

# José Ortega y Gasset

The Spanish philosopher who saw  
life as an intellectual adventure

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## Abstract

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José Ortega y Gasset is the only Spanish philosopher whose name is generally known to a wider international public. He belongs to the earlier European tradition associated with the eighteenth-century French “philosophes” characterised by broad intellectual and social interests and a talent for writing well. He also embodies the typical situation of Spanish intellectuals whose lives, up to these last twenty or thirty years, have always been marked by the economic and political backwardness of their country. Despite his huge popularity in Spanish-speaking countries over many decades, his work is not as well known as one might think, neither in Spain nor in the rest of Europe. The two main reasons may be that he had a broad range of interests so that his work does not today belong to a specific field and, secondly, that he had powerful enemies within different spheres in Spain who were less interested in his philosophical and sociological ideas than in examining him from the standpoint they considered to be politically correct.

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## José Ortega y Gasset – The Spanish philosopher who saw life as an intellectual adventure

José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) is probably the most important intellectual that Spain has ever had, and his success as a journalist, lecturer and philosopher in Spain and in Latin America began with *Meditations on Quixote* (*Meditaciones del Quijote* 1914) and lasted up to the Spanish Civil War when his life, like that of so many others, underwent a complete change. The life and work of this short, thin and talkative gentleman are relatively unknown even to academics, though there has been a renewed interest in his works in Spain during recent years. The present study has adopted the focus of the intellectual biography and will begin by outlining his life, continue by underlining the most interesting concepts elaborated by Ortega and showing the breadth of his interests, and ending with an overview of the current evaluation of his work. To study Ortega from this perspective is also to follow his own way of working, as he himself has talked about life as a fusion of thinking and action, of deciding what you want to become, your mission, and your curriculum vitae. Both Ortega's own experiences, his personal taste and his intellectual pursuits were oriented towards Spain and things Spanish, and he saw as his mission putting the Spanish intellectual public in contact with "Europe". This preoccupation should be understood as a consequence of Ortega's awareness of the fact that other countries in Western Europe were culturally more advanced than Spain.

In a work on Ortega the Spanish philosopher Abellán writes that Ortega knew different parts of Spain from his early childhood (Abellán 2000). His family was from Madrid but lived for a while in Cordoba, and Ortega went to school both in Malaga and in the Basque Country. The summers were spent in El Escorial near Madrid but also in the Basque Country. Members of his family had a country estate outside Madrid and, at a very early age, he became quite knowledgeable about things like bullfighting and hunting. Later he loved to travel in Spain by car, visiting different regions. All his life, he loved conversation and walking, and he often used to elaborate his ideas when walking and talking to friends, or to himself. When the publication of *La revista de Occidente* was interrupted at the beginning of the Civil War, the informal reunions that used to take place in the office of the

review were also discontinued, a circumstance that was almost as difficult for Ortega as the loss of a journal of his own in which to publish his articles.

Ortega was born into a family with pronounced cultural interests and he very early chose a life of study and in particular the study of philosophy. After completing his studies in Spain, he decided to travel to Germany where he undertook a heavy programme of studies including German, classical Greek, mathematics and, especially, philosophy. After his first stay, he returned twice more in order to acquire more learning and to come into contact with the best philosophers of the day. He tried to bridge the gap between Spanish and other European intellectuals, and later he tried to fill that same role for Argentina. Like no other Spanish intellectual of his time, Ortega represents the ideal of profound learning combined with cultural contacts between Spain and other countries.

Ortega published an enormous number of essays and also initiated and participated in different activities in order to raise the level of Spain's intellectual life and public debate. Before World War I, he was one of the two founders of The League of Political Education and also of *La revista de Occidente*, that was published between 1923 and 1936 and later revived by his son José Ortega Spottorno. He started *La Biblioteca de las ideas del siglo XX* in Espasa Calpe, a series that had an enormous impact on intellectual life in Spanish-speaking countries. After World War II, he founded The Institute of Humanities in Madrid, one of the most important cultural initiatives in Spain in those days, even if it did not prosper (Dobson 1989).

In developing countries, intellectuals must always exercise their skill in many fields due to the fact that there is often a shortage of specialists in all areas. In this situation, intellectuals have been at the same time writers, essayists, journalists, teachers and politicians. These widespread activities can either prove an enriching experience or, conversely, an example of dilettantism, forced on them in a particular historical situation. These intellectuals find themselves in narrow intellectual worlds, dominated by political passions. What makes Ortega different from many other intellectuals is his resolve to become a great thinker and also his success in prolonging his period of study and in putting off his entrance onto the labour market until after he had acquired a solid basis of knowledge in philosophy. He became a "maestro", a professor for young people, as he intended, with the aim of increasing the number of people who understood public matters. The "Prologue for Germans", written as an introduction to *The Revolt of*

*the Masses (La rebelión de las masas)* is considered to be his most important autobiographical text. Here Ortega comments on his own situation, saying that as a Spanish intellectual you must be prepared to fill all kinds of roles and that you can never escape Spain as a problem.<sup>1</sup>

These characteristics are also those of the authors in the so called “generation of 98”, one of the most distinguished groups in Spanish literary history. Like many others, Ortega has described the members of this group as being so different from one another that they had no common way of thinking that could justify expressions like “generation” or “member”. Ortega knew these writers personally and wrote articles on several of them. After starting out by professing great youthful admiration for Unamuno, the foremost intellectual of the group, he later distanced himself from him, while as regards the novelist Pío Baroja he wrote that the Basque writer was absolutely incapable of any systematic effort, a comment that, coming from Ortega, is damning (Ortega 1962: 480, 499).

Ortega had thus several traits in common with the typical Hispanic intellectual of his times. He devoted himself to many activities at the same time, he wrote on a wide variety of topics and his main preoccupation was the development and modernisation of his country. What is unusual is his philosophical background, his orientation towards intellectual life outside Spain, in countries like Germany, France and Great Britain, and of course the personal brilliance of his ideas and his style. The following pages will show the range and extent of his interests, the coherence between the positions he adopted on different topics and the value currently accorded to his work by critics.

### *Style and influence*

Ortega's prose combines profound, audacious and important ideas with unusual attention paid to the reader. Ortega used to say that clarity is the courtesy of the philosopher and, when he was elaborating a text, he put a lot of effort into the way in which his thoughts were expressed. Typically his work includes definitions of terms, words explained through etymology and history, metaphors used for pedagogical reasons and, now and then, a verb in the first person plural to indicate that the author and the reader will

together embark upon an intellectual adventure in a new field. This is why there are expressions like “Let us concentrate on”; rhetorical questions like “At this time, what was the attitude of X? ” and formulas to attract attention such as “This is really a worthwhile question”. Ortega’s style can also be said to be influenced by the genesis of his texts, as he typically started to elaborate a thought orally, in discussion with friends. Then he might present the idea in a lecture and end up by incorporating it in an article. This means that his philosophical ideas were developed in conversation or in front of an audience. As mentioned above, his reflections were prompted by a wish to develop the understanding of public matters, at first in Spain and later also in Latin America.

