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The Philosophy of Ortega y Gasset Reevaluated

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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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mentioned in chapter "Spain Is the Problem; Europe Is the Solution". Regardless what one thinks of his opinion that phenomenological reduction is a "rest" of idealism in Husserl's thought (Morón Arroyo, 1968: 205)—and I think the issue is debatable—his exposition of Ortega's affinities with the phenomenological method is on the whole correct. Some years before the illuminating analysis of Javier San Martín of the first four sections of the "Preliminary Meditation" of the *Meditations on Quixote*, Morón Arroyo has shown the extent to which Ortega's description of the woods of the Escorial are an example of how the phenomenological method can be applied (Morón Arroyo, 1968: 206). In any case, the issue must be revisited.[2]

Philosophers can be victims of retrospective illusions regarding their own evolution. Perhaps that's what happened with Ortega. Anyway, that's not what matters here. What Ortega says in 1934, in his famous "Preface to Germans," about his relations with Neokantianism and especially with phenomenology—that he abandoned it the moment he got in contact with it—may not be entirely true. But two central ideas in this text are certainly true. (1) Around 1912, Ortega and a whole generation of young philosophers, trained in the Neokantian philosophy, felt deeply the urgency of departing from idealism, even if they were never entirely Neokantians; (2) for those same philosophers, phenomenology offered a bundle of rich philosophical analysis, even if phenomenology, as Ortega says, lacked the necessary systematic character (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 150). Moreover, phenomenology seems to have played a decisive role in their farewell to idealism. In Ortega, however, the phenomenological method, as it is exemplified in Husserl's writings, seems to have made a strong and lasting imprint. This explains why, as one of his former students says, Ortega always claimed that philosophical efforts were directed to the solution of problems and not to the understanding of what philosophers have thought about them (Garagorri, 1970: 47). That was the reason why Ortega's language, in his lectures and in his writings, avoided those technicalities that prevented human mind to focus on the things themselves.

Ortega's 1915 Lectures on *The System of Psychology* are a clear-cut example of what he thought at the time about idealism and phenomenology. Ortega offers an analysis of what "consciousness" means and says that consciousness is the most difficult thing to find in the whole universe if by "consciousness" we mean some kind of entity that is separated from the other things of which it is the consciousness of (Ortega y Gasset, 2007: 466). I am only aware that I love, for instance, when there is someone loved by me, just as I can only be aware that I make a

[2] There are some topics related to this issue that have to do with an overall interpretation of Ortega's thought and the phases of its evolution. For instance, regarding the 1910 essay "Adam in Paradise," shall we say that it is still Neokantian or not? And if not, is it still idealistic in nature, or is it already pointing to the mature philosophy of vital reason? Some have claimed with no apparent justification that Ortega's mature philosophy was already present in this juvenile essay (Marías, 1983: 326; Graham, 1994: 120). And how do we explain what has changed in Ortega's aesthetics between "Adam in Paradise" and the last essays about Zuloaga's paintings, after his return from Germany in 1912? About these issues, we refer to what we already said in chapters "Ortega and Germany" and "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism".

judgment when there is something judged. When I say that I am "conscious of," there is always another thing different from consciousness that appears and gives consciousness the possibility also to appear. And this happens, as Ortega rightly stresses, not thanks to an a posteriori act of reflection about what being conscious means but rather in that very moment in which I am "conscious of." When someone looks at a table, there is at the same time the table that appears and the appearance itself of the table. Only the latter, i.e., the appearance, can be called a phenomenon of consciousness; however, it needs the former, i.e., the table, in order to happen. The important point for us is the fact that Ortega expresses these phenomenologically oriented ideas without any criticism to an alleged phenomenological idealism. Of course, Ortega overlooks the fact that an appearance is an appearance to me, and so I must be aware of myself when I intend something other. Anyway, the real problem lies elsewhere: can I recover my previous spontaneity when later I reflect upon my executive act? We will come to this issue later in this chapter.

Some—like John T. Graham—have also argued that Ortega's overcoming of idealism, especially in its Neokantian variety, was only possible thanks to his acquaintance with William James' pragmatist philosophy (Graham, 1994: 120). The relation of Ortega and James is too large an issue to be addressed in this Chapter. Graham is perhaps right when he stresses that one of the roots of Ortega's idea of life as radical reality can be found in James' philosophy. However, considering phenomenology only as a method and accepting Ortega's opinion, we mentioned above, that phenomenology lacked the necessary systematic character to be considered a *prima philosophia*, Graham misses the role it plays in Ortega's farewell to idealism. Morón Arroyo points out correctly that the fact that Ortega labels his own philosophy, in 1915, a "radical positivism"—which remembers us Husserl's statement that he was the only "true positivist"—means he looks at his own philosophy as a kind of realistic phenomenology, where the aim is to "show" or to "exhibit" and not to construct (Morón Arroyo, 1968: 2009).

1 Ortega's Philosophy in 1929

Since that what we called in chapter "Ortega and Germany" Ortega's "second navigation" was already motivated by the need to abandon the continent of subjectivity, i.e., idealism, we may in this chapter address Ortega's mature diagnosis of idealism, from 1929 onward. As we shall see, phenomenology will now be accused by Ortega of being a kind of idealism, and his personal relations with Husserl's philosophy will be reevaluated. This reevaluation culminates in the abovementioned statement of 1947 in *The Idea of Principle in Leibniz*: "I abandoned phenomenology at the very moment I received it" (Ortega y Gasset, 2009d: 1119).

