give it its due place in the network of phenomena one is trying to analyze, in other words, not to ignore its existence and its role. On the other hand, salvation means to bring something to its own possible perfection. Spanish circumstance, according to Ortega, had to be saved. It meant the effort to look at it as it really was, with its backwardness and its potentialities, and not just introducing in it ideas and concepts stemming from alien circumstances.

The "eyes of the flesh" and the "eyes of science" constitute another formulation of the problem of the two Egos. Obviously, they are not yet the ones that appear in the *Meditations on Quixote*, in the well-known statement "I am myself and my circumstance," and it will take a long reflection for Ortega to arrive at it. At the time of his Neokantian training, Ortega designates these two Egos, as we already know, the as "orangutan" or "gorilla," on the one hand, that is, the animal and unlearned Ego, unable to rise to the level of science, and the cultivated Ego, capable of science, on the other. We have the Ego that sees the flat earth and the science-informed Ego that can correct his animal perception and see that the earth is round. In this context, the meaning of a sentence in a letter to Unamuno, dated 13 December 1907, must be understood as saying that Spain must die as a people to survive as a cultivated nature.

5 The Genesis of the *Meditations*: Papers and Conferences from 1913

Ortega's first contact with phenomenology and his reaction to Unamuno's book are simultaneous. Now, if Neokantianism was right, if science—and, in particular, mathematical physics, with their pure categories of relation, which underlie the concept of function and allowed the creation of infinitesimal calculus—represented the *telos* of the human spirit, Spain's task could only be to assimilate this science, which was born with modernity and meant the triumph of that same modernity. But if it is not exactly so, one must see what may be the part of truth that exists in Unamuno's critique of the "Europeanizers." However, in order to understand how Ortega will take a stand on this issue, it will be necessary to analyze a text that precedes the publication of the *Mediations*: the 1913 essay entitled "Sensation, construction, intuition," which constitutes the first public recognition in Spain of phenomenology (if not the first outside Germany), as Husserl had been practicing it since 1900.[8]

In this essay we can see the overcoming of Neokantianism and the assimilation of phenomenology and also the development of what will become the future point of view of *Meditations on Quixote*. As can easily be seen, each of the terms in its title identifies a specific philosophical attitude: empiricism, Neokantianism, and phenomenology, respectively. I will summarize what I think is the essence of

[8]The critical edition of Ortega's *Complete Works* allows now a better understanding of the intellectual evolution of the Spanish philosopher in the years between his last journey to Germany, which ends in 1911, and the publication of the *Meditations on Quixote*. The reading of the posthumously edited texts written at that time is fundamental to the understanding of the stages of that evolution. While still in Germany, in 1910, Ortega writes a text, untitled, but which the publishers of the *Complete Works* entitled "El hecho de que existas cosas ..." (which are the words with which that text begins), where he shows acquaintance with Husserl's doctrine of ideal meanings (Ortega y Gasset, 2007a: 195). It is also essential to read the text entitled "Current Trends in Philosophy" (Ortega y Gasset, 2007b: 232–269), to understand how, as early as 1912, after his return from Germany, Ortega had assimilated Husserl's critique of psychology in the *Logical Investigations*.

Ortega's argument so as to understand what he will say the following year—in 1914, therefore—in the *Meditations*. Sensations—he says—contrary to what empiricism supposes do not provide us with an immediate contact with reality. As empiricism presents them, sensations are already the result of a theory, of a certain understanding of the psychophysical nature of man, and the ways in which an information from an alleged outer reality comes to him. But if, against what empiricism argues, one must recognized that the being of things is meaningless outside their relation to knowledge—that is, there is no being that can be captured by knowledge like it pre-exists before the relationship with the subject who grasps it—the opposite attitude, i.e., constructivism, which argues that being is nothing but the equivalent of the root of an equation, the value of which will be determined by previously known quantities, is the victim of a similar error, although of an opposite sign (Ortega y Gasset, 2004g: 649). Both empiricism and constructivism are incapable of restoring the way consciousness simply perceives its objects, i.e., how it has what phenomenology labels an *Erlebnis*, or a lived experience. However, this perception is a relation much more complex than empiricism has ever imagined. Take, for example, what Ortega says (Ortega y Gasset, 2004g: 629) about the perception of a color. Ortega insists that it does not depend on the perceiving subject the fact that a color is always the color of something, and therefore the essential connection—intuited by the subject—between any surface and the colored tone with which it is seen constitutes one kind of legality to which all mundane objects must obey.