Ortega writes on topics in very different fields such as philosophy, sociology, political science, mathematics, technology, the history of natural sciences, literature, art and history, not to speak of bullfighting, hunting, the charms of South American ladies and a large number of the topical themes of his day. If academic criticism only studies a certain part of his production, this approach may lessen the reader’s understanding of Ortega’s position, as his influence had to do with the wide range of his interests, his vast knowledge and his continuous presence in the press. It is possible that it is just this broad line of approach which has contributed to Ortega’s absence today from many lists of required reading at university level. In his work on Velázquez, for example, he does not only speak about art. In *The Revolt of the Masses* he does not only speak about sociology and, as he writes on many subjects, some philosophers dismiss him as a polygraph. Now that specialisation has become so common no specialised field sees him as “theirs”. Also, Ortega integrates different types of knowledge. In order to explain a point, he uses etymology, history and philosophical analyses of concepts and finally pays close attention to his own language so that the reader may follow his thoughts more easily. Ortega’s own case thus shows how difficult it is to describe the greatness of someone in the field of the humanities. He presents a way of thinking that takes many themes into account and that is based at the same time on historical, anthropological and etymological perspectives. In order to perceive his greatness and to be able to make comparisons, one must read much of his work together with similar work written by other authors. There are also important differences between his various books and articles as to the level of difficulty and intellectual density. Whereas other texts can be understood by readers with

a general secondary education, the work most quoted by professional philosophers is *La idea del principio en Leibniz*, published in 1958, that is after his death, a work that requires knowledge of both mathematics and philosophy at university level. Furthermore, Ortega creates or inaugurates new scientific fields in Spain. Writing for example on Goya, he discovers that there are no reliable biographies, insufficient historical research, no descriptions of the development of Goya's ideas and no comparisons between the various sources. The texts that he finds are of such inferior quality that he cannot use them and so he has to go directly to the sources, also in fields that are not his own. Ortega wanted to be a "maestro" for his fellow citizens and he wanted to show Spaniards different roads to intellectual development with the possibility of learning from other European countries. He decided that this was to be his life work, while studying in Germany. He did not write in order to impress a specialist in some field at a later date. He wrote to be immediately useful to his contemporaries among Spanish-speaking peoples. He offered his texts as a method of helping others to learn to think better.

The essay is the form that Ortega favours in order to reach a large readership that is not used to reading scientific texts. It is also a genre that is suited to publication in journals and reviews. In *Meditations on Quixote*, Ortega declares that he sees the essay as a link between adventure and thinking, between the objective and the subjective, between intelligence and literature, describing this genre as a scientific work published without notes and bibliographies (Ortega 1961:318). In these essays, he seldom gives biographical references, a habit that left him open to accusations of having plagiarised other philosophers even though he made no secret of his debt to Germany. In other words, some critics prefer to see him as someone making a dishonest use of other people's ideas rather than as an intellectual trying to reach a vast audience unfamiliar with the philosophers whose works inspired Ortega. The best known of these critics is Orringer (1979) who tries to belittle the importance of Ortega's ideas and who presents Ortega mainly as an introducer of German philosophy in Spain, as a mediator between the two cultures. This kind of evaluation would seem to attach insufficient value to the fact that intellectual and artistic work always starts off from the experiences of those who have previously worked in that field. In his book on *The Origin of Philosophy* (*Origen y epílogo de la filosofía*, published in 1960), Ortega points out that the series of philosophers that

constitute the long historical list in this field appear to be one and the same because a philosopher assimilates the most important features of his predecessors' works, maybe in different, more developed and precise way. Ortega points out that an idea always has an "underground", a "ground" and an "antagonist" (Ortega 1962: 394-395). As an example of the underground element of an idea he refers to more or less traditional ways of thinking that are not seen as ideas elaborated by particular persons. In contrast, the ground element consists of relatively recent ideas learnt in a conscious way. The antagonist is then the person who stimulates the development of a new idea.

### *Theory of knowledge: perspectivism and ratiovitalism*

Even an overview of Ortega's work can leave the reader slightly out of breath, but in order to understand the response to his work, the reader must have a rough idea of its content. The most often quoted lines Ortega are: "I and my circumstance and if I do not save my circumstance I will not save myself" from *Meditations on Quixote* (Ortega 1961:322)<sup>2</sup>. This short sentence expresses the philosophical relationship between the narrator and the outer world. Reality does not only consist of objects as the narrator is also a subject although a subject limited by circumstances. Between the narrator and the external circumstances there is a dynamic relationship. Ortega draws our attention to the etymology of "circum-stance", something which "stands around". He realised when he was in Germany that he was truly Spanish, that Spain constituted his "circumstance", the milieu to which he belonged, and he felt that it was his task to try to save and develop it. This attitude is in keeping with Ortega's great interest in social issues. In other words, his philosophical position is in consonance with his interests as a citizen. It is striking, however, that many intellectuals of a postmodernist and multicultural conviction only mention the first part of Ortega's intentions, suppressing the aspect of personal responsibility that we all have for the circumstances of the group in which we live.

Ortega uses a number of comparisons to illustrate what he means by perspectivism. If we think about a hunter, a painter and a field labourer confronting the same landscape, it is obvious that each one of them will fix

his attention on different details of the landscape although this will have nothing to do either with the landscape or with the eyes of the observers. The same is true about a room where an elderly man is dying. If his doctor, his lawyer, his wife and a painter are present, it is clear that each one of these persons will experience the situation in a different way. Another image used by Ortega is that of a river examined by different persons from their own perspective. The river exists objectively and is the same for everyone and yet out of this reality different people will retain different aspects. This comparison illustrates the fact that Ortega clearly did not consider perspectivism to be relativism. The image also shows that there are perspectives that are more or less interesting. If a point of view is capable of taking into account many facets of a phenomenon it is more valuable than others that take account of fewer (Dobson 1989:149-153).

Ratiovitalism, the combination of life and reason, is the central idea in Ortega's writing. Thus he tries to go further than both realism, which puts all the emphasis on the surrounding reality, and idealism, which only concedes real existence to the consciousness through which man understands what surrounds him. Ortega considers realism to be impossible because if there is no subject nobody will see the objects. However, a world does not only exist in the illusions in our brains, as idealism would have it, but there must first be a reality with which we have to deal and on which we base our ideas. In order not to remain stuck in this dichotomy, Ortega speaks of a co-presence between man and his world, the world being a pre-theoretical reality. There are things about which we have no doubts, that we have to accept without discussion, which we have to reckon with, like toothache, a reality which we do not question. Using Ortega's words, life itself is man's "radical reality". Seeing life as a combination of action and thinking, Ortega rejects both rationalism, which only highlights thinking, and voluntarism, which only highlights action. Acting without thinking would be acting like animals that are influenced, from the outside, by others. Thinking and acting must be combined, because otherwise our intellect might be like an island floating in the sea of our vitality.