In this chapter we will in the first place address Lessons VI, VII, and VIII of *What is Philosophy?*, from 1929, and the Lessons II and III of the *Principles of*

Metaphysics, from 1932 to 1933.[3] Later, we will turn to Lesson X of *What is Philosophy?*. We will also mention the Section 4 of the "Preface to Germans"[4]. At last, we will address *The Idea of Principle in Leibniz*, which offers some new arguments regarding idealism and particularly the so-called phenomenological idealism.[5]

We will begin by the end of Lesson VI of *What is Philosophy?*. There Ortega resumes the task of philosophy previously mentioned in earlier Lessons and says that philosophy is the quest for the ultimate *data* of the universe, i.e., those that exist in the universe and, at the same time, in our knowledge of it. This means that there may be things in the universe that we don't know (and perhaps will never know), and things in our knowledge that don't exist in the universe, although we believe they do. Regarding these last kinds of things, the task of philosophy is called *desasirse*, which means, in Ortega's more technical vocabulary, voiding oneself from false beliefs. One remembers, immediately, Descartes' doubt and Husserl's *epoché*. One could ask why those things—or at least some of them—which exist in the universe but not in our knowledge cannot be called ultimate *data*. The answer seems obvious: a *datum* is only a *datum* as long as it is given to someone. This is very important, not only to an overall understanding of Ortega but also to an understanding of his critique of idealism: "ultimate" doesn't mean existing in isolation.

Where may those ultimate *data* that philosophy is looking for be found? To begin with: almost all *data* are a source of problems. Ortega offers a simple and nice example: if we look to a stick in a transparent vase full of water, we will get two different *data*, the *datum* of that part of the stick that is in the water and the *datum* of that part that is out of the water. And as we all know—and both physics and psychology teach us why—those *data* don't overlap, since the stick will appear to everybody broken in two, in that part that corresponds to the water level in the vase. Moreover, this appearance contradicts the appearance of the stick in normal perceptual conditions, i.e., outside the water. And so, we have a problem: which is the real appearance of the stick? Which of the appearances corresponds to what the stick really is? Even if we rightly say that the stick is not broken, the appearance of the stick out of the water corresponding to this belief (in what we have called "normal

[3] The complete title is *Principles of Metaphysics according to Vital Reason*. These Lessons were first published by Paulino Garagorri under the title *Lessons of Metaphysics*. (*Unas Lecciones de Metafísica*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1966.)

[4] This text was only posthumously published in 1958. Ortega intended it as a preface to a German edition of *The Theme of Our Times*. Helene Weyl translated the first 100 pages of the Spanish original into German, but Ortega suspended the publication in 1934. As he confessed at the time, the political events in Germany that same year were the main reason for this suspension.

[5] I recall that the focus of this chapter is Ortega's evaluation of idealism and not of phenomenology. Phenomenology is mentioned here only as it is considered by the Spanish philosopher as a variety of idealism. Ortega's discussion of phenomenological themes goes far beyond this limited issue. For instance, in *Man and People* he has a very interesting discussion of Husserl's and Alfred Schütz' theories of intersubjectivity.

conditions") cannot be an ultimate *datum*. This *datum* can only be stated by someone to whom the stick appears and is able to reckon how it really is.[6]

The search for ultimate *data* is the specific task of philosophy and what distinguishes it from science. Even Descartes was searching ultimate *data*; doubt, for him, was just the method to get hold of them. I think Paulino Garagorri is wrong when he says that Husserl was just prolonging Descartes' errors when he looked for the ultimate *data* in a kind of innate universal a priori structures that made knowledge possible (Garagorri, 1970: 36). The only a priori Husserl's phenomenology allows is the noetic-noematic correlation. As we just said in footnote 6, when Ortega interprets this correlation as the same correlation that obtains between myself and my circumstance, he is only enlarging the scope of Husserl's analysis, converting what in the first place was a theory of perception into a theory of culture.

In *What is Philosophy?* the quest for ultimate *data* has four levels. Ortega, at the beginning of Lesson VI offers a brief account of the first two, since he is now going to enter the third. The visual image of philosophy's slowly approach to this *data* is a spiral (Fig. 1). The two most external circles of the spiral correspond to the scientific view of the universe. For a positivist-oriented philosophy, these circles represent the most objective knowledge of the universe; the objectivity is guaranteed by the facts that experiments allow us to get hold of. According to this view, a scientific assertion is objective if we can make a correspondence between what it says and what happens in the world. Ortega does not put into question the fact that science gets its support in some observable *data* (Ortega y Gasset, 2009d: 945). However, he adds that science is an intellectual construction on the basis of those *data*, "a pure intellectual exercise"—a kind of sportive activity, as he also puts it—that has not much resemblance to what we grasp about the way things behave in the world of

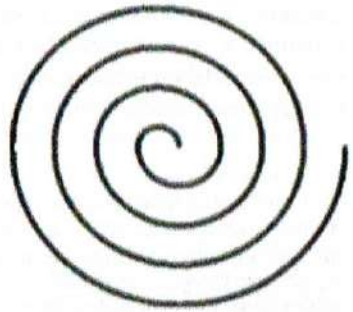


Fig. 1 The method of approach to the ultimate *data*

[6] Of course, those who insist that in Ortega's philosophy every reference to the subject means also a reference to the objectivities that appear to that subject, and that this is a proof of Ortega's overcoming of idealism, are right. What we argued in chapter "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism" is that this simultaneous reference to a subject and to an object—condensed in Ortega's famous motto *Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia* (I am myself and my circumstance)—is just Ortega's interpretation of Husserl's noetic-noematic correlation (1950: 227).

everyday experience.[7] Incidentally, he adds that this is the reason why Aristotle and medieval Averroism denied the existence of a personal intellective soul (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 292): scientific thought is an impersonal activity and our individual life, the only one that really exists—just like the beliefs that guide our lifeworld experience, as we shall soon see – takes no special part in it.

Now, Ortega draws other and more important consequences from what has been said about the relations between science and reality. Since science doesn't sprout from the radical center of our own person (but only from one of its derivative functions), scientific assertions will never be an object of belief. That's why they have a kind of sportive character. Scientists may endeavor to ground their assertions on facts; however, our personal life is not entirely committed to these assertions, or, if it is, it is only as long as they are the basis of technical discoveries that can improve the way we live. It's not impossible that what was first an idea may turn, in the course of time, into a belief. On the other hand, beliefs don't have the same impersonal character of scientific assertions, and, even when they are shared by a great number of people, they always keep a close relation with individual life. It would be nonsensical to say, for instance, that I believe in the curvature of space, according to Einstein's theory of general relativity; it is a rather technical mathematical construction needed for the explanation of some *data* captured by astrophysicists. Even if the curvature of space could be proved, we still wouldn't have, in our daily lives, the phenomenal experience of it. On the other hand, it makes sense to say that I believe that I cannot go through a wall, because in my daily life I adjust my behavior to this belief, which, besides, is shared by all my fellow men.[8]

The ultimate *data* of the universe must be evident. But evidence is not a feeling. It's the immediate presence of an object in consciousness. No wonder that the point of departure of idealist philosophers was the claim that consciousness is immediately present to itself. We can understand what evidence is with the help of some examples. If we look to an orange, we see the orange color of its peel. The peel is immediately present in consciousness. (Note: the peel and not the idea of the peel, which is an elaborate construction of the philosopher or the psychologist when analyzing human mind.) However, the inner parts are not immediately present; and if

[7] Perhaps Ortega is thinking about something like a paradigm, in the sense of Thomas Kuhn. Those intellectual exercises he calls science differ from each other more according to the kind of world scientific view they propose than according to their empirical content. We will soon see how, according to Ortega, scientific theories "touch" empirical reality. Anyway, he is addressing here another issue. He is contrasting the intellectual endeavors of science with man's daily occupation with his own life.

[8] In the context of this chapter, I will only mention briefly Ortega's theory of belief. It would deserve a long explanation, but at least three things can be said thereupon. (1) There are, for Ortega, two kinds of beliefs: those who stem from any kind of human experience, regardless of the context in which it happened, and those who have a historical character and are doomed to disappear at the same time as the époque that saw their birth. (2) Ideas may be transformed into beliefs as long as time has consolidated their existence in man's consciousness. (3) From a cultural point of view, ideas are indispensable, since only they enable men to give stability and reliability to the social reality they live in.

we split the orange in two halves, each of these halves will also have an inner side that is not seen. The inner side of a physical object is never immediately present in consciousness. This assertion is very important, and we will understand it better after another example.

When someone proves a theorem, has he the immediate experience of it or not? If our answer is yes, we would have to draw the rather strange conclusion that our relation with a theorem has something in common with our relation with an orange peel. But that prima facie strange conclusion has to be drawn. Evidence, as Ortega stresses, has nothing to do with the ontological status—or the peculiar way of being—of the thing from which we have the evidence. We must require that an object be present to consciousness in order to be able to talk about it, but the way it is present depends on its own peculiarities. Evidence just means that what we think of a thing, i.e., its concept, and the way that same thing is given overlap.[9] Now, we must draw the two following conclusions (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 302):

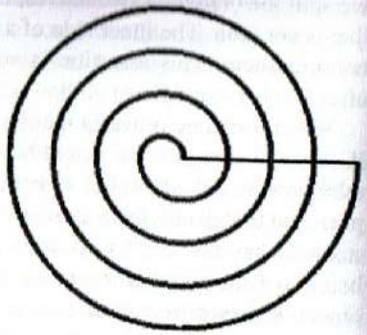
1. Sensible or intelligible things can be evident, since evidence regards the way a thing, no matter its ontological status, is present in consciousness. This is what Ortega calls a radical enlargement of positivistic claims.
2. When something, sensible or intelligible, cannot be immediately present in consciousness, the evidence of it is impossible.

Let's apply now our conclusions to the problem of how many things there are in the universe, retrieving our point of departure. Firstly, we must reckon that there are just the things that are. Like Willard v. O. Quine remarked, any statement like this one is trivially true, in the sense that no one will disagree with it. However, it doesn't improve our knowledge (Quine, 1994: 1).[10] Secondly, we must also reckon that some of the things we believe exist may not exist. Thirdly, there are those things that exist and that we may be sure they exist; as we said above, those last things are at the same time in the universe and in our knowledge of it. We are now in condition to complete our first image by this new one. In Fig. 2 a straight line connects our point of departure and our expected point of arrival; but, progressing toward the center of the spiral, we pass, each time a circle is completed and before entering a smaller and inner circle, through our point of departure. We are just progressing; however, progressing means that we can only accept as true what has been given to us in an adequate intuition. The path Ortega followed was intended to prove that neither the *data* of common sense experience nor those of scientific experience were adequately given. Has this path by chance approached an intuitively given *datum*? If so, what is it? As we will see, it's here that, according to Ortega, we can experience

[9] Perhaps it would be better to say "when we intend a thing" instead of "what we think of a thing." Ortega is probably thinking about the relation of meaning intentions and fulfillment intuitions, as Husserl explained it in the *Logical Investigations* (1984: 44).

[10] We will see two sections ahead that from this conclusion onward Ortega and Quine will follow two different paths. The main question for the American philosopher is: "what is there in the universe?"; for instance, alleged mental objects, like unicorns, have any kind of being? For Ortega the question is: "what is the nature of what is there in the universe?".

Fig. 2 The path towards intuitive data



the dramatic failure of every kind of philosophical idealism, i.e., of the philosophical systems of modernity.[11]

2 An Alternative Path?

The *Principles of Metaphysics according to Vital Reason*, a course lectured in 1932–1933 in Madrid's Central University, seem to offer an alternative path to that radical reality of my life Ortega has been speaking about since 1914. Perhaps the reading of *Being and Time*, of Martin Heidegger, can explain some of the shifts in this course regarding the Lessons of 1929. As he had not the possibility of direct access to Husserl's late Freiburg Lessons, nor to his manuscripts from the same period, Ortega was unable to guess how near he still was from the actual phenomenological work of the father of phenomenology. Ortega's point of departure, in the abovementioned course, is the need for metaphysics. He is trying to understand why men do metaphysics—or some men at least do—and what it can possibly mean to learn doing it. (Ortega's first Lesson is about the distinction between doing metaphysics when one feels the need for it and studying metaphysics; although it is an important issue, I won't address it here.) The first of Ortega's important statements is that we cannot learn metaphysics from a book; in order to be able to learn it, we

[11] In 1929, idealism, for Ortega, began with Descartes and ended with Husserl, but Ortega did not always thought like that. At the time he wrote the *Meditations on Quixote*, idealism ended with Neokantian philosophy. Of course, not all Ortega scholars agree with this opinion. Antonio Rodriguez Huéscar, for instance, says that phenomenology was for Ortega, an idealism to be overcome since the beginning (1982: 45). We have already addressed Huéscar's opinions in chapter "Ortega, Phenomenology and Idealism". Anyway, and disregarding this last issue, idealism was, for Ortega, a historical and necessary progress, since it corrected the unilateral character of ancient and medieval philosophies, i.e., philosophies based in the primacy of sensation. (What Ortega means by sensation must not be interpreted in an empiricist fashion. It's based on the sensation every philosophy that postulates the primacy of the object over the subject and forgets that knowledge is an unsurmountable relation between the two.)

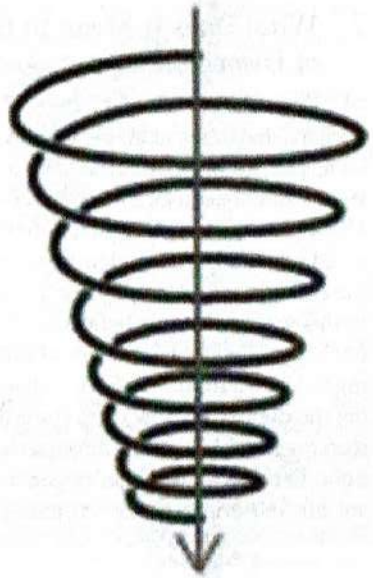
must feel a personal need for it in the first place. Metaphysics is something men need. Ortega then says that we can only feel its necessity in those situations in which we feel ourselves disoriented. Metaphysics is then a kind of top-down movement, a descent, as he says at the end of the Second Lesson (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 575), that we may represent through Fig. 3.

In a somewhat different manner, Ortega is still walking over the soil he opened up for philosophy in the Lessons of 1929. I mean, Ortega is retrieving the idea that my life is the radical reality, that what happens to and in my life is the most important thing for me, in the sense that it is the thing I experience in the first place. Disorientation is something that happens in my life and compels me to stop to think. Later, in the "Preface to Germans," he will be even clearer about this:

> [...] personal life is the radical reality and (...) life is circumstantial. Everyone exists as a shipwrecked in his circumstance. In it, he has to brace in order to keep floating. (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 152)

Significantly, Ortega doesn't say that to stop to think means to lose the executive character of consciousness. Phenomenologically, we could say that to stop to think is what every transcendental subject does.[12] This stop is the possibility of going on carrying executive acts. When Ortega, in other writings, analyzes the role played by *ensimismamiento* (the capacity of human beings to turn to themselves) in the

Fig. 3 The top-down movement characteristic of metaphysics



[12] In some of his writings, like the "Preface to Germans," Ortega seems to think (wrongly) that the transcendental subject is the phenomenological subject, i.e., the subject that carries the phenomenological reduction. This confusion can explain some of his criticisms to phenomenology.

achievement of human projects, he will come to very similar conclusions.[13] Life has in itself the possibility of reflection. But, when, like philosophical idealism, we put that possibility in the first place as the distinctive characteristic of the subject who reflects (which is what Ortega now thinks phenomenology also does), we lose the meaning reflection has in life. Reflection is no more something that happens in life for life's own sake, or for the sake of its own executivity, but an intellectual procedure that consists in analyzing primary consciousness (San Martín, 2012: 160). The fact that executive consciousness and reflective consciousness do not necessarily oppose each other is also stressed by Móron Arroyo (1968: 213), just like culture doesn't oppose the spontaneity of life. Reflection is consciousness' attention to itself, to its own intimacy, and to the acts it executes, in order that philosophy may be possible.

Disorientation would be inexplicable if either idealism or realism were right. Because Descartes identified things with my *cogitationes*—and this identification is the core of every idealism – he had to blame imagination for my disorientation, since imagination can induce me to act before the *clara et distincta perceptio* has informed me about what to do. This is important to notice, since Ortega's criticisms to phenomenological idealism consisted, for its most part, in the accusation that it forgot the executive character of consciousness.

3 What Does It Mean to Be Disoriented? Kinds of Disorientation

Perhaps that is not at all clear, at least at the beginning. Why should metaphysics be an answer to disorientation? What does it mean to feel disoriented? In what occasion is someone disoriented? Now, these are difficult questions to answer, since they all have to do with Ortega's notion of man and of belief. We feel ourselves disoriented when our beliefs don't work anymore. It is the theme of the second lesson of the *Principles of Metaphysics according to Vital Reason*.[14] I think things can be put in this way: when our beliefs seem to work, we are not disoriented. Resuming one of Ortega's examples, we could say that usually we don't feel disoriented when trying to leave a room. We know what doors are made for, and we also know that opening the door will allow us to leave the room. In the same way, we know that it is not recommendable to jump through the window, at least when we are not in the ground floor. Perhaps a door won't open when we try to open it. But problems of this kind are not the origin of disorientation, at least in the radical sense Ortega thinks it.

[13] *Ensimismamiento* is especially important in epochs of crisis, when men feel disoriented and search for a new meaning for their lives (Ortega y Gasset, 2010: 463). We shall address in full length the problem of *ensimismamiento* in chapter "Ortega's Philosophical Anthropology", when we will discuss Ortega's anthropology.

[14] In this section we will only address the 1932–1933 series of Lessons. The other two series will be addressed in the next section.

Anyway, something has been won with the previous analysis. Rooms, doors, and windows, and similar things, are just those things that are in the universe, which we encounter because we live among them. Even a skeptical has to admit that he takes into account their existence.[15] That's why, as we explained before, Ortega's question is not "what is there?", but instead "what is the nature of what is there?" Daily life gives us an answer to the first question, but not to the second. This is the reason why men do not have an immediate access to the radical reality. Ignoring the nature of what there is, we live in a kind of chaos. In other words, we are disoriented.

Now, let's try to think a little more about what happened when the door didn't open, as we expected. This trivial matter happened in our life; perhaps it was sufficiently unexpected to occupy our whole attention, at least for a few moments, particularly if we were especially in a hurry to leave the room. The much probable fact that elsewhere doors were functioning as usual was of little help to us. This trend of thought has allowed us to advance a little bit: disorientation is always something that happens in our lives. And so, the radical disorientation that is at the origin of metaphysics must happen in our lives too.[16] Keeping always this in mind, Fig. 3 becomes more comprehensible: we must dig in the surface of our beliefs[17] to find the reasons, lying deep in our being, that make us disoriented from the beginning.

However, the two trends of thought we have been addressing (first the one of 1929 represented in Figs. 1 and 2 and now the one of 1932–1933, represented in Fig. 3) are not really opposed. In the second of his *Lesson of Metaphysics*, Ortega characterizes his own method as a movement that goes from the more external attributes of our lives to the most intimate (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 570). Immediately after, Ortega adds something that may seem paradoxical: the intimate center of our lives consists in the fact that life is always punctual or instantaneous. Only the instant we live in, i.e., only what we are living now, has reality. However, this statement must be immediately followed by another one if we want to understand what to live really means. Every instant is of such a kind that in it we remember past instants and anticipate the future ones.[18] Past and future events only have reality as long as we remember them or expect them to happen.

[15] This sentence may seem typical of a naïve realism, which is not where Ortega stands. We will soon see what this sentence really means.

[16] Most of the times, we will speak of "our lives," but it must be kept in mind that for Ortega life is always "my life." As he stressed several times, life is non-transferable, which means that no one can live my life, just as no one can occupy my place in space, as long as I remain there. When someone does something that I could have done, for instance, seating in a chair where I could be seated if I had arrived first, what he has done is an event in his biography not in mine.

[17] Perhaps the example given by Ortega in the second Lesson (2008b: 567) is not the best one. He speaks about our belief that it is impossible to get out of a room through the walls. But that belief can only be an example of the radical necessity of orientation if we reckon from the beginning that it is a justified belief that has to do with our most primitive experiences of the world. There is of course a physical explanation for this phenomenon, but in our daily experience we don't need to bother about it.

[18] The two classical texts about this important issue are Augustine's *Confessiones*, Book XI, and Husserl's *Lessons about inner Time Consciousness*. Ortega had already addressed this issue in

In every instant we take possession of the totality of our lives. However, this life of ours (that Ortega stresses is always "my life") is not identical with ourselves as persons. Our life is ourselves and the things which we are occupied with, which Ortega labels my "pragmatic fields" in *Man and People*. We cannot put them at a distance: we and they (or rather, a man and the totality of his pragmatic fields) are like the Greek and Roman divinities called *Dii Consentes*, i.e., gods that were born and lived together (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 573). The end of this Second Lesson has a clear Heideggerian orientation. Heidegger's *Being and Time* was published in 1927, and it immediately called Ortega's attention. But we must not forget that a philosophy centered in "my life" as the ultimate radical reality was being proclaimed by Ortega since at least 1923, the year of the publication of *The Theme of Our Times*.

Life has two unsurmountable characteristics. In the first place, as Ortega says, it is given to us, we are *arrojados a ella* (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 573), which corresponds to what Heidegger called, in § 29 of *Being and Time*, *die Geworfenheit* and Sartre will call later, in *Being and Nothingness*, the *déréliction*. In the second place, life forces us to choose between opposing and sometimes conflicting possibilities. This is a kind of paradoxical situation: albeit we didn't choose to live, we are forced to choose as long as we live. A comparison will help us to understand this. If a bullet had consciousness, it could, given a certain quantity of gunpowder and the intention of the shooter, calculate its own trajectory. As in our lives, the bullet neither shoot itself nor has chosen the target; but, after having been shot, it still won't be able to choose its trajectory or modify it. In this it is different from us: choosing the trajectory or modifying it (or refusing to do so) is what we human beings do. Life, for human beings, is a problem, although the solution to this problem is never given to us in anticipation: we always have to choose between conflicting possibilities (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 574). That's why the movement of a bullet is not the movement of life.[19]

4 The *Principles of Metaphysics*: The Later Lessons

The Lessons entitled *Principles of Metaphysics according to Vital Reason* were resumed twice, in 1933–1934 and 1935–1936. The Lessons from 1935–1936 were the last Ortega lectured at the University of Madrid before his exile. These two different series of Lessons have some important remarks about the nature of beliefs, which we intend to address in this section of the present chapter. Above all, they constitute a clear testimony of the ambiguities that pervade Ortega's theory, which we have already mentioned earlier.

Lesson X of *What is Philosophy?*

[19] Incidentally, Ortega adds that life is not a dream. I think that what he is trying to say is something like this: in dreams we don't choose but are constantly dragged in its stream. Only after the awakening we can integrate this stream in our conscious life and perhaps enlarge the meaning of our life with it (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 574).

Philosophers, Ortega says in 1933–1934, mistrust beliefs. Philosophy—I think he is thinking in the first place about modern philosophy, in spite of a reference to Plato's *Phaedon* that I will mention in a moment—begins when doubts about the validity of men's beliefs come to the foreground. Beliefs, he adds, are subjective opinions, almost like phantasies. If, making philosophy, we are looking for the radical reality we must put them aside and focus our research on what gives itself to us as it really is. What we believe in has been given to us through daily experience and is the outcome of a naïve or primary trust in it (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 106). Surprisingly, if we think about what Ortega says elsewhere, he claims that beliefs make us insecure. It is not philosophical doubts that make us insecure; when alleged certainties were far more numerous than now—i.e., in the primitive or savage epochs of mankind, when beliefs prevailed over critical examination—insecurity was greater. It seems that then men were always changing their system of beliefs in order to find out a new belief that would be better than the previous ones. The last centuries, the centuries of critique (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 106), offered the greater security men have enjoyed so far.

Now, one may argue that Ortega is just speaking about the task philosophers have to carry out, i.e., the search for radical reality, and beliefs are not a radical reality. The problem, however, is that Ortega is not just opposing philosophical ideas to unphilosophical beliefs but also arguing that we should not live on the basis of beliefs, leveling all our beliefs and not establishing between them those subtle but important differences he makes elsewhere. He even seems to say that unphilosophical thought consists of things posited by the mind, while philosophy is the search for what posits itself as it is, independently of the mind. Of course, whenever Ortega speaks of the mind, he immediately explains he is thinking about "constructive thought" (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 106), and we already know that by this last expression he means above all Neokantian philosophy, opposed to phenomenology as a non-constructive or intuitive philosophy. We also know that this immediate reality that intuitive thought is looking for is not that mind-independent reality traditionally called the "object" or even the world, but instead individual life. I think that is the reason why the reference to Plato's *Phaedon* has some importance here (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 107). The *Phaedon* is a dialogue about death; but after all we all know that we die. Plato's dialogue pulls us away from the triviality of statements like "I will die someday" or "everybody is doomed to die" and forces us to focus on the kind of life we live if we want to deserve a life after death.

I think we are now approaching the center of Ortega's thought about the relation between some kinds of beliefs and ideas. The fact is that some beliefs are not really grounded on reality but on mere hearsay (San Martín, 2012: 184). However, the fact mentioned above that I cannot go through a wall is not just hearsay, even if I am totally ignorant of the nature of molecules. It corresponds to an important characteristic of my lifeworld experience, it is the basis of my bodily schemes of orientations in space, and it is the permanent proof that I live in a world whose reality is attested by the fact that it resists me. That I cannot go through a wall is that kind of belief that stems from our relation as human beings to the world in which we leave. The scientific explanation of this fact may change, since science is a historical event: but

the fact underlying the explanation will not change (at least as long as human beings remain what they are now). Other beliefs, however, are just hearsay. The things they allegedly correspond to have no evidence since they are not given to us in proper intuition. Regarding those things, philosophy urges us to take the attitude Ortega calls, as we said above, *desasirse*.

Now, we have a serious problem here. Namely, what is the criterion to distinguish between these two kinds of beliefs? Does Ortega give us the final reason why such a distinction has to be made? Unfortunately, I think he is not entirely clear regarding this issue, although we can find the criterion in his works, especially if we read the Lessons of 1929—of which we talked about at the beginning of this Chapter—and the three series of Lessons of the *Principles of Metaphysics*. One must void oneself of false beliefs in order to keep true beliefs, but one only grasps the meaning of this difference as long as one has previously voided oneself of all beliefs in order to attain the radical reality of life. Only once we have made the top-down movement described above and represented in Fig. 3 will we be able to understand that living also means carrying, as a special kind of tools, those beliefs that allow our worldly orientation. We must now see how Ortega comes again to this problem in 1935–1936, in his last Lectures at the University of Madrid before he went into exile.[20]

Ortega begins stressing an important point: man's primal situation in the world he lives in may be characterized as one of "insufficient truth" (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 186). This means that every man possesses a bundle of certainties and truths whose ultimate ground he ignores; moreover, some of these alleged truths are in a state of collision with each other. Coherence between truths is not a mandatory concern in the primal situation; the connections between them have a vital and not a logical character (Bonilla, 2013: 105). That's why doubt arises, and theoretical thought is put in movement. (There are several kinds of theoretical thought, namely, science and philosophy; they are different in kind, but I will skip this issue here.) However, as soon as theoretical thought comes into play, doubt arises. But now Ortega makes another important remark. He says that doubt about the validity of the grounds on which our previous beliefs had their roots entails another belief that is not at the same level as the ones now put in question, namely, the belief that things have a certain kind of being that will not, so to speak, evaporate from the moment we investigate it. In other words, a being that is, at least to a certain extent, accessible to our thought (Ortega y Gasset, 2009c: 188). That is why anyone that engages in the pursuit of knowledge, even before he begins, always has a certain opinion about things: things have a being. Since this opinion is previous to any kind of proof, we may call it a belief. But we must reckon that it has not emerged from mere hearsay. The belief that everything has a being comes out from the inner center of one's own life.

[20]The editorial notes to the edition of this course in p. 1439 in the volume IX of the *Complete Works* say Ortega y Gasset, 2009c that, according to Paulino Garagorri, who was responsible for its first publication, the beginning of the Lessons was dedicated to the presentation of the main topics of *Ideas y Creencias*, which had just been published in Buenos Aires.

5 Why Has Idealism Failed?

In the last section of this chapter, we come again to the analysis of the reasons why, according to Ortega, idealism has failed. (In what will follow, we can also see why realism also fails, but that's not the issue we are addressing now.) As we have seen, man's normal condition is disorientation, but it always happens somewhere and is due to certain motives: I may feel disoriented because I cannot find a way out, or because a cherished project has failed, or because life seems to have lost its meaning due to the sudden death of someone I loved, or for any other reason. However, although I may feel deeply disoriented, I am not in the first place aware of myself as disoriented, but aware of the circumstance that motivated the disorientation. According to Ortega, it's only in a second moment that I turn to myself to reckon my disorientation (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 587). I live among persons and things, and to be aware of myself as a living being I have to turn away from those things. What Ortega calls *percatarse de las cosas* (to pay attention to the things that surround me)—the executivity of consciousness that we talked above—is always prior to *reparar en mí* (to pay attention to myself).

Idealism means to put the *reparar en mí* as the radical reality. But, if I only pay attention to myself after having paid attention to the world that surrounds me, radical reality can only be the relation between myself and the things of which I am aware of, a relation in which I am not aware of myself before being aware of the world. This relation is, for Ortega, the ultimate *datum* from which philosophy has to depart.

Let's now return to Lesson VII of *What is Philosophy?* Ortega offers a characterization of idealism that he sees represented by the work of Descartes. (Husserl is never mentioned in these Lessons, but we will see later that there are good reasons to think that he is also the addressee of the critics directed against Descartes.) Idealism is a quest for the radical reality, which cannot be identified with the outer world since the latter can be put in doubt. The *data* stemming from outer experience are uncertain and doubtful. They only appear to me as long as I (or my thought) appear to myself. Realist-oriented philosophers claim that everything distinct from thought exists even when it is not thought. But it's doubtful that a statement about existence can be made in such conditions. On the other hand, thought, i.e., things seen as long as they are seen, or imagined as long as they are imagined, is undoubtedly aware of itself and grasps its own existence (Ortega y Gasset, 2008a: 320). Modern philosophy for Ortega is the paradoxical consequence of this decision. However, things as long as they are thought, or even thought as long as it thinks about itself, are only a part of the experience that our life has of itself. We never encounter, in the first place, thoughts or meanings.[21] That's, for Ortega, what idealism failed to notice.

[21]Ortega puts it nicely when he says that no one has ever perceived a perception. Of course, I can turn to perceptions to study them. That's what a psychologist may do. But to study a perception, its

Now, Ortega claims that, having discovered life, he has discovered a new continent or, as he says in Lesson X of *What is Philosophy?*, a new kind of being. But that being is not like a new animal variety of a well-known species, not even like a new species. A zoological discovery, even if it is an unexpected one, always has a regional meaning; our universal idea of what the reality taken as a whole is like is not altered by it. But now, the farewell to idealism means the discovery of a new reality that cannot be thought by ancient concepts or categories: these were intended either to think about objects independently from the subject or to think about the objects as they were constituted by the subject's autonomous activity. Perhaps Ortega is just retrieving the old Diltheyan idea that the categories of life cannot be the same as the old ontological categories inherited from Aristotle, i.e., categories of beings in general. Perhaps he is also retrieving what Heidegger (strongly influenced by Dilthey) had said about the same issue in *Being and Time*. However, before attesting Ortega's indebtedness to this two authors, one should look to what he has to say.

Ancient and medieval philosophies were not subject-oriented. Not only they were object-oriented, but they also considered truth as the unconcealment of a thing, the fact that it was opened to the outside, publicly visible. This openness allowed the thing to leave an imprint in the human mind. That's why ancient and medieval philosophies lived according to the metaphor of the signet and the wax.[22] However, the subject of modern philosophy is opened to the inside, i.e., to himself. Here lies the paradox. Man is by nature directed toward the outside, and idealism is in a sense anti-natural. However, when that outside becomes doubtful or uncertain, man must turn to the inside in order to overcome that uncertainty. Figure 4 tries to explain it. The smaller circle in the center represents the Ego. The other circles, from the less to the more peripherals, represent the outer world, the images of the colors, shapes,

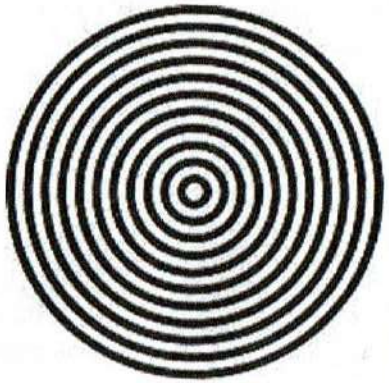


Fig. 4 The relation of the Ego (the smaller circle in the center) to the outer world in idealist systems

psychological or physiological mechanism, is not living as perceiving subject, but in accordance with scientific achievements.

[22] Rodriguez Huéscar (1982: 51) stresses this point correctly.

sounds, physical bodies, etc. We must be very attentive to this, because here lies the Orteguian way of interpreting idealism, and also, since 1929, of interpreting phenomenology, which, from now onward, will be considered a variety of idealism, being perhaps its most radical and coherent variety.

In the published version of the "Preface to Germans," written originally in 1934, Ortega, as is well known, retrieves these same critiques to phenomenology. However, here arises a problem that, to our knowledge, has not yet drawn the attention of most of Ortega's commentators. Ortega speaks about the two Neokantian generations of 1840–1855 and 1855–1870 (to which belonged to his two Neokantian masters in Marburg, respectively, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp), but, between these two and the earlier generation of Hegel, he puts another one, whose main representatives were born around 1830. Ortega calls it the most unhappy generation in the history of European philosophy (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 139). The case is the following: they were not idealists, like the previous generation—that of Hegel and of the post-Kantian philosophers—and like the following Neokantian generation of 1840; nevertheless they were unable to fight against the emergence of positivist and empiricist philosophies that came after the downfall of German idealism. Nevertheless, they put forward some remarkable ideas: for instance, that a whole is prior to its parts, that the categorical must not be opposed to the empirical, that intellectualism must be overcome, that a synthesis is not just something added by a spontaneous subject to the empirically given, and several others (Ortega y Gasset, 2009b: 140–141).

It's difficult not to acknowledge that all these remarkable ideas can also be found in phenomenology.[23] Perhaps the third—the fact that intellectualism must be overcome—was not entirely evident in the books Husserl had published until 1934. But Ortega himself had made very interesting and successful efforts to prove that phenomenology could be directed to attain this end, especially in his first book, *The Meditations of Quixote*. Moreover, the accusation that in the "Preface to German" he addresses to phenomenology, of not being able to gain a systematic form, cannot be found elsewhere in his writings before 1934. And the accusation that it is a new form of idealism only appears in 1929. We can even advance the hypothesis that Ortega's efforts since 1914 were meant to give phenomenology the systematic form that he thought it still lacked. However, Ortega had more to say about the so-called phenomenological idealism. In the next chapter, we will address this issue. And we will also see that the reasons Ortega offers to sustain his accusations are grounded on a misinterpretation of the role of reflection in Husserl's thought.

[23] Huge problems arise here. Unfortunately, I won't be able to address them all. The idea that a whole is previous to its parts is a central theme in Husserl's phenomenology. The third Logical Investigation analyzes this issue. Ortega has shown in a remarkable way that this is not only a cognitive issue. When we think, for instance, in the meaning of sentences like "I am in this room," or "a table is in this room," we are facing the relation between parts and wholes (Ortega y Gasset, 2008b: 589). Moreover, if "I am" or the "table is," this "being in" only gets its meaning—its ontological status. if one likes—from the whole, i.e., the relation between the room, the table, and me. (We will come back to this issue when analyzing Ortega's Anthropology in chapter "Ortega's Aesthetics".)

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Phenomenology Revisited

1 Ortega's Second Critique of Phenomenological Idealism

To begin this chapter, I will address two important issues: (1) why must idealism be overcome; (2) how does Ortega's philosophy of vital reason, and its perspectivism, allow the overcoming of idealism. We have already noticed that idealism, for Ortega, is pretty much the same as modern philosophy, which began with Descartes and ended with phenomenology. This last point has a polemical character. As I stressed before, Ortega only began to accuse phenomenology of idealism from 1929 onward, and until that date Neokantian philosophy was considered the most prominent representative of an idealistic philosophy. So, we have to assume that after 1929 Ortega has an idealistic interpretation of phenomenology to offer; in fact, he seems to maintain that interpretation until the end of his life—we will see that he comes to it again in 1934 and 1947—and offers us reasons to support that interpretation, although never fully explaining why he changed his mind on this issue. In the "Preface to Germans," he is very clear about the kind on interpretation he has to offer:

> [...] Husserl believes to find the primary reality, the positive or the given, in pure consciousness. This pure consciousness is an ego that is aware of everything else. But this must be well understood: this ego doesn't want, he is just *aware* of his will and of what he wanted; he doesn't feel, but *sees* his feeling and the values felt; at last, he *doesn't think*, i.e. *doesn't believe* in what he thinks, but *only* notices that he thinks and in what he thinks. (Ortega y Gasset, 2009a: 155)

To sum up, idealism swallows the objective reality since the subject is for it the primordial reality. Modern philosophy, for Ortega, is a philosophy of the subject that unilaterally underlines an aspect that ancient philosophy had left unnoticed. Actually, subject and object are strongly correlated; they, so to speak, are born and die together. Let us go back to our earlier example of the orange. It will allow us to understand the two mentioned issues at the beginning of this section. Let's suppose

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