For the history of Ortega's relationship with phenomenology, a reference must also be made to the essay entitled "On the concept of sensation," originally published in three parts, in June, July, and September 1913, in the *Revista de Libros*, as a book review of the work of a former student of Husserl, Heinrich Hoffman, entitled *Studies on the Concept of Sensation* (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 624–638).[9] Ortega begins by referring to Hoffman's critique of the concept of a pure sensation, which he considers a notion constructed by psychologists to explain the genesis of psychic activity, to which, however, no lived experience corresponds (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 625). We must be particularly attentive here to Hoffman's conclusion, which Ortega also supports: a pure sensation, or a simple sensation, is almost impossible to determine, even more so in visual than in acoustic sensations. Does any simple sensation correspond to any of the four fundamental colors? In a visual experiment, which, for example, runs through all gradations of color between red and yellow, the gradations of orange will appear with the same fundamental color character as red and yellow colors, and not, as might be expected according to the theory, as transition colors. Thus, a description of visual perception can only have its starting point in the lived experience of colors, which will necessarily be made up of complex sensations.

[9]The original title of Hoffman's book is *Untersuchungen über den Empfindungsbegriff*.

But the most interesting thing about this essay lies elsewhere. In his second part, published in July 1913, Ortega seeks to explain the differences between induction, deduction, and intuition; the first two establish the existence of certain factual connections, while the last establishes an essential connection. So, for example, the fact that a color supposes an extension that it colors is an essential connection. It is not up to me, as I express in a judgment such a connection, whether a color may be detached from its relationship with extension (Ortega y Gasset, 2004f: 629). But Ortega says something even more interesting. While induction and deduction suppose a concatenation of facts, the vision of an essential connection can be grounded in the experience of a single fact. Regarding the previous example, Ortega stresses that the experience of a single surface is sufficient to understand the relationship between a color and a surface. This experience can be based on a perception, an imagination, or even a hallucination. An imagined surface must be equally colored as a hallucinated one, for this essential law does not refer only to objects that exist in the real world, independently of a subject that eventually perceives them.

Therefore, detecting the presence of phenomenology either in the *Meditations* or in other writings of the same period is not a very difficult task for anyone familiar with Husserl's thinking. It is even surprising that, for decades, Ortega's leading scholars (including some of his closest disciples, such as Julián Marías or Paulino Garagorri) have not been able to highlight this fact. Probably their ignorance of phenomenology, coupled with their belief in the letter of a late statement by Ortega that he would have departed from phenomenology from the moment he had the first contact with it, prevented many of them from seeing the obvious. It was necessary to understand how Ortega appropriates and interprets, in the first four paragraphs of the "Preliminary Meditation," the four sections of *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Husserl's work published in 1913 and which Ortega is among the first to have read outside Germany) in order that the genesis of the *Meditations on Quixote* could receive a new light.

6 Ortega's Philosophy of Culture at the Time of the *Meditations*

All these considerations may seem far removed from the philosophy of culture, but in reality, it is not so. I argued earlier that Ortega realizes the possibility of applying the fundamental acquisitions of phenomenology, as Husserl had exposed them in the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*, to the problems of culture. It should also be noted that Ortega, at least in 1913, reads these two works as if there were no essential differences between them, which will expose him to some difficulties of interpretation, which I will not address here. But this explains the course of his theory of intuition, which contrasts with Neokantian empiricism and constructivism. In the First Section of *Ideas I*, Husserl sets out the distinction between facts and essences, showing that reality is crossed by a typical ideal structure—which constitutes what

is commonly called "essences"—that determines how it can be viewed. To explain it I will look for help in an example that Ortega himself offers in the *Meditations on Quixote*. If I look at an orange, he argues, I will see only the part of it that faces me, not the whole orange, just as I don't see the inside. But the part that is hidden, or the interior that I don't see, are there for me as possibilities, at the same time determining the reality of the orange I see.

This analysis entails a new concept of reality, from which Ortega will draw a new concept of culture. The real world for the moderns is Descartes' extensive substance. Reality, however, as the perception of the orange has shown us, has two dimensions, the patent and the latent. There is a depth in things that comes to surface in order to manifest itself. So what I see is successively replaced by what I had not yet seen. Of a totality (e.g., the actual forest of the Escorial, of which the *Meditations* speak), I only see the successively visible parts. This totality that is the forest escapes from my eyes. The forest is, wherever anyone look at it, a possibility, as was the case just now with our orange.

In Paragraph 3 of the "Preliminary Meditation," entitled "Brooks and Orioles," Ortega raises a delicate problem (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 767–768). Let us imagine that in a forest I hear the rushing waters of a brook at my feet and at the same time the singing of an oriole in a distant tree. The combination of our auditory, visual, and tactile senses provides the conscious awareness with precious elements for our orientation in space: I cannot arbitrarily put at a distance the brook that I see at my feet and whose water I can touch with my own fingers. Something different happens with the oriole whose singing is captured by my ears. In Husserl's language, in *Ideas I*, we would have to say that the brook or the oriole is noemata, that is, not just a set of sensible qualities, not just material objects, but objects with meaning: wandering in the woods one hot summer day, the water of the brook, for me, is not just H_2O, but something that gives me a certain feeling of freshness and where I can wash my sweaty face.

But Ortega still urges us to make another kind of experiment. Let us transform active hearing into passive hearing. That is, let us suspend our attention to the noise of the waters of the brook and to the song of the oriole and consider them both as pure sound matter. Let us do even more: let us suspend the act of interpretation that accompanies the auditory sensation and causes us to project in the distance the song of the oriole and place at our feet the brook whose waters we hear. We realize, then, that remoteness and proximity are not features of the things themselves, but something that they acquire only by virtue of an act we executed. The sound sensation is purely superficial; it is that part of reality that is offered to us effortlessly and which we may call the patent world; the sense of proximity or distance that accompanies it is hidden, in the sense that it palpitates in patent reality (almost like hearts beat in every breast) without being identical with it, and demands from us, in order to be able to grasp it, the performance of an act of a totally different kind.

In the *Meditations on Quixote*, Ortega will spell out this new concept of reality and this new way of thinking about the relationship between consciousness and

reality. For ancient and medieval philosophy, reality was something independent of the subject and of which the subject, in order to know it, sought to form a copy; for the Modern Age, reality is the outcome of a constructive activity of the human mind. Nevertheless, both ideas are false, although the modern world, according to Ortega, highlighting the role played by the subject, has obtained a viewpoint that cannot simply be put aside, but only put in its rightful place. Henceforth, it is not legitimate to assert the being of reality without asserting, at the same time, the being of the subject who asserts that same reality. This is what Ortega expresses, in the Preface of the *Meditations*, by the famous statement "I am myself and my circumstance," which must, however, be withdrawn from the trivial or falsifying interpretations of its meaning. This is what I will try to do in the following lines.

In 1914, shortly before the publication of the *Meditations*, Ortega publishes a preface to a collection of poems by Moreno Villa, *El Pasajero*, which he titled "Essay on Aesthetics in the Way of a Prologue" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004h: 664–680). Sections II and III of this text are particularly interesting, since it is here that Ortega offers his theory of the Ego, outlined in the essay "On the concept of sensation." In the title of Sect. II, appears, I believe that for the first time, the expression "executive Ego," which, in Ortega's language, corresponds to the Husserlian notion of thetical or positional consciousness. This expression means that the Ego is usually in a utilitarian or pragmatic attitude toward the things it deals with. However, he is not a thing, nor, as long as it remains executive, can he become a thing. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, by abandoning this executive character, the Ego itself may become an object. The best way to understand how this happens and what its consequences are is to follow Ortega's own example: the analysis of our walking experience (Ortega y Gasset, 2004h: 667–668).

Walking is an act that, for each of us, involves muscular tension and an effort. This is tantamount to say that we make a direct experience of what we do, without, however, at the same time we make that effort, we are entitled to say that we see ourselves walking. It is also true that we suppose that others make an effort similar to ours when they walk, but we do not see it; we just see others walking, as living bodies performing certain movements to change their situation in space, but without being able to feel, through direct experience, the effort they make. However, we can also see ourselves as we see others, that is, we can see ourselves walking. In this situation our primary consciousness has lost its executive character and has become reflexive consciousness: the executive consciousness is now the reflexive one, which takes primary consciousness as its object. (It is again the problem of the two Egos, now in a more complex way.) Now, this reflexive consciousness corresponds to the consciousness of the phenomenologist, after having performed the phenomenological reduction (of which Ortega does not speak), and the primary consciousness is one's own consciousness as a transcendental subjectivity that performs intentional acts. Therefore, "I am myself and my circumstance" means that I am a set of intentional acts and objectivities put in these acts. The first objectivity is the circumstances of my immediate personal life, which must be brought, through reflexive activity, to the level of culture. It is the effort that Ortega calls, as we already know, "saving the circumstance."

7 Final Remarks

We are now in a position to get an understanding of the phenomenological theory of culture—that is, the philosophy of vital reason—which Ortega proposes in these *Meditations on Quixote*, replacing his first theory of a Neokantian kind, with the explicit aim of understanding, by means of this new theory, Spanish culture and its destiny. In short, we could say culture is not identical with immediate life but is not opposed to it either. (That is, it is not executive, but it is not opposed to executivity.) Ortega further states that culture is security; that is, culture is the whole of the ideas we create in order to be able to live, so that life is not, as for Plato was the sensible world, just a flow of fleeting impressions and sensations. But there are, in Ortega's theory of culture, three aspects, above all, that deserve a better look in order to conclude.

First, culture, understood as a set of ideas that are useful for life, is an intersubjective creation that raises claims of truth and objectivity. This means that if a culture's point of view on reality may not exhaust what that reality is as a whole, if any culture is ultimately unable to do so, for reality is always given to us in perspectives, like the orange of our example just now; however, what each culture says of reality must express what that reality is. Failing to do so, it runs the risk of turning into an imposture. (This was the case with Spanish culture at the time of the Restoration.) This brings us to the second aspect. Authentic culture, for Ortega, is an act of kindness or love. Through culture—that is, through concepts—we express what in a thing goes beyond it and refers to all other things, constituting the depth dimension that is latent in what is evident in each one when it is presented to someone. Culture is thus the virtual element that extends beyond what is real, is the existence of one thing in all others and of all others in it, is the unifying drive that Plato called "Eros" in his dialogue *Symposium* (Ortega y Gasset, 2004h: 782).

Finally, as a third aspect, I would say that culture is, for Ortega, an imperative of clarity. But, as is evident from what I have said above, there is a clarity of superficial things and a clarity of the depths of things; there is a clarity proper to sensible impressions and a clarity that means the peaceful spiritual possession of things (Ortega y Gasset, 2004i: 788). The depths of the forest of the Escorial are no less clear than its borders, which we contemplate before entering it; but they will only gain clarity if we can penetrate them and have previously developed the organ capable of perceiving them. This clarity, which is the concept or culture, is not life, but instead—in the nice expression that Ortega makes use of—the commentary on life, not in the sense of something accessory to it, but as life itself led to its fullness.

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Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism

We have already addressed the relations between Ortega and idealism in our chapter "Ortega and Germany". But there our aim was to show that Ortega's "second navigation"—an expression, we recall, we borrowed from Plato's dialogue *Phaedon*—i.e., his farewell to Neokantianism around 1911–1912 and his reception of phenomenology, was also intended to be a departure from any kind of modern idealism, which means that we offered an interpretation of Ortega's philosophy as realistic since the beginning of his maturity and an interpretation of Ortega's own interpretation of phenomenology, at the time he received it, as a realistic trend in philosophy, destined to put an end to that idealism we have just mentioned.

As is well known, not all the interpreters of Ortega's philosophy (perhaps not even the majority) agree with this interpretation. In his very interesting book about Ortega and idealism, Antonio Rodriguez Huéscar says not only that Ortega, since the beginning, looked at phenomenology as a subtle variant of the old Cartesian idealism but also that the main Orteguian concepts, at the time he published the *Meditations on Quixote*, in 1914, were already directed against phenomenology (Huéscar, 1982: 45). Huéscar fails to notice, for instance, that the concept of *ejecutividad* (executivity)—indeed a central concept in Ortega's philosophy—was the outcome of an effort to translate into Spanish a central idea of Husserl's fifth Logical Investigation, which the German philosopher labeled *der Vollzugscharacter des Bewussteins* (the executive character of consciousness). But Huéscar is not the only one to have committed this error. John T. Graham, for instance, seems to connect the roots of Ortega's idea of executivity with an early influence of William James' pragmatism, before Ortega took acquaintance with phenomenology (Graham, 1994: 122).[1] Much closer to what I think is the right evaluation of Ortega's contribution to a realistic-oriented phenomenology is the book of Morón Arroyo that was already

[1] Nevertheless, in footnote 43 to (1992: 122) Graham acknowledges that the first occurrence of "executivity" dates from 1914. At this time, Ortega had already read Husserl's *Logical Investigations*.

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