Ortega criticises relativism because it leads to scepticism, the inability to believe in anything. The relativist denies absolute values but, of course, in order to do this he must think that there is an absolute, as the idea of relativism presupposes the idea of a fixed point with which one can compare in order to say that everything is relative. In addition, Ortega says that

relativism is absurd because we know that we can understand other people and other times. Relativism does not permit us to understand the world and can lead us towards suicide. The idea of truth, of reality, is what he refers to as a principle of economy, because it allows us to act and corresponds to the necessity for truth on which to base our lives. This ratiovitalism is the contrary of rationalism which does not sufficiently take into account the whole of human life.

Ortega accepts the existence of pure reason but he thinks that pure reason is not very important in our lives because we often have more use for narrative or historical reason in our attempts to come to grips with the world. Understanding the world through narratives is an aspect that Ortega developed especially after having read the German philosopher Dilthey. To speak of historical reason can be seen as underlining the enormous importance of the historical perspective in everything that has to do with the humanities. From the very beginning, Ortega rejects the idea of metaphysics, of a reality outside this world, a stance that put him in a precarious position in Franco Spain.

From the very start, Ortega ascribes importance to the historical aspects of any subject, and he has many times mentioned that, when reading Dilthey, he recognised what he himself had felt intuitively for a long time. Of all the books in Ortega's private library, one written by Dilthey is, according to Dobson, the one with the most comments in the margins. Both Dilthey and Ortega found unsatisfactory French and English positivism with their emphasis on reality, on things, and with no allowance made for contemplative subjects. In the same way they found idealism insufficient as it postulates man's consciousness as the central point in a worldview. Instead, they emphasise man as a historical being. Ortega points out that each one of us is a part of the circumstances that precede us, that we are born into a specific world and that we are no more than a continuation. When we are born, we gain access to the experiences of a group, its words, and beliefs, and this heritage naturally differs according to the group in which the child is born, intelligence being in a certain way something collective because this mental "underground" is something elaborated in common. Ortega also emphasises the fact that ideas and convictions cannot be understood in isolation but only as part of a network. In this way, he establishes a connection between ratiovitalism and a historical vision of man.

An important part of the heritage consists in the access to a language that contains the experience and the wisdom of earlier generations. This is why Ortega says that philology should not be separated from history. He is in favour of a pragmatic philology, as opposed to a philology which is solely centred upon texts. For example in *Ideas y creencias*, from 1940, he insists that language contains condensed thoughts and he also underlines the fact that good readers almost always ask themselves if they have understood the meaning of the words. In the prologue to *El collar de la paloma*, Ortega gives an example of this: the word “love” can have very different meanings in different times and places.

Ortega and many others say that we need history in order to understand our own times. Without history, we swim in an ocean of confusion. If we can recall the past, we can speak about the future (*Ideas y creencias* 1961:395). He says that learning history can save us from a “rebarbarisation” and that earlier, people in general possibly knew a little more about history even if it was only the history of Greece and Rome, whereas the ignorance of the average man in modern society may not be far from that of a primitive man. We act as if reason were an automatic heritage, something that we have received once and for all, and that is not so. Modern culture is based on a trust in reason and, if we do not bother to learn the basis of modernity, we will not be able to sustain our culture.

Ortega also points out that there is no other way of enjoying earlier art, for example Titian’s paintings, than historically, from a distance. Trying to interpret these paintings as contemporary work would be, he says, like trying to take part in the Thirty Years’ War (“Ideas sobre la novela” 1957:212-221).

*En torno a Galileo*, from 1933, presents a theory elaborated by Ortega that is called the theory of generations or generationalism. Its main idea is that what is decisive in history is not an isolated hero, as individualism would have it, nor collectivity, as collectivist ideologies think, but rather the generation, with each generation appearing on the stage of history with its own sensibility, a new perception of the world and new ideas. This theory used to be quoted frequently but that is no longer the case.

## *Politics, sociology and ethnography*

Ortega's two best known works on politics are *Invertebrate Spain (España invertebrada* 1921) and *La redención de las provincias*, from 1931. Both were written in the early part of Ortega's public life. In *Invertebrate Spain* he says that Spain has been slowly disintegrating since 1570, that different groups in society have had different interests, that different regions live very much in isolation from one another and that they are characterised by hypersensitivity regarding their own grievances and a lack of interest in those of other regions (Ortega 1957:67-68). The famed Spanish individualism may sometimes be more accurately called anarchism, as it is based on the habit of everyone thinking about his own situation and not about what is common, the result being, in Ortega's view, that Spain has still not taken shape as a nation.

In *La redención de las provincias*, Ortega speaks about the lack of participation in public life by voters and he proposes a regional political level for two reasons: voters could exercise their right to vote and easily see the result of their decisions. At the same time, national politics would be freed from regional matters that are not very interesting for other regions. It may be surprising that Ortega proposes a certain degree of autonomy for the regions after having deplored the fact that Spain was not "articulated" or "had no backbone", but he is clearly thinking of moderate reforms as opposed to regional separatism.

Ortega tried to help advance the level of political knowledge of the general public before World War I and then again at the beginning of the 30s, and he participated continuously in public debate through his books and lectures, as a university teacher and as a journalist and, for a couple of years, as a Member of Parliament. The extreme violence of Spanish political life at the beginning of the 30s and his frustration because of the Catalan refusal to compromise made him decide in 1931-1932 not to make any more public statements on politics but to concentrate on cultural and philosophical issues.

*The Revolt of the Masses* from 1930 is the single best known of Ortega's texts, translated into many languages and reprinted many times. The ideas of the book that are still of interest today are those about the problems that democratic regimes may encounter. Ortega thinks that democracy is not usually the government of the people so much as that of one of many

minorities fighting for political power in a country. In countries with universal suffrage, voters place their trust in one group or another, which will then govern in the name of the people but not necessarily in the real interests of that same people (Ortega 1969:60-62).

A key concept in Ortega is the “mass man”, a new human type. Earlier, men were either wise or ignorant, Ortega thinks, but now we have the specialists, the experts, who are “educated but ignorant”, because they are ignorant about everything outside their own field although they consider themselves competent to give their opinions on any theme (Ortega 1969:106). This group, that may include the majority of the inhabitants in the developed countries, constitutes the “new Barbarians” in Ortega’s vocabulary. In Ortega’s view, Rome did not fall because the Barbarians were more successful than the Romans but because the Romans themselves had already chosen to become Barbarians. Thus Rome is an example of what happens when the citizens of a society no longer wish to accept discipline and responsibility: life deteriorates and one can be sure that other people, eager to take over, will appear.

A people without education will be flattered at election times but only then. Writing in the 30s, Ortega considers that schools teach the techniques of modern life but not the sensibility or the spirit of modern culture. He thinks that the three main principles that made this new world possible are liberal democracy, science and industrialism, but that the tendency now is that the citizen prefers to act like a spoilt child who wants everything without accepting the obligation to submit to training and to hard work in order to conserve or develop what he has. Ortega speaks of the radical ingratitude of the mass man (Ortega 1969:69). The rich countries are drifting in their own abundance, not wanting to analyse the consequences of their acts. Traditionally, to live has always been to feel limited, Ortega recalls, while we now tend to think that there should be no limits whatsoever. Furthermore, many people who have not created anything preach nihilism while they live like parasites on what their forefathers have achieved or their contemporaries are creating.

Writing in the 30s, Ortega makes another observation concerning the risk of an increase in state intervention in different aspects of life, possibly leading to the disappearance of historical spontaneity which is what sustains and nurtures human life. A strong state presence in life could be called the militarisation of society. Different researchers have tried to pinpoint Ortega’s

political sympathies in different texts, even though, or perhaps because, he no longer took part in public political debate. In *The Revolt of the Masses* it is obvious that he does not show any enthusiasm for the Spanish Conservative party and, at the same time, he criticises the working-class parties because they think they have the right to look down upon intelligence (Ortega 1969:160).<sup>3</sup> On the topic of the different extremist movements in Europe in the 30s, he comments that Bolshevism does not present any promise of greater happiness for a European, and that Fascism is obviously still more violent. In other words, long before the Spanish Civil War, Ortega's standpoint is that politics are at the same time important, being responsible for the circumstances that affect everybody, and yet almost impossible, due to the negative orientation of many political groups.

*El hombre y la gente*, from 1957, analyses the relationship between the individual and society, emphasising the fact that we all depend on the group to which we belong. Ortega develops this theme, discussing the structure of life itself. He says that life is personal, depending on particular circumstances, that it cannot be transferred and is our own responsibility. In contrast to Existentialists he claims that death is what gives an extraordinary value to life.

Ortega was also interested in the particular patterns of life in certain regions or countries. His *Teoría de Andalucía*, from 1944, combines history, ethnography and his own observations, and in *Meditaciones de un pueblo joven*, from 1939, he writes on Argentina from the same perspective.

## Aesthetics

Ortega has written several studies on Goya and Velázquez that could serve as textbooks on research methodology. He begins his study on Velázquez by saying that there are few facts known about this painter and that his life seems to have been extremely uncomplicated. There was apparently only one woman in his life - his wife; one friend - the king; one residence - the royal palace; one workshop - the royal palace; one important visit - that of Rubens to Madrid; two journeys - both to Rome; and this during a very long and apparently very favoured life.

Faced with the work of Velázquez, Ortega begins by asking himself what is missing, what Velázquez did not paint. This makes him observe

that in Velázquez's work there are almost no portraits, no religious paintings and no copies of his own work or of that of other painters. From this it can be concluded that the painter's friendship with the king liberated him from the tasks that his colleagues had to accept in order to make enough money to survive. Velázquez's work presents, on the contrary, a series of very rare characteristics: he painted very little, he almost never repeated any single motif and he chose to paint still life, a motif considered plebeian. The style he adopted was also considered plebeian as he did not depict particularly beautiful persons or objects. Moreover he quite often left his paintings unfinished. Ortega comes to the conclusion that, due to the special circumstances of Velázquez's life, he could paint to please himself and that he produced paintings for painters, in other words he enjoyed solving pictorial problems yet, once the difficulty was solved, the technique in question lost its attraction for him.

In the analysis of Velázquez's paintings, Ortega observes that individualisation, a novelty at the time, is an obsession with this painter. Velázquez paints a Bacchus with accompanying figures that are also a group of individualised drunks. He paints a jug with such precision that it is not a generic jug but the portrait of a special jug. Ortega notes that, at the same time, the relative ugliness of the object draws our attention to how the object is painted rather than to the object as such, a similar effect being obtained by the faces in "Las hilanderas" that are more implied than depicted.

Ortega also uses historical documents in order better to understand the Velázquez enigma. The catalogue of Velázquez's library contains works on natural sciences, travel and history but almost nothing on art or poetry. Of course, on the other hand, Velázquez was surrounded by the best European painting in the royal palace, and he was able to visit Rome. Due to his friendship with the king he did not need to try to become famous or organise exhibitions with the result that he was not as famous during his lifetime as we might now imagine. Nor did Velázquez seek the company or friendship of other painters of his time. Ortega emphasises the fact that the Madrid of Philip IV was "a fiesta", and Velázquez was already the king's friend and could not hope for higher honours than that. Ortega also comments upon the curious fact that there seems to be no mention in Calderón's work of Velázquez, as there is no allusion in the work of Velázquez to Calderón, although they were the two artistic geniuses of their time, almost exact contemporaries and living at the same court. The most interesting fact that

Ortega discovered was the petition for Velázquez to be declared a Spanish nobleman. Velázquez came from an impoverished Portuguese noble family, and being the friend of the king, this may have been a way of giving redress. The most interesting thing about the petition mentioned is that it claims that Velázquez had never worked, that painting in his case was only a talent. The usual explanation for Velázquez's limited production is that he could not escape from his numerous obligations at the court, whereas Ortega advances the theory that Velázquez may have been living exactly as he wanted to, as a nobleman at court and as a friend of the king. With the present romantic attitude to art, it may be considered more interesting to be a famous painter than a courtier, but Velázquez may not have shared that view.

Ortega's study on Goya presented him with other challenges. First of all, Goya's case shows that the profession of being a painter had lost most of its social prestige after Velázquez's time. A painter of the importance of Goya seems to have had a rather confused view of intellectual matters. According to Ortega, Goya saw the world from the standpoint of a peasant. He had received very little general education but learnt different pictorial techniques in his father-in-law's workshop, constantly perfecting these techniques and learning new ones.

Ortega begins his study with an inventory of what Goya painted, mocking the critics who do not distinguish between what a painter wants to paint and what he paints. Ortega points out that the popular motifs that Goya painted were in fashion and that, among the upper classes, there was an infatuation with low life, a tendency referred to by Ortega as plebeianism. Ortega also mocks the tendency to try to deduce the life of a painter from his motifs, saying, for example, that a depicted woman must have been his mistress. Ortega also seriously questions the legend of Goya's bohemian life as his father-in-law was a severe man, and Goya was a friend of the politician and writer Jovellanos, well known for his personal sobriety.

Another method that Ortega uses is to start with a sentence such as "Goya came to Madrid" in order to ask himself "Who was the Goya who came to Madrid?" and "What was the Madrid he came to like?". The sentence "Goya was a painter" is used to ask what it meant to Goya to be a painter or, in other words, what concept did he have of his profession. Ortega uses a similar technique when he asks himself, in other studies, what might have been the development of Goethe's work had he not had

such a pleasant life in Weimar (Ortega 1962). This technique consists basically of an interesting question as a starting point followed by attempts to find the answers in the documentation available. In Goya's case, Ortega has found contracts and accounts of the famous "Quinta del sordo" where Goya lived. The documents show that the painter can hardly have lived there for more than a very short time.

The famous *The Dehumanization of Art* (*La deshumanización del arte* 1925) has certain traits in common with *The Revolt of the Masses*, as one of the themes is that the masses feel hatred towards cultural products that they do not understand, and they do not understand the new avant-garde art that is ironic, hermetic and playful and that does not follow the rules of realism to which the masses are accustomed.

Among Ortega's texts on literature, the most famous one is *Meditations on Quixote*, but Ortegas's observations on the novel, the theatre and the generation of '98 are also still interesting although they are not so often quoted as the those in *The Dehumanization of Art*. What is still mentioned are the explanations of how a metaphor "works". Ortega says that a metaphor consists of two concepts that, activated at one and the same time, become active, become verbs, actions and not objects. The image used by Ortega is that of a cypress-flame. To understand the metaphor one should see the two images at the same time and superimposed, and the transference becomes mutual: the cypress becomes a flame and the flame a cypress. The metaphor consists of a simultaneous transposition of two objects from their position in reality to a third place, which is imaginary and not real, where there are objects that are at the same time cypresses and flames and that can be considered more as actions or relationships than objects.

In "Ideas sobre la novela", Ortega illustrates a way of describing the difference between science and art by saying that science is based on abstraction and generalisation whereas art is individualisation. Ortega does not accept that mysticism leads to knowledge as that kind of experience cannot be controlled. He also mentions the much discussed problem as to whether or not don Quixote can be said to exist. He exists, says Ortega, but only in the aesthetic sphere, and the problem only presents itself if you forget that there are different meanings of the word "exist".

## *Psychology and pedagogy*

In several works, Ortega points out that an animal is born with a genetic programme and that it has no choice but to follow this programme, while a human being has to fashion a programme for himself, choose how to spend his life, create his “curriculum vitae”. In *El hombre y la gente*, published in 1957, Ortega says that an animal reacts on an external stimulus, is activated when the stimulus comes from outside. When the animal's attention is not attracted by something or someone, it tends to fall asleep. In human beings, the possibility of directing one's attention towards one's interior, one's thinking, is central, and anti-natural. Man has been late in learning to concentrate whereas it is natural for him to be easily distracted, something which, according to Ortega, he has in common with apes and some primitive peoples. Typically, impressions from the outside tend to absorb people's attention. Ortega uses this way of reasoning in order to say that man's life is a combination of both action and thinking. If it was only action, man would act like an animal or a primitive person: he would be a voluntarist. If it was only thinking, almost an impossibility, we would be in the presence of an intellectual deviation.

In *Ensimismamiento y alteración* from 1939, Ortega declares once more that a capacity for concentration is the basic requirement for all kinds of learning and that this is not something acquired once and for all by a group of persons. History shows us innumerable cases of retrogression, decadence, degeneration, and there is therefore no evidence to support the idea that human progress is inevitable, an idea that has “anaesthetised” people in Europe and the United States so that they do not see the very real risk of cultural retrogression.

In *Meditations on Quixote* and other texts, Ortega speaks about the acquisition of a new concept as the acquisition of a new organ to perceive the world. The concept is the normal organ for perceiving what is profound, and we use concepts to see and to understand.

Ortega also writes about education in *El libro de las misiones* from 1940, which includes *The Mission of the University*, often reprinted. In contrast to primitive men, civilised men must learn a large quantity of facts, and pedagogy therefore consists of making a good selection, as the common learner's capacity has its limits. Ortega considers that it is harmful to read a lot without reflection, as the person in question can become one of the

“new Barbarians”, someone who thinks he is wise without being so. Ortega speaks about three missions for universities: the transmission of culture, the teaching of professional skills and research. He enumerates what a person should know in the field of culture in order to be “in step with one’s times” and understand the world: physics, biology, history, sociology and philosophy.<sup>4</sup> A student also needs professional training. What the ordinary student does not need, according to Ortega, is science. Science is creation, it requires monk-like dedication, and that is exactly why it is not of immediate interest to an ordinary student. He thinks that the infatuation with science has rather resulted in there being less time for discussion and afterthought, which is a negative development for young people. That in turn has contributed to the appearance of what are referred to as ignorant experts, specialists who act like “new Barbarians”.

*Meditación de la técnica*, from 1939, is a work in which Ortega has combined several of his concepts elaborated earlier, for example perspectivism, the insistence on being in step with one’s times, the concept of life as the radical reality of mankind and the idea that man really creates his life in the sense that he decides how he wants to live and to what ends he will dedicate his efforts. Ortega thinks that technology is fundamental for contemporary man, reminding us that technology means adapting circumstances to man, the very opposite of the biological adaptation of man to his environment. Technology helps us fill our needs for survival with a minimum of effort and it also helps us invent new objects. Freeing us from subsistence worries, technology allows us to devote our time to reflection which, in turn, allows us to become more human. Ortega values technology highly, and he thinks that we should be more attentive to the circumstances in which it has developed in order to prevent it from disappearing again. He thinks that one of the signs of barbarism is not to want to subject oneself to necessary discipline in order to maintain a high technical level. There are many people in developed countries who are as ignorant as someone from a primitive people suddenly catapulted into a country with a high technological level and who acts as if the technological artefacts are natural objects, simply there to be used. As such a person does not understand the effort of creation and manufacturing behind these objects, he does not value them and will not help to preserve the conditions that made them possible.

One point of contact between pedagogy and philosophy is to ask oneself what is man and how does he live. Ortega speaks about man as someone with a life project, a will, and, having a specific will, he will live surrounded by obstacles but also in favourable circumstances. Man is his own creator, the author of the story of his own life, but the other aspect of these possibilities is the instability and variability that also characterise us in comparison with other animal species. Comparing humans with animals, his conclusion is that men differ greatly among themselves when one compares them with bulls, tigers or other species. Ortega's way of expressing this is to say that the bull is born a bull but man has to make himself into a man, has to develop himself.

In another comparison, Ortega compares the limited energy supply of the old Egyptian pharaohs, based on slave labour, with the energy to which each one of us has access in modern society. The result is that any citizen of a modern country has access to so much energy that our dilemma is rather to direct this potential force to something useful. Ortega speaks about modern man as a "nouveau riche", who does not know what he wants, and therefore buys what everyone is supposed to want as he has no special knowledge or will to make him adopt a personal line of thought.

### *Ortega's private attitude to politics*

Ortega was born into a liberal family and all his life he remained liberal. His constant preoccupation was to modernise Spain. All his life, he tried to serve as a bridge to "Europe" through his activities as a philosopher, an essayist and a university professor. Confronted with political groups, he seems to have asked himself in a pragmatic way whether these could improve the situation (Ortega 1967). He was in favour of a republic but became deeply frustrated by the events of the early 30s. The violence and regional fanaticism prompted his much quoted words "Not like this. Not like this" (See Abellán 2000:69).<sup>5</sup> He did not feel sympathy for either of the two main factions in the civil war and decided not to make public statements on political questions, which led to total isolation from other intellectuals because both sides criticised him. He had bad personal experiences from the republican zone, as his son Miguel was shot at, even if he survived.

Ortega himself was forced by some young people to sign a petition expressing his support for the republican side. Ortega's two sons later fought on the Nationalist side, whereas his daughter Soledad accompanied her parents into exile.

All his life, Ortega said in public that he was not a Catholic, something very unusual in Spain, but he also denounced the burning of churches and convents and the killing of priests and nuns that took place in the 30s. This combination was even less frequent in Spain at the time. Curiously, he also seems to have wanted to be married only according to state law while a church wedding was important for his wife, a devout Catholic. When Ortega was dying in 1955, his wife called a priest, a friend of the family, and rumour had it that Ortega was converted on his deathbed, whereas he had left instructions to his children that he wanted no Catholic ceremony. Therefore his children did not accept the official suggestion from the University of Madrid that there should be a solemn mass on the occasion of his death. On the contrary, many students followed his coffin to the cemetery in what became the first public demonstration against the Franco regime (Abellán 2000:219, 241).

There is also in Ortega a certain elitism that some find fault with just as they do with his tendency to put more emphasis on the end rather than the means when it comes to modernising Spain. It is clear that Ortega was against "pluralism", if this means the dissolution of the state. Some critics today also find fault with the language Ortega used when speaking about his country, a language that is seen as organic, biological. At the same time, Ortega defended the individual confronted with different totalitarian regimes in the 30s and 40s as few other intellectuals of his time did (Dobson 1989:35, 96; Abellán 2000:128).

Retrospectively, the happiest period of Ortega's life was between 1920 and 1932, while the civil war, exile, illnesses and bitterness characterised the last part of his life. In other words, he shared with many others the feeling that with the Civil War he had lost the world to which he belonged and with that world his mission in life. During World War II he spent a couple of years in Buenos Aires, a city in which he had felt at home on earlier visits, but where he was now pointedly ignored because of his refusal to make declarations against Franco. He was not offered any teaching at the university and his own publishing company Espasa Calpe would not even accept him as editor. He returned to Europe and set up house in

Lisbon where he maintained his fiscal address up to his death, travelling frequently to Madrid and later also to Germany and the U.S. What most depressed him was the cultural situation in Spain. He had dedicated the whole of his life to furthering the intellectual life of Spain, and yet the situation was worse at the end of his life than in his youth.

Almost all those who comment upon Ortega's situation during his last years use the word ostracism to describe the social isolation in which the philosopher found himself. From the start of the civil war and until his death, his social, intellectual and economic situation was difficult. Since his death in 1955, his person and his works have been ignored, manipulated or treated with scorn, and only recently have things begun to change.

### *The evaluation of Ortega's work and person*

What is most striking in the critical studies on Ortega's work is that commentators have a tendency to adopt the position of judges of Ortega as a private person and to speak less of his work. In Europe in general, it might be fair to say that his name and some of the titles of his books are known, but not his work as a whole. Dobson insinuates for example that other Europeans might not expect there to be an important Spanish philosopher and that Ortega's origin might have been an unfavourable circumstance for him. The fact that the Spanish language is less well-known among other European intellectuals than English, German or French might also have something to do with the relative obscurity he has suffered. Critics often use the vantage position they enjoy as they know how European political history continued and use this knowledge to evaluate Ortega's political attitudes. Another group of critics are those who are only interested in a part of Ortega's work, and they too have the advantage of being familiar with developments in that particular field. This gives the critic an advantage over the object of his study, Ortega, which the critic would not have had if they had been contemporaries. Questions that have interested the critics are whether or not he really was a great philosopher and whether there were Fascist tendencies in Ortega's ideas.

It might be typical, therefore, that among the critics who have devoted themselves to Ortega, Medin is the most generous. Medin works at a university in Israel but writes from a Latin-American perspective. His theme

is Ortega's influence in Latin America, and he begins by establishing a distinction between Ortegas's influence and the actual ideas expressed in his works, between different kinds of influence, between different countries and time segments during the period from 1916 up to 1980. He states from the start that Ortega's influence on Latin-American culture was absolutely essential (Medin 1994:7).<sup>6</sup>

Medin mentions the phrase "I and my circumstance" from *Meditations on Quixote* and, in this short phrase, he sees the basis and legitimisation for philosophical meditation on national reality, for example in Latin America. Texts of this type had, of course, been published earlier but with Ortega they acquire the status of philosophical reflections. This change also served as a basis for Marxism in the 60s and 70s. Ortega spoke about a new sensibility, and young Latin-Americans thought that they had precisely that, a new sensibility as opposed to that of their elders (Medin 1994:18-20).

In many countries, for example in Argentina, the European country that was generally admired was not Spain but France. In Ortega's texts and person, Latin-American intellectuals saw that Spain had much to offer and to admire. This influence was such that, when Ortega died, leading Latin-American intellectuals such as Carpentier, Paz, Henríquez Ureña and many others quoted Ortega in order to pay him the homage of saying that he had been their "circumstance", the one who had created the intellectual environment that was so important to them (Medin 1994:21-32).

*La Revista de Occidente* was widely disseminated in Latin America and gave intellectuals a selection of the best European ideas and all this in their own language. In Argentina and Mexico especially, *La Revista de Occidente* was also used as a model in order to start new reviews of a similar kind. Espasa Calpe introduced the concept of the pocket book in Latin America, starting out with *The Revolt of the Masses*. Even if Ortega himself did not have much success in Argentina during his third stay, his books sold, that is to say that his influence was still important.

*El tema de nuestro tiempo* was important as it promoted perspectivism and ratiovitalism in contrast to the irrationalism proposed by some other intellectuals. Ortega does not believe, as we have seen, either in the individual hero or in collectivism but proposes the idea of generation. This generationalism was to have a great impact on young people who used the concept to claim more space for their generation in public life. *The Revolt of the Masses* expressed a sociological fact in Latin America where this

rebellion had been present since independence from Spain. Ortega was even quoted by the Peruvian "apristas" and by some Mexican revolutionaries. Medin sums up by saying that Ortega's influence in Latin America has been "far-reaching, deep and lasting" (Medin 1994: 39).

Ortega's suggestions for reforming universities were taken up very seriously in, for example, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Costa Rica and Argentina, where different university reforms were based on the ideas of the Spanish philosopher. Several of his students, such as Gaos and García Bacca, were appointed to important posts in Latin-American universities and, in their capacity as professors of philosophy, went on to shape new generations of Latin-American philosophers.

As we have seen, Ortega insisted that man does not only have nature but, to an even greater extent, history. In order to illustrate Ortega's importance in Latin America, the Uruguayan philosopher Ardao, quoted by Medin, says that Ortega offered Latin Americans the opportunity to think about their situation independently without feeling that they were merely copying others. Ardao thinks that Ortega pointed to a way in which Latin Americans could reflect on their own intellectual history as a legitimate philosophical task (Medin 1994:171).<sup>7</sup>

Medin also mentions the attacks that Ortega suffered in Latin America, both from Jesuits for not being Christian and from Leftist groups who identified him with a social elite and accused him of not being Marxist and not participating in the condemnation of the Franco regime (Medin 1994:230-231).<sup>8</sup> Medin concludes that Ortega was the spiritual leader of Latin America and he invests him with the title of honorary Latin American. This evaluation can be compared to that of Sasso (1998) who does not mention Ortega in his discussion of the defining traits of philosophy in Latin America but who thinks that these traits could be eclecticism and a tendency to interpret philosophical thought as political thought.

The famous Argentine intellectual Grondona thinks, however, that Ortega's triumph in the Spanish-speaking world can hardly be overestimated and that it has few parallels in the Spanish-speaking world (in Aguilar et al 1997:160). Grondona takes very seriously Ortega's observations on the Argentina of the 20s and the 30s and notes that Ortega had clearly identified weaknesses in Argentine society, such as the enormous importance accorded to money and social success.

Another Argentine thinker is the sociologist Imaz, who mentions Ortega among other Hispanic intellectuals but without giving him any special emphasis. He does, however, mention that all of Ortega's work has been translated into German, but very little into English and still less into French (Imaz 1990:174). If someone is not translated, it is not to be expected that he become well known. The language has an enormous importance, at least in the humanities.

Dobson, an English critic, declares that Ortega's work has been less studied than one might think and that there are at least two important explanations for this. Within Spain, both the Church and the Spanish Left abhorred him although for opposing reasons, and specialists in Spanish culture in other countries usually concentrate their efforts on literary texts rather than essays. Dobson's interest is in Ortega's political ideas and he is on the lookout for possible Fascist tendencies in Ortega's work. Dobson, like so many other critics, adopts a somewhat arrogant attitude when approaching Ortega. He studies Ortega's work in the 20s and the 30s closely but finds no confirmation of his suspicions (Dobson 1989:103-105). At the same time, however, Dobson gives Ortega no credit for seeing already in the 30s where the different totalitarian countries were heading. All in all, he is not very generous toward Ortega.

Gray, a critic from the U.S., has published a biography of Ortega in which he starts out by saying that English-speaking countries are largely ignorant when it comes to Ortega's work. Gray's book provides many detailed facts about Ortega's professional life but very little new knowledge about his ideas or, still more curious, his private life. Like all critics, Gray sums up saying that Ortega dedicated his life to serving Spain, trying to combine German depth of thinking with Latin clarity and elegance of expression. In this way he wanted to emulate the French "philosophes" from the period of Enlightenment (Gray 1994:67, 102). Ortega's words that "clarity is the courtesy of the philosopher" are famous (Gray 1994:20). Gray thinks that Ortega understood better than others that an intellectual depends on his audience and that he must play his part in helping to educate this audience. The result is a language that is at the same time correct and colloquial, full of images, and that does not seem influenced by the style used in German philosophical texts. Gray is one of many who note that Ortega found himself the object of adulation during the first part of his

professional life, whereas he often met direct hostility during the last years of his life (Gray1994:375).

Orringer, who is also from the U.S., has studied Ortega's private library in Madrid and especially the books that Ortega used to develop his own lines of thought. Orringer adopts a detective's approach in order to prove that Ortega plagiarised different thinkers or philosophers when elaborating his own ideas, looking into fifteen cases of German thinkers used by Ortega and showing that there are many similarities. This, together with the presence in Ortega's library of the books in question, sometimes with underlinings, is presented as proof. Orringer's reader may, however, object that it is natural for an intellectual to read books written in his field in order to develop his own thinking. Intellectual life is just that. Orringer himself says that Ortega usually develops an idea that he has found in someone else's work, giving it a new emphasis or integrating it in other contexts. What Orringer has proved is that Ortega has studied these works profoundly, that he has devoted a lot of energy to understanding and then elaborating ideas from other important thinkers of his times, nothing of which justifies criticism. Ortega has mentioned his intellectual debt to Germany and he has always spoken of his wish to reach a large audience, working over his texts many times in order to facilitate the understanding and the attractiveness of them as texts. This being the situation, Orringer's accusation is reduced to a criticism of Ortega for having done exactly what he proposed to do. Furthermore, Ortega himself has, as we have already seen, explained that a new kind of thinking is usually developed on a basis of an "underground" of ideas, so well-known that they are maybe not even be perceived as ideas, and other ideas from the contemporary intellectual and political world as a "ground" and not seldom the presence of opposing philosophies. The philosophers to whom Orringer refers have been Ortega's "ground" and his "opponents".

Morán (1998) is a journalist and essayist who has studied the last ten years of Ortega's life, the most unhappy period, full of illness and of unrealised hopes. Morán gives the reader a lot of details but no clear argumentation. As in the cases of Dobson, Gray and Orringer, the author gives himself the right to place himself above his "object" in order to denounce what he sees as flaws. Morán's text is clearly political, as he always mentions a person's political affiliation before discussing his work, and in his text he uses the method of guilt by association, for example associating Ortega with Francoism already in the title of the book. Morán's attitude to Ortega is

worth noting because it coincides with that of many intellectuals (Zorrilla 1998).<sup>9</sup> This dominant position of politics in public life could be a legacy from a history of conflicts in many Spanish-speaking countries. On the one hand, Morán points out that Ortega taught several generations of Spaniards how to think and that nobody denies that Ortega was an excellent journalist, professor and philosopher but, at the same time, the book draws a picture of Ortega as a hypocrite and, because of his silence, a collaborator with the Franco regime (Morán 1998:13).

It should however be emphasised that Morán gives proof of compassion and empathy when writing about the philosopher's last years, marked by illness and isolation. Ortega seems to have felt during his last years that he had been a failure: he has no disciples, he does not connect easily with young people, and not even the members of his family understand his work properly, work that was systematically ignored in Spain.

Morán presents as a sensation the fact that he has found a record of the salaries of the professors of the Central University of Madrid, later converted into the Complutense University, and that the name of Ortega is present on that list. Morán's concludes that Ortega received a salary from the regime during all the years when he made no political comments (Morán 1998:499). However, referring to Morán's theory in a recent book on Ortega, Abellán says that there is no proof whatsoever that Ortega received any salary from the Franco regime and that, in those days, salaries were paid in cash. If there are no receipts signed by Ortega, Morán's accusation is without foundation. Morán would thus be yet one more of the many people who have attacked Ortega from different standpoints over the years. In his book, Abellán, a Madrid professor of philosophy, shows another curious way of dealing with Ortega, as he writes almost as much about himself and his own generation as about Ortega.

Osés Gorraiz is a sociologist and he sees a change in Ortega's attitude to society. Ortega starts out by seeing society as the coming together of the efforts of all citizens, whereas during that last part of life, he depicts society as hostile or threatening towards people (Osés Gorraiz 1989:182). Generationalism is not a method used today, and Osés Gorraiz discusses the fact that *The Revolt of the Masses* has not become a classic textbook in sociology. The explanation he offers is that Ortega's analysis is not purely sociological but also includes ethics and psychology. In other words, he emphasises that sociology, like most intellectual fields, has experienced rapid

development and, at the same time, that our current degree of specialisation would make it difficult to understand multidisciplinary work.

However, ex-students speak about Ortega with admiration and affection: Gaos, who became one of Mexico's most important philosophers, and Ferrater Mora, who went to the U.S. both state the fact that the idea of "I and my circumstance" should be used when speaking about Ortega himself. In their opinion his ideas were often characterised by the themes of the day and were reactive, contextual, "ad hoc", prompted by events of a passing nature. This could be the reason why Ortega's ideas may impress us less than they impressed his contemporaries. The ex-student who has most consistently defended Ortega is Marias (1983), who in his turn was criticised for defending Ortega's work at a time when most people attacked it. The reader may find Marias's work less biased than some insinuations in earlier works infer.

There are critics who include the name of Ortega in the titles of their work without saying much about Ortega, giving the reader the impression of having used his name in order to attract a larger readership than the authors would normally reach. Ovejero Bernal tries to make Ortega fit into a pre-postmodernist mould, using the perspectivism which was characteristic of a relatively early phase in Ortega's work. He interprets Ortega's interest in language as social constructionism, insisting that Ortega is a relativist and a constructivist who does not want to admit his real convictions (Ovejero Bernal 2000:137). Although this may not be very convincing, many of Ovejero Bernal's observations are very perceptive. He does not think that one should use the term plagiarism in regard to the similarities between Ortega and different German philosophers, but notes that Ortega uses Heidegger extensively. In politics, he concludes that the position of Ortega is anti-revolutionary (Ovejero Bernal 2000:30, 61).

Cacho Viu, a critic with a close connection to Ortega's family, points out that it has not been sufficiently stressed that Ortega represents a liberal line that goes back to "krausism" and to Giner de los Ríos although the movement did not have all that many representatives in Spain (Cacho, Viu 2000:53). Cacho Viu's book is curious in that he sets out to discuss the political implications in Ortega's work but does not say much on the subject.

García Alonso (1997) writes on aesthetics but, contrary to what one is led to believe from the title, he mentions very little about Ortega.

In Mermall (1976), the title indicates that the aim is to study Spanish culture after Ortega y Gasset but, in this case, the name of the philosopher also seems to have been used to attract readers. Mermall comments that when Ortega came back to Europe in 1945, he saw that the philosopher in vogue in Madrid was no longer he himself but his former student Zubiri, who was a Catholic. It is not surprising that Zubiri's notion of "religación", a new bond between people and God, was more acceptable to the new national Catholic Spain than the resolute distance that Ortega maintained on religious questions. There was also direct criticism of Ortega from Catholics, as can be seen in Hernández-Rubio Cisneros's text from 1950 which is purportedly about sociology and politics but in reality adopts a theological perspective. Generally speaking, recent works on Ortega are more technical and less characterised by political partisanship than earlier ones, as can be observed in the work of, for example, San Martín (1998) and of Martín (1999).

To sum up, many critics treat Ortega not as the most important philosopher within the Spanish language area but as an elderly gentleman who did not adopt politically correct attitudes in his private life. It is normal that a critic uses our current understanding of a political situation or his knowledge in a particular field, but the reader may be surprised by the tone of reprobation sometimes used. There are not many who try to study Ortega's work in the way that he himself offered it to the Spanish-speaking public, that is as an aid to learning to think and to open up new horizons. There are also those who use Ortega's name, associating it to their own, in order to attract more attention to their own work. It would seem that some critics cannot accept the fact that Ortega clearly wished to have an influence, to be important, to be a "maestro". It would seem that nobody is a prophet in his own country, not even someone of the calibre of don José Ortega y Gasset.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Yo tengo que ser, a la vez, profesor de la Universidad, periodista, literato, político, contertulio de café, torero, “hombre de mundo”, algo así como párroco y no sé cuántas cosas más.” [...] “El español que pretenda huir de las preocupaciones nacionales será hecho prisionero de ellas diez veces al día y acabará por comprender que para un hombre nacido entre el Bidassoa y Gibraltar es España el problema primero, y perentorio.” Both passages are quoted from Abellán, J. L. (2000:53)

<sup>2</sup> “Yo y mi circunstancia y si no la salvo a ella, no me salvo yo.” All translations into English are my own.

<sup>3</sup> “se creen con derecho a despreciar la inteligencia y ahorrarse las zalemas ante ella” (Ortega 1969:160).

<sup>4</sup> “a la altura del pensamiento de su tiempo”.

<sup>5</sup> “No es esto. No es esto”.

<sup>6</sup> “Se trata, sin lugar a dudas, de una de las figuras intelectuales que más han influido en tal cultura durante el siglo XX, y ello en numerosos países, en múltiples áreas y de diversas formas. Más aún, en muchos aspectos su influencia fue verdaderamente decisiva, al grado de que es imposible escribir sobre la cultura hispanoamericana sin relacionarla necesariamente con la influencia del maestro español en la misma” (Medin 1994:7).

<sup>7</sup> “por gracia de sus tesis capitales, el historicismo actúa, de hecho, como invitador de la personalidad filosófica de América [...] (su) pensamiento ha tendido a reflejar el de Europa, pero al reflejarlo, se encuentra paradójicamente consigo misma, invocada en lo que tiene de genