Historical Reason

1 Introduction: Why Is Reason "Historical" and History "Rational"?

As Ortega claims at the beginning of Lesson IV of *The Historical Reason* (the series of Lectures held in Lisbon in 1944), man is an animal doomed to have ideas. And man needs ideas because everything he does must be grounded in phantasy, i.e., in a sketch of the future situation he wants to make appear. But this rather strange condition also means that men are always delivered to themselves, instead of being delivered to nature's liberality, like the animals (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 673). John Graham, in *Theory of History in Ortega y Gasset: The Dawn of Historical Reason*, explains that Ortega's notion of historical reason corresponds to a new approach to the way of doing philosophy that stems from the idea that man does not have any prior and given nature in the static and unvarying meaning of this word but rather has an individual and concrete historical life in which he has to make himself (Graham, 1997: 105). For this reason, Graham maintains that, following a period of time during which "vital reason" was the central concept of Ortega's philosophy, the philosopher ended up identifying it with historical reason. Only if we pay attention to its historical dimensions we will be able to understand life as a form of relationship between man and the social and historical-cultural circumstances in which he lives (Graham, 1997: 109–110).

The several phases of this evolution are documented first by the 1923 published book on *The Theme of Our Time* and the article "Neither vitalism nor rationalism" published in *Revista de Occidente* in October 1924; next by the 1935 texts *History as a System* and *On the Roman Empire* and subsequently developed in Lessons such as *On Galileo*, given in Madrid in 1933; and lastly by the Argentinian Lessons of 1940 *The Historical Reason* and the Lisbon Lessons with the same title held 4 years later. Several distinct but interconnected issues are addressed in these texts. In the first place, the problem of "meaning" in history, i.e., the problem of the possible

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existence of a logic linking the apparently contingent historical events in such a way that they can be looked at as milestones in a process that aims a common end. Secondly, the problem of the exact nature of this link, be it of a spiritual kind (as, for instance, in Hegel's philosophy of History) or of a material and economic one (as, for instance, in Marx). Thirdly, the problem of the greater or lesser value of the historical "acquisitions" of each historical period or, in other words, the problems of progress and "relativism." Lastly, the role of the individual and of the generations in history. As one can easily see, the first two problems are, in Ortega's terms, of a "historiological" kind, i.e., they pertain to the realms of philosophy of history (Moreno, 2005: 176) and epistemology of the historical sciences; the last two have to do with the historical and temporal condition of men. The next pages will be devoted to the analysis of these fundamental issues.

A striking characteristic of Ortega's conception of History has to do with the way he evaluates the role of crisis. The Spanish philosopher describes the period of crisis that mediated between the end of Middle Age and the beginning of Modern Times making an analogy with his own times, which were also times of crisis. The crisis of Modernity meant that the living faith in biological and naturalist sciences, which had dominated the entire modern period, had turned out into a dead faith, since science was no longer able to provide answers to human problems. At the same time, i.e., at the rise of the twentieth century, philosophers became aware that nature only represents one dimension of the far vaster reality of human life, a reality that *physical reason* was insufficient to embrace. Man does not have a "nature," like plants and animals, i.e., a stable and permanent being. Physical bodies may also vary, but only inside the invariable boundaries established by scientific laws. If physical reason can say nothing about man's nature and problems, we must look for another kind of reason: "(...) the failure of physical reason leaves a free way for vital and historical reason" (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 56).

Thus, through this notion of "historical reason," Ortega aims to explain how each epoch pays attention to a certain dimension of reality. For instance, in certain periods of history God was kept apart from the human affairs; those were periods of agnosticism and positivism where prevailed a human type that Ortega characterizes in the following manner: "The agnostic man is a perceptive organ that is exclusively accommodated to the immediate" (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 607). In other periods, this state of affairs seemed difficult to bear, and God came again to the foreground. Other epochs, as, for instance, ancient Greece, had a certain idea of God, but could not think of a God endowed with the power to create the world. For Greek philosophy, to be—stresses Ortega—meant to be autonomous or independent (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 497). Accordingly, as long as the world is it cannot be just the creature of a worldless being. In the same way, the individual things that make up the world may have some influence over each other, but their true being does not consist in being created. However, Christian medieval philosophy gave place to the idea of the creation of the world through the power and will of God. On the other hand, for Greek and medieval philosophy the being of things consisted in their independence regarding the intellect. But a new epoch—Modernity, which lasted until the first decades of the twentieth century—began with the Cartesian critique of this philosophical realism. Sense data, Descartes thought, are doubtful: if I close my eyes or cover my ears, if I don't touch the things that surround me, they cease to exist. Idealism began when philosophers asserted that the radical reality philosophy is in search of is not the world but thought (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 500). All these examples mean that reason is intrinsically historical. History is its own substance. And history is also rational, since it is composed of the changeable ways along which men try to account for the existence of the world and for their own existence.

2 History as Tradition and as Innovation

Reason is not something absolute but rather an instrument in the concrete lives of individuals and in the historical life of peoples. Truth stems from the dynamic correlation between these two dimensions—individual and social—of reality. But are all historical truths or systems of ideas only valid for the circumstance in which they were discovered? And if this is true, can any historical epoch be fully understood by those that come after it? Enlightened reason thought that the one and same concept of reason was at work in every historical epoch, only imperfectly developed in the past but reaching in the present its maturity. Ortega looked suspiciously to these ideas that, according to him, were just a projection—in the historical past but also in forms of culture other than the modern European ones—of a narrow concept of reason that characterized European culture since the beginning of Modernity (Cerezo, 2011: 185).

The being of the things that Ortega tries to grasp does not correspond to the traditional ontology of Hellenic origin, which, since Parmenides, has always meant a fixed, static, and unvarying being that precedes the variability of existence, an ontology that is reflected both in Aristotle's notion of nature and Thomas Aquinas' notion of substance, as well as in Hegel's notion of "spirit." Ortega's notion of being corresponds to a new metaphysical categorization that conveys the dramatic, unique, and unstable existence of each man's life in his free action and the acknowledgment that the only given fact is circumstance: "Therefore, in order to talk about being-man, we need to produce a non-eleatic concept of the being, as if we were elaborating a non-Euclidian geometry" (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 66). A living being is not only accidentally mobile but also metaphysically and hence has to be conceived by means of concepts that inevitably question its identity and exhibit its contingent nature:

> Human life, therefore, is not an entity that changes accidentally but, instead, the "substance" within which the change precisely occurs, which means that it cannot be conceived in the Eleatic fashion as a substance. (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 67)

Abandoning the concept of being, with its connotations of immobility, Ortega highlights the fact that man neither "is" nor "is becoming" but rather "lives." If life must be conceived as a drama, the subject of this drama is not a "thing" that exists previously or independently of it, but rather as a "function" of it. Man keeps his own

individuality in a process of constant change, like some words (for instance, "here" or "there") keep their meaning regardless the objects they are pointing to (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 67).

In the fourth lesson of *What is Philosophy?*, lectured in 1929, Ortega affirms that philosophy is constitutively necessary to the intellect and holds the function of searching for the Universe in its totality, recognizing that which is given to us only represents one part or one fragment of this broader and more latent reality that is the world. The trivial reality of the colors we see refers to colored surfaces; the room we are in refers to the house to which it belongs; even a single state of mind refers to other states of mind. Similarly, when we theoretically encounter the world, it appears to us as a problem that does not explain itself by its own means. The world is an object that is not in itself sufficient and that does not sustain its own being: "The world is an object that is insufficient and fragmentary, an object founded on something that is not it, that is not what is given. That something has, thus, a founding mission in the strict sense, is what is fundamental here" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 281). In a fashion distinct from traditional metaphysics, Ortega identifies this fundamental being, which is not given but rather postulated as a problem, as a reality that is not manifest in the world and is not present in knowledge and thereby constituted by an absence: "(...) the fundamental being is the eternal and absent essential (...) the completely other, the formally distinct, the absolutely exotic" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 281–282).

Philosophy affirms it is experiencing an epoch characterized by the resurgence of the divine, in contrast to the modern period in which the agnostic perspective prevailed (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b: 606) and a period falling under the guidance of the phenomenological perspective of history with supra-historical requirements. We experience the rise of a new kind of reason that replaces the former belief in reason and incorporates a meta-historical and ontological dimension and hence a metaphysical dimension (Graham, 1997: 111). This new kind of reason must apply to history categories similar to those categories that philosophy applies to the understanding of man's individual existence. Men's lives are, at the same time, restrained by what men inherited from their predecessors, by the past events of their lives, and by the habits contracted; identically, every historical epoch inherits from the precedent epochs. But a heritage is not something an epoch can just live upon, as if it was an inextinguishable stock of resources; rather, any receptive attitude must be complemented by an operative attitude that may allow innovation (Cerezo, 2011: 195).

3 How Rational Historical Events Are?

Let us begin with a small thought experiment. What would we figure out if a strange noise was heard coming from behind the door of the room in which we rest in a chair? We could imagine that someone was just knocking on the door, waiting that we allowed him to enter the room, or that he bumped into the door while going from

one place to another in the next room; other noises would perhaps give us a hint of what he was doing, but other noises could be meaningless and arouse our curiosity about what was really going on. Suppose that I ask: "who's there?" and getting no answer I get up from the chair where I was sitting and open the door. Now, seeing the person who was moving around in the room next to mine I grasp the meaning of all those noises, connecting them with a stretch of a life whose intentions I'm acquainted with. What at first was a set of noises devoid of meaning is now rationally justified.

If we want to think seriously what human life is, we must use the concept that Aristotle applied exclusively to God, the concept of *energueia*. Not that human life is a kind of divine life in the Aristotelian sense; but at least it has—as long as a man lives—that characteristic that God's life enjoyed permanently, the endeavor to go on living. We must notice this marvelous characteristic of human life: when someone thinks of his own existence, he finds himself already existing for a long time. This means that my birth strictly speaking does not belong to my life: it's a tale I have heard of. The same applies to immortality. It is a speculative idea. That's why for Ortega human life is endless, albeit not infinite: it has not begun for me—only for others who witnessed my birth—just like its end state is impossible to imagine (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 530–531). Due to man's limitations, human life is no more than a system of possibilities and impossibilities that history has the task to investigate. However, possibilities for human action are never indeterminate, but rather grounded on the soil upon which men have to act; that's why the outcomes of human action are not merely contingent, and, for someone who knows how to look at them, they seem most of the times as if they could have been easily predicted. That's why Ortega can say, at the same time, that although a historian is no fortune-teller only as prophecy does a historical science become possible (Moreno, 2005: 180).

Ortega illustrates the resistance reality imposes upon man resorting to the biblical narrative of Adam's expulsion from paradise. Paradise is a symbol of a condition in which man feels no resistance from the surrounding world and the world merges with man. The exterior world, following the expulsion, means the strange and hostile reality that man does not know how to deal with. Indeed, in the present conditions, any circumstance man lives in is composed of facilities and difficulties. If it was only composed of facilities, it would be like an extension of our own body, and, facing the world, men would be like gods; if instead the world were exclusively composed of difficulties, man would not exist because he wouldn't be able to find a place in it (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 532).

In addition to the body, the soul, and all of the mineral, vegetal, and animal realities, there are the other persons and all of this collected into a landscape that we call planet Earth in a permanent sense of future belonging. Graham highlights how Ortega moved away from the metaphysical model of Parmenides to adopt the model of Heraclitus in the sense that change and movement do not gain recognition according to any logical-analytical reason but rather by historical and narrative reason (Graham, 1997: 118). That's why history as a science is not entirely constituted by its own methodological procedures, like natural sciences. Something different from method is necessary to understand historical events. That's why Dilthey spoke of an

understanding of other men's actions, which is totally different from the accumulation of facts and statistics. As Ortega himself stresses, a non-Eleatic concept of man is as necessary as a non-Euclidean concept of space was necessary for modern physics: "Man, Gentlemen, has no nature but rather has history" (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 557). The radical reality is not in the world of things (as in Antiquity) nor in the world of thinking (as in Modern Age) but rather in the fact that each human life is aware of the things it encounters (Contemporary Age). I see horses, or flowers, or people in front of me, I don't see my seeing of horses, flowers, or people. I am as real as those things I see, but reality now has acquired a new meaning: reality means that I and all those things I claim to be around me are mutually dependent (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 505).[1]

Nevertheless, man is not permanently turned to the outside, i.e., to the other men, the other leaving creatures, inanimate things, or states of affairs. With man happens a characteristic turn (which is incomprehensible from a zoological point of view) to the inside, i.e., to himself as a leaving and acting person, engaged in actions and projects and in permanent intercourse with other fellow human beings. With the help of words so worn as old coins (Ortega y Gasset, 2010: 143), we use to label this attitude "thinking" or "meditation"; Ortega calls it, in Spanish, *ensimismamiento* (the act of returning to one's own self).

Contrary to the stone that is from the outset everything that it is, in the substantial Greco-Scholastic sense that it lacks nothing for its existence, according to Ortega, man is not yet what he is to become and hence lives under the constant aspiration of self-realization before his own self, striving for his own being and struggling to exist in accordance with his program and aspirations in life. Life is thus a given but in the dynamic sense that implies that each of us has to make their lives, humanizing the world with their ideas and values through to self-fulfillment in what the author terms a kind of "materialized soul" (Ortega y Gasset, 2010: 145). Happiness is the supreme goal of life and must be turned into an ethical imperative. But happiness is not an easy task, because it means to achieve one's own life program, i.e., one's own Ego. The main difficulty to obtain this goal is the circumstance in which every man lives, that strange and heterogeneous milieu in which our projects and aims can fail. That's the reason why Ortega says that men sometimes envy the animals: not because they are happier than we, but because their adaptability to nature prevents them from being unhappy (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 540).

4 Is There a Historical A Priori?

At this point of our investigation, a distinction has to be made in order to continue, namely, the well-known distinction between *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*

[1] We encounter again one of the main tenets of Ortega's philosophy and the ground for his critique of idealism. This issue has already been addressed in chapter "Ortega's Social Philosophy", and the reader is asked to refer to what was said there.

or between historical events and the historical science that recounts them. For Ortega as for Martin Heidegger a historical science is possible due to the fact that man himself is a historical being, i.e., lives in time. An understanding of the basic structures of human existence is the first condition for an understanding of human history. Just as, in a human life, the present is a small portion of the total life span, which mediates between birth and death, so the historical present is a small portion of the vital trajectory of humanity (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 400).[2] Historical changes produce changes in the idea of truth that is proper to each epoch; different epochs may have different ideas of what truth is. But this also means that each historical epoch has a certain idea of what truth in itself is. Only the changes in the circumstances that surround every human life may lead humanity to choose one kind of truth instead of another. Circumstance is thus a problem for the historian, as well as a difficulty for the men who leave in it, or the background of the vital and historical drama of the life of each person. Lesson X of *En Torno a Galileo* offers us some nice examples of this situation.

Medieval man, says Ortega, when faced with situations of despair, when discovering the shortcomings in their life, makes himself Christian, assuming the need to accept the firm existence of another life. True reality thereby becomes the spiritual reality of divine life, and man feels himself to be a creature, totally dependent on a higher being. The world of politics, economics, and science is thereby devalued as the true reality lies in the ultra-mundane and absolute life of God, which cannot be accessed through the means of reason. However, according to Ortega, this other intemporal or eternal life appears in Christian belief as a counter position to this world.

To the contrary of Greek polytheism, the Christian God is perceived as absolutely transcendent, and the only means of communication is attained through revelation, i.e., the Christian God is not just what He is, but must make Himself known to man. Accordingly, in Saint Augustine, the *motto* is *Credo ut intelligam*, which means that there is a knowledge of God that can only arise out of faith through the intuitive process of illumination through intellectual contemplation (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 473). According to this interpretation of the philosophy of Saint Augustine, man in himself does not have any reality, his labors in the world are a punishment, and knowledge consists only of the passive reception of illumination of the truth revealed in God.

However, Ortega identifies how, a few centuries on, this movement is no longer viewed as unilateral in which faith is not received by man in a passive form because it has to be assimilated and understood. However firm the Augustinian thesis of illumination may be, there is a point to be acknowledged: in the process of reception of divine truth by man, there is a moment of assimilation that is no longer pure passivity. In this sense, Ortega cites Saint Anselm, for whom man would not be able to find the illumination of faith without the working of intelligence. Notification about

[2] This idea in Ortega is closely linked to his conception of "generation" and of the importance of generations for historical development. We will return to this subject later.

the absolute and supernatural God may only be accepted naturally by man so that the divine science of revelation demands the divine science of scholastic theology. From Thomas Aquinas onward, we move on from an intelligence illuminated by faith for a better understanding of God to arrive in the presence of a separation between intelligence and faith: evident reason lives with its own principles independently of blind and irrational faith. Within the absolute reality of God, there is now a place for the autonomy of creatures acting of their own accord and recognizing their powers and their rights in a conscious fashion, endowing them with a new valuation of science and theology. As Aquinas' thought has become for centuries accepted in the Catholic Church, men tend to ignore the crisis it represented at the time[3]. Because if God is, at least to a certain point, accessible to human reason, if He is, so to speak, within the range of human reason (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 476), He is to a certain extent a part of nature.

These examples will allow us to understand one of the enigmas of history. If truths can be considered timeless, they must nevertheless appear in the course of time. And they must appear through the action and the thought of a man or some men. Historians must try to grasp the conditions that allowed these men to do so. On the other hand, there is a correlation between a truth and the kind of man able to think it. Men of the fifth century AD, in the time of Augustine, were not able to think about God what, eight centuries later, Thomas Aquinas said about the divine essence and the relation of God to man.

Scotus' ontology and Ockham's nominalism are a sign of the crises represented by late medieval thought. Ockham, namely, stated that conceptual reason does not serve to grasp the particular realities of the world, with its universality resumed by names and that do not serve to understand the universal realities of God that thereby become conceived as irrational. Man gets lost or disoriented, due to the fact of becoming obliged to live only with the experiences of the senses: "The irrational God that communicates bureaucratically with men through the ecclesiastic organization is left in the background of vital human landscape" (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 478). Indeed, Ortega considers that this constitutes the crisis of fifteenth-century man that then gives rise to modernity and a new level of attention to the world, to nature, and to social values. Man despairs of the ecclesiastic model of Christianity and, breaking away from God, tends to remain only with worldly things and with the hope of encountering a new instrument, a new rationality, a new science for helping resolve the problem of his surrounding world. Such a new instrument stems from the physical-mathematical reason of Galileo (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 479).

To sum up, two strong ideas may be taken from what has been said. In the first place, human culture, in different epochs, even the most divergent cultural orientations, as long as they have been produced by a rational being, i.e., man, have a minimum of coherence and are endowed with a minimum of meaning, which allows them to be understood in epochs sharing divergent ideas and values. In the second

[3]The concept of crisis is fundamental to the understanding of Ortega's Philosophy of History. We will have something more to say about it below.

place, history as a whole has an a priori structure, constituted by permanent changes that lead to the choice of certain set of ideas instead of another.

That's what makes the nineteenth century so interesting from the point of view of historical reason. It's an epoch of crisis in which some of the ancient beliefs, namely, those of Christian theology, may still be current but life follows divergent paths. In the fifteenth century, following the crisis opened by the nominalist critique of the great scholastic systems, God is seen as a power of creation, and there is no apparent reason, excepting God's will, for the world to be what it is and not something different. God's *potentia absoluta* merges with his *potentia ordinata*, i.e., there could have been any other reality and not that which actually exists. This means that the ground in which men's beliefs rested until then begins to lose its stability. The content of our faith could even be different, if others were the dogmas that God revealed to us. Ortega describes the spiritual situation of man at the beginning of modern times in the following manner:

> We are certain that God made the world but that it all ends there because, at the same time, we are certain that He did not made it for a reason. This matter of reason is something created, human, and an instrument we possess to deal with nature but not with what is above nature. (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 490)

The previous considerations will help us to understand the nature of periods of crisis and the way humanity may overcome them. Historical crises are characterized by two main factors: on the one hand a symptom of disorientation and of loss of roots and on the other hand the weakening of long-time established beliefs. This means that, in periods of crisis, reason and life are no longer in harmony, as well as culture and vital spontaneity (Cerezo, 2011: 181). But even historical crisis cannot make a radical tendency in human life disappear, namely, the fact that men are everywhere committed to the pursuit of truth; skepticism offers no way out and only seems to triumph thanks to the absolutism of abstract reason. But reason is first of all "vital reason," despite the idealistic misinterpretation of its tasks. That's what can make us hope, as it happened in the past, that a sound regime of harmony between individual aspirations and the claims of truth will always be re-established after an epoch of crisis.

5 The Concept of Generation

The concept of generation plays a central role in Ortega's philosophy of history. However, before entering in details about its meaning and importance, some words must be said about the historical and philosophical context in which Ortega carries his thoughts about the meaning of history. A lot has already been written about the coincidence between some of Ortega's main theses and Wilhelm Dilthey's conception of the moral sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Ortega always claimed his originality regarding the German philosopher and stressed the fact that his own theories about the meaning of history and man as a historical being preceded the posthumous

publication of Dilthey's works on the subject. Strong similarities exist, nevertheless, but they can be easily explained by factors alien to a direct influence. Both were, at the same time, trying to save the "spirit" from the attacks of positivist-oriented trends in philosophy and the social sciences; both were, also, committed to a rational explanation of historical events and of the outcomes of spiritual activity, while avoiding teleological explanations of a Hegelian kind.[4]

Now, like Hegel, Ortega wanted to explain historical changes, i.e., he wanted to find some kind of logical necessity and not only mere contingency, and this necessity he believed to have found in the way generations react to the problems with which they are faced. But, first of all, what is a generation? Although Ortega sometimes speaks of a generation as some kind of zoological variety, the more exact way of approaching this phenomenon is to say that a generation is a group of men united by the consciousness of the urgency to answer some historical tasks. However, historical science is not the study of generations, as if they were the true subjects of history. Societies—i.e., groups of men tied by a set of common practices and beliefs—are the true subjects of history.

Speaking about his own generation, he says that around 1911—when he was 28 years of age and made the acquaintance of 2 German young philosophers, about the same age, Nicolai Hartmann and Heinz Heimsoeth—he felt a strong necessity that was also felt by his 2 fellow students at the University of Marburg: Neokantianism had to be overcome. Of course they all had certain ideas about what philosophy should be, about the way the philosopher school fulfill his tasks, but that was not the most important (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 143): the important factor was that they thought that truth must have a certain meaning and consist in certain things regarding which Neokantianism was not false strictly speaking, but surely lacked that strong commitment to the pursuit of truth that must characterize authentic philosophy. To sum up, Neokantian philosophy had, says Ortega, a "forced" character (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 143), in the sense that it always ends up distorting the nature of things. In our chapters "Ortega and Germany" and "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism", we have already talked about the consequences, for Ortega, of that lack of commitment regarding the understanding of Spanish cultural situation. This way of presenting the tasks of a generation, however, has more than one consequence:

1. A generation is composed of active personalities that, so to speak, point the way and of a great number of passive people who just follow the others.
2. A generation is not a homogeneous group of men. They can be divided (and usually are) by distinct social, political, or religious programs; what unites them is a clear consciousness that those divergent programs are the answer to the same questions.
3. Men of the same generation feel a kind of proximity to each other, regardless their divergent programs, and a distance from men of previous generations, even in cases where there are great similarities between their programs.

Now, a generation, regardless its internal differences, is always a system of beliefs (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 391). In *En Torno a Galileo*, Ortega says there are two kinds of beliefs: those that are proper to a single individual and those that are current at the social level and have the character of anonymity. (Social life for Ortega, as we have learned in chapter "Ortega's Philosophical Anthropology", is the realm of anonymity.) Regarding this last kind of beliefs, everybody accepts them because they are endowed with current acceptance; they offer everybody a social pattern of action. They consist of everything I can count with, just like, says Ortega, I know that I cannot walk through a wall to get out from a room. However, something is not right here. The well-founded belief that I cannot walk through a wall is both individual and social (in the sense that I cannot imagine a human being that does not share it), but, unlike to what happens to most social beliefs *stricto sensu*, it is not subjected to historical change. What I mean is the following: this last belief is connected in such a way with man's normal experience of the world and the ways of getting oriented in it that it cannot be subjected to the historical change that characterize other social beliefs.

What we have just said is not just about historical-philosophical issues: it has to do in the first place with Ortega's anthropology. I must resume some ideas that have already been advanced in chapter "Ortega's Philosophical Anthropology" to understand this complex issue. First of all, we must remember that life, for Ortega, is a permanent "having to do," men live like the victims of a shipwreck that must brace to keep themselves at the water level. Of course, this is a metaphor, but this Orteguian metaphor, which he repeats time and again in his Lessons and books, stems from his conception that living is always dangerous, because future is unpredictable, the others appear as strangers before becoming familiar and friendly, human achievements are always in risk of being lost. The danger is not always the same,[5] and so human answers to the drama of life must vary.

Now, a second problem. Which are the temporal limits of a generation? For how long does a generation lead the destinies of humanity? Although Ortega gives us some figures (and I will mention them I a moment), the most interesting of his concept of generation is the conception of time that underlies it, because it is true historical time and not just the physical time that science applies in the study of things and we, with some naiveté, apply to man's achievements.

[4] However, the aim of avoiding teleological explanations is not obtained if one just replaces them by a collection of facts—even though causally connected—with the aim, as Leopold von Rank puts it, of saying only what happened exactly as it has happened. Although history as a positive science has the praiseworthy goal of saving itself from logical deductions in a realm where there is no place for deductions (since historical events are not logically connected, at least in a Hegelian sense of logic), it cannot save itself from the trouble of creating its own categories to understand historical events. See Ortega (2006a: 234).

[5] Perhaps with the exception of some very general dangers, like death, that rather seem to be the common lot of every member of the human species. The question is in itself relevant, but we will skip it due to our present purposes in this chapter.

6 Perspectivism

According to Ortega, there is no unique method valid for the evident knowledge of reality as each man and each people provide their contribution or "point of view," in accordance with their epochs and circumstances, with only God the absolute responsible for them all (Ortega y Gasset, 2005c: 616). This approach resolves the problem of the relationship between truth and history without giving way to relativism. Actually, relativism is the huge problem that Ortega's philosophy of History has to face, like before him Dilthey and Hegel also had to face. Ortega addresses the problem in these terms: can a philosophy be, at the same time, faithful to the truth that human mind seeks in every circumstance and to the vitality of human existence that in each epoch calls "truth" the opinion that prevails on that epoch? The alternative seems clear: either we claim the impossibility to know what truth is—even admitting that it exists—or we claim that truth exists, although it is independent of human life and only valid for man as long as man is a pure rational being. If we accept the first term of this alternative, we fall in skepticism, and, while preserving human vitality, we deprive life of landmarks and guidance of any kind; if we accept the second, i.e., the viewpoint of rationalism, an invariable truth will deprive life of its substance that is change and variability.

Regarding the relation between God and the World, Ortega's response is provided in a chapter of a small text written in 1926, even before having embarked on his second navigation under the title of "God in sight," defending that the perspective of his epoch began to impose a notion of a secular God interrelated with mental acts that are alien to religion. This change of perspective characterizes every domain of human activity. Analyzing Spanish painting of the seventeenth century, Ortega stresses the fact that painters like Velasquez, whose paintings seem almost unfinished (since the background often is just sketched), would be misunderstood by the public of the former generation. So, the explanation for this fact cannot lie on Velasquez particular style, but on a change in the meaning of painting itself (Ortega y Gasset, 2006d: 618). However, regarding the relations between present and future—two of the three temporal dimensions of time and history—rationalism seems to be more dangerous for Ortega than skepticism, since it is the cause of the utopian thought that characterized the nineteenth century. Utopia means looking to the future without perspective, and that means without one of the basic characteristics of every human relation to circumstance. Utopianism believes that reason is not closely connected to its own time and is able to legislate for any imaginable future and human intellect can prevail over past and present.

In each epoch, the infinite reality of the Universe and the place man occupies in it unveils the attentions of man in a specific form, in accordance with a regime of preferences and blind spots. Indeed, in relation to the problem of the first and last questions as regards understanding the relationship between God and the World, the modern epoch is characterized by the notion of "agnosticism," in a sharp contrast with the first phase of Christian thought, where human temporal existence was totally reabsorbed in God's eternity (Ortega y Gasset, 2006c: 471). In the modern

epoch, there is only recognition of the immediate reality, and that ignores any need for a complete reality and the scope for "another life" and of any eternal "ultra-world" completely distinct from temporal reality:

> Man renounces on worthy pretexts of prudence the discovery of the secret of the ultimate things, of the "fundamental" things, gazes affixed exclusively to 'this world'. Because 'this world' is what is left from the Universe after we have removed all that is fundamental; thus, a world without foundations; without location, without cement, an islet that fluctuates adrift on a mysterious element. (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b: 607)

Through his philosophy of history, Ortega presents the transition from medieval religious culture, which gave way to the irrationalist overlapping of faith and reason, to a modern culture that reacts to this distortion through the predominance of scientific reason and the abandoning of adhesion to the divine through agnosticism. The contemporary epoch, to which the thinker belongs, expresses a return to the divine, no longer by means of fideist irrationality or through confessional faith but rather according to a deist rationality. In this historical analysis, Ortega puts at the same level, on the one hand, fideist irrationality and, on the other hand, Gnosticism, which was characterized by the devaluation of the world and an exclusive dedication to the "ultra-world" and the divine reality. Ortega mentions the gnostic metaphysical position of Marcion, according to whom the world was the work of a malignant entity and enemy of God, redemption meaning the undoing of this malignant action of creation, and characterizes these two antagonistic positions in the following terms: "(...) the agnostic's word is 'experience'—which means attention to 'this' world—the Gnostic's word is 'salvation', which means escape from this world and attention to the other" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b: 607).

But all this only means that man has to invent a program for his own life, what Ortega calls a "static form of being" that may answer satisfactorily to his problems and difficulties (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 72). Man looks at himself as that imaginary being he intends to be and experiences it at the extent that he comes to believe that it corresponds to his real being. However, as we have already stressed, man has no static being, no substantial nature, but instead a history. This means that that imaginary being he intended to be in the course of history—history in the sense of res gestae—and the system of beliefs that accompanied them were not his real being. Man's real being consists only in the historical projects he makes for himself. When a project fails, men try to replace it with another: so, every historical epoch must be explained according to two factors, namely, the circumstance that originates a life project and the past projects that have failed and to which the present project reacts.[6]

Ortega arrives at this conclusion by applying the historical reason method on the assumption that man is "a pilgrim of being," without any limitations for that which he is capable of being and how his being is variable and grows in a progressive form, creating his own identity in the circumstances that surround him (Ortega y Gasset,

[6] That's the reason why Ortega says that the past projects are still effective, as projects that must be avoided (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 72). We will come to this issue soon.

2006b: 72–73). The modern conception of man, the world and God is different from the Christian and stoic conceptions but could not exist without them. Progress requires that the new forms exceed the former but that for this to happen, it has to draw support from them in a cumulative process of being. The only aspect that is fixed is and determined in man is his free condition to make himself and to interpret the world: "(…) the being of man is irreversible, it is ontologically forced to advance always over itself" (Ortega y Gasset, 2006a: 69). However, the future is not conceivable without the past. That's the important issue addressed in *History as a System*, written in 1941. So, let us suppose man facing the present crisis. (One must remember that Ortega is writing more than 75 years ago, when the world was plunged into World War II.) He tries to find the best political solution for it, after the experiences of democracy, liberalism, monarchical absolutism, and feudalism. The first question is: is modern man no longer any of these different things? In a certain way they are his past, i.e., they show him past experiences or ways of living that, at their own epochs, were thought to be the solution for the crisis they should overcome. Now, man has made all these experiences; he has them over his shoulders, so to speak; and this means he is able to evaluate them, both successes and failures. As John Graham stresses, for Ortega man's present possibilities contain his whole past (Graham, 1994: 63). However, historical circumstances having changed, man knows he cannot repeat past experiences, the very fact that he has made them is like a force that prevents him from making them again and propels him toward the future. Ortega resumes this idea saying that the proof that the past stills exists is the fact that it remains active within ourselves, preventing us to repeat it (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 70).

Taking up opposition to idealism, Ortega affirms that radical reality is not only thinking but rather "my life," this trans-objective intimate center in which there is no divide between the Ego, the Universe, and God: "(…) that things, that the Universe, that God Himself are the contents of my life – because "my life" is not only me, me the subject, but living is also the world" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 350). Primordial reality is neither any mundane or divine thing nor the subjective intimacy of cogito. However, it is human life in his intimacy with itself and with things, in a dynamic coexistence in which the things, the Universe, and God himself are constituted as contents in "my life." This notion of correlation between the reality that is there in the evidence of the cosmos and the invisible perspectivism of the beliefs and the subject that confronts this with his ideas appears in further detail in Berta Pimentel's conception that life is made in mundanity, in events independent of any a priori element: "The ideal feeds history but it is historicity that constitutes actual reality" (Pimentel, 2007: 254). The being in man is a passage, a personal and collective circumstance, ever since stoicism and Christianism through to rationalism and vitalism, and with this narrative escaping capture by pure physical-mathematical reason but instead by historical reason. This progression in the configuration of reality is not a priori defined—in the sense of the utopian way of thinking we mentioned above—but may only be stated a posteriori by historical reason (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 71). That's why the only way to understand the being of a particular man is to tell the story of his life. The same holds for

civilizations: "It would be impossible to understand very well just what is the European 'rationalist' man should we not know exactly what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be Christian without knowing what it means to be stoic, a and so forth" (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 75).

Now, we come to a decisive point; historical reason is a biographical reason. We have discovered the intimacy of man's life. Antiquity only acknowledged the world of things; man was only a small part of this world, that part that was endowed with reason. Modern Times have gone a step beyond, as long as "subjectivity" was put at the basis of reality: from then on, things could only justified that they were real and how they were real once subjectivity reckoned their existence. However, as we have seen before (namely, in our chapters "Ortega and Germany" and "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism"), a subjectivity opposed to the external reality is only half of the entire subjectivity. That why philosophy had to come to "life" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 348). Life—i.e., the new continent Ortega claims to have discovered—is not subjectivity. That's why Ortega may also claim that discovering life philosophy has attained a higher lever than Antiquity and Modernity: "higher" means here that objective reality and subjectivity have not disappeared; they only have been, *sit venia verbo*, swallowed by a new kind of reality, place in a higher level than the other two. The digestive metaphor is quite appropriate here. Something that has been swallowed does not disappear; it just changes its original state.

The problem with idealism, the reason why a historically oriented philosophy is impossible if someone takes an idealist point of view, is its unilaterality. The existence of things has become problematic from the moment onward we think about their relation to us; but, even if, so far, we can follow the idealistic trend of thought, its consequences are inacceptable as long as we have discovered the radical reality of human life. And the consequences are the fact that idealist philosophies are just "contents" of our consciousness (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 348). That is, according to Ortega, the first and more important tenet of every idealist philosophy. It's not nonsense, in the sense that it clearly has a meaning that anyone can understand, just as I can understand that someone who says that $2 + 2 = 5$ is just trying to make an addition, although the result is false. In the same way it's false that things are "contents" of my consciousness. When I look at a thing, I do not look at an element of my inner life: I look at a thing that is "out there," occupying the place where I see it, but in a special kind of relation to me that I call "perception."

It's true that Ortega uses the word "content" when he speaks about the "contents" of my life, but here "content" has quite a different meaning. If I can say that everything that is in the universe is a content of my life—that even God, if he exists, must be a content of my life—that is because my life is not only me, the subject that Modern Times put at the ground of reality, as the radical *datum* of the universe (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 350), but also the world. Idealism, the philosophy of Modern Times, brought to philosophy the idea that being or existing meant, in the first place, existing independently from any other reality. This "superlative of ontological independence" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 349) cannot have any kind of history. History is only possible for a being that exists in time. That's why, faced with the fact that there are two different kinds of reality, the thought and the things that

are thought, idealism was forced to ask: which of these two is independent from the other? Which of these two really is, i.e., independent of time and its vicissitudes?

According to Ortega, the being of man is his biographical or historical life that is not predetermined but made in accordance with his decisions, containing all of the past and everything to come in his circumstance in the world (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 574). To be a man always means "to become a stranger"; to be in a circumstance that was not created for him, with which he has to struggle; in a way, to live is to have the nostalgia of not being God, the Being that floats in his own element, for whom nothing is alien or strange (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 611). The world in which we are enclosed does not correspond to our needs, and, for this reason, we feel the need to question the ground upon which we live and to conceive "another world": "A world in that sense favorable to man is exactly another world, the world man dreams for himself because this world is rather the opposite—an unfavorable world to man" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 616).

7 Meaning in History

As I said earlier, Ortega's philosophy of historical reason addresses the problem of human action in time as well as the historiological problem of reconstructing this action and the aims of historical actors. Before addressing this last issue, one must remember that for Ortega concepts and ideas—and, above all, scientific ideas—only touch reality in some of their aspects; for their greatest part, they are a kind of free speculation, an intellectual sport done for its own sake. This is most true of modern theoretical physics, namely, quantum mechanics, but any scientific endeavor (including History) has this same feature. Now, how to fill the inevitable gaps between facts? As we shall see, that's the task Ortega gives to imagination in science.

However, regarding History as a science—the *historia rerum gestarum*—the problems are even more complicated than with physical science. Material objects can be submitted to the experimental procedures a researcher thinks as the more appropriate to the theme he is addressing. The same doesn't hold for historical events. The physical and scientific truths are exact but incomplete and penultimate, due to be overcome by ontological truths, which are inexact but complete and ultimate, giving us the integral radicality of the world (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 265). This continues to be a speculative and theoretical approach but one which recognizes the infinite mystery of reality that emerges in the multiplicity of the perspectives stemming from rooting the subject in the dynamism of the historical circumstance which, in the words of Ortega, is constituted as the "negation of the Ego" and "being against myself": "Paradise is the magic world we talked about the other day. The world, in contrast, is the anti-paradise" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 619).

As Julián Marías highlights, by the action of man on the World, it is inevitable that he reaches beyond physical science and asks about his origins and his destiny as it is not possible to renounce the desire for a complete and integral notion of the Universe and of a notion about the essential meaning of life (Marías, 1950: 180). If,

like idealist philosophies of Modern Times postulated, the radical reality of the universe is me and my thoughts, to exist would only mean to enter in oneself; correlatively, to be a historian would mean to be a kind of psychologist. Man would not be limited except by himself; in other words, he would be in the same position as God (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 530). Ortega makes a contrast between this divine condition of existence, in which God has everything immediately present to him, with the human condition: "When the catechism ensures that God is everywhere, it is only symbolizing this peculiar condition of divine existence that turns it into such a distinctive thing that contradicts what we understand by 'human life'" (Ortega y Gasset, 2005d: 589). Contrary to what would be the point of view of God, men have always looked at the circumstance in which they live as an element distinct from themselves. We say that human beings exist because the word existence means, according to its etymology, a being out of oneself, i.e., in a world where there are other things, a world that is distinct from me, alien to me, where things should not be merely called "objects," but rather "facilities" or "difficulties," depending on whether they are favorable or unfavorable to men's projects. Moreover, each man is a system of possibilities and impossibilities; so, when a historian tries to grasp the significance of a human existence, he must, above all, take notice of that system (Moreno, 2005: 183). And just like the actions of a single person stem from the individual system of his life, in the same way historical actions stem from a much more complex system that is constituted by the totality of the social, economic, and political relations of an epoch.

From this perspective, where philosophic knowledge looks like a search for the being of the things of the world, a search which stems from the radical human dimension that is man's ignorance, Ortega considers that the light that shows us the provisional realities of the world is not sufficient to us and demands that we strive to know the stable and permanent being of these things. In "Qué es el conocimiento?" Ortega puts in the following manner the distinction between the finite and limited reality of human life in the world and the infinite and perfect reality of God, whose existence coincides with the things, not needing to search for the being that is latent in them:

> God may deal directly with infinite things in number and in ways of behaving. He takes into consideration each one of them, those from the present and those from every tomorrow. He is as infinite as they are; His sphere of existence coincides with the sphere in which those things inhabit. (Ortega y Gasset, 2005d: 589)

Indeed, this confirms here Ortega's rejection of an idea he had already rejected in his 1923 work *The Theme of Our Time*, namely, the refusal to associate the divine to an ideal of "infinite emptiness" (Ortega y Gasset, 2005c: 597), in the fashion of a nirvanic extinction that annihilates the existential reality of life. Moreover, he rejected the opposition between the divine, as the center of all perfections, and any form of mundane life. Affirming life as that which is what it is, in its immanent qualities certified by science, morality, and art, cannot mean any separation and breaking away from God as sought after by Christian Gnosticism, with its exclusive valuation of a transcendent and ultra-vital reality:

> Given these two antagonistic and equally exclusive preferences, the understanding should be established by an intermediary line, precisely the line that sets the frontier between one world and the other. This line where 'this world' ends, belongs to it, and has therefore a 'positive' character. However, in turn, such a line begins in the ultra-world and is therefore transcendental. (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b: 607)

Following this line of thought, Ortega values Hegel's efforts to think things rationally from within, i.e., his endeavors to avoid an intellectualist and constructive methodology that could only entail an imposition into historical events of a reason alien to them. Historical events, Hegel acknowledged, possess an original form of being, prior to the rational activity of the historian who tries to grasp their meaning (Bonilla, 2013: 109). However, as Clementina Cantillo argues, Ortega rejects the Hegelian process in which the nexus between reason and history, universality and particularity, thinking and life were submitted to the pure dimension of the logic of spirit and of a rational teleological development. Only a narrative and biographic reason is capable of learning the unrepeatable aspect of particularity (Cantillo, 2016: 199). That's why one of the main critiques Ortega addresses to the Hegelian notion of Spirit—that according to Hegel sets history in motion—has to do with its static character, the opposite of the dynamism that is proper to life. Ortega, of course, acknowledges Hegel's efforts to give Spirit some kind of activity (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 63). However, as Ortega immediately notices, that activity is an internal motion, Spirit comes to be at the end what it already was at the beginning; while in motion, the Hegelian Spirit keeps its identity with itself. "Spiritualism" in the Hegelian sense is just a kind of up-side-down naturalism, because naturalism doesn't consist in speaking of ideas as if they were material things, but rather in speaking of material things as if they were ideas that kept an identity with themselves.

However, this philosophy of life assumes that there always has to be a minimum of appropriateness or a common formal structure between thinking and reality, without which knowledge is not possible: "The world can only enter my mind if the structure of my mind partially coincides with the world's structure, if my thinking behaves in a manner that coincides with my being" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 274). Hence, Ortega considers that, for the prospects of a correlation between the knowing subject and the object, and for there to be knowledge, the appropriateness has to be mutual: thinking has to coincide with the thing, but this is only possible because the thing in itself already coincides with the structure of our thinking. We may verify on the one hand the rejection of a skeptical perspective, according to which being does not coincide at all with thinking, and on the other hand the rejection of the epistemological optimism of coincidence, according to which either knowledge shall result from being (realism) or being results from knowledge (idealism). When a man looks at his own life, most of its details may seem to him contingent; but the overall contour of his life will seem perfectly understandable. This contour is not irrational, since, at the very moment he looks to his own life, it stems from the totality of his past, from his doings, and these were what they were due to the social milieu in which he was educated and raised, with its system of habits and beliefs. His life will appear to him as a system, just like the history of the "collective man" (Ortega y Gasset, 2006b: 74), i.e., human societies is also a system. According to

Ortega, this happens not due to the subterranean activity of a Hegelian Spirit, but because human experiences in history form a chain and each link in the chain is connected to all the others.

Now, since philosophy lost the belief in the Hegelian spirit, it seems that history has lost all its meaning. As Ortega describes this process, in the first lesson of the Lisbon Lectures on *Historical Reason*, things began to turn bad when the world lost its faith in progress. As long as that faith remained alive (until around 1900, according to Ortega), the idea of meaning was not abandoned altogether, and the intellectuals, especially in Europe, looked as if they were able to guide humanity, indicating the direction the course of history was to take. Around 1920 Ortega says that it was evident for everybody that intellectuals were no longer able to do so (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 630). He even adds that it is surprising that they were able to keep a guiding position for almost two centuries of European history; actually, the fact that intellectuals have a special role to perform has only been acknowledge, in the history of humanity, since 2500 years (at least in the West), with long periods of intermittence. But what is an absolute novelty in the twentieth century is the attempt to organize the whole human existence putting radically aside the intellectuals (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 631).

But that is not the whole story. Humanity has lost faith in the intellectuals, it has also lost faith in reason and in science, but the worst—says Ortega quoting from Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 664)—is that science has also lost faith in itself. With quantum mechanics physics, no more knows what space and time mean; with mathematics, the validity of the principle of the excluded middle became uncertain; the science of law doesn't know what right means. Our present historical situation, stresses Ortega, is even worse than the situation Descartes had to face in the first half of the seventeenth century, which led him to put everything in doubt (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 678). Nevertheless, Descartes' example can be of some use to us. Like him we are bound to the requirement of overcoming a crisis. Descartes doubted about everything, but his doubt ended with the discovery of the cogito. Ortega has already shown that the Cartesian solution is of no use once modernity comes to its end. But he emphasizes that, like Descartes, the crisis must be overcome. At the end of modernity, we can no longer rely in a subjectivistic philosophy. Subjectivism (and its political counterpart, utopianism) is one of the reasons of modern crisis. Time has come to go beyond modernity, without falling back in the opposite unilateralism: the objectivism of ancient and medieval philosophy. That's the new task reason has to take upon itself.

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Epilogue

1 Ortega's System of Philosophy

Ortega's philosophical life was not a very happy one. His endeavors to give his philosophy a systematic form and to display it systematically before the public were not successful. Moreover, his remarkable literary gifts often led people to think he was more a talented disseminator of philosophical, aesthetic, and scientific ideas than an original philosopher. In *The Idea of Principle in Leibniz* Ortega says sourly that none of his contemporaries tried to grasp the following single fact: his writings were not literature that looked like philosophy, but instead a systematic philosophy that offered itself under the guise of a literary text (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 1136). Of course, there are two distinct issues here. The first has to do with the essence of philosophy itself, the other with the method of its exposition.

One can always wonder if a certain philosophy could or could not be presented in a way different from the way the philosopher actually chose. For instance: could Plato display the content of the *Sophist* in the fashion of, say, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*? Or was it possible for Kant to write the *Critique of Pure Reason*, without losing some of its content, in the form of a platonic dialogue? Ortega never addressed this kind of problems directly, but we have enough references to them in his writings in order to be able to get a general idea of his thoughts on the issue. At least three different items must be stressed.

1. In the first place, his well-known statement, in *What is Philosophy?*, that clarity is the courtesy of the philosopher. Ortega seems to think that deep philosophical ideas can be displayed before a large audience in a way accessible to those that do not master completely philosophical technicalities.
2. In the second place, the mission Ortega assigned to philosophy and to philosophical activities in the specific Spanish context in which he lived. Spanish backwardness—at least so he thought—forced him to avoid the literary style of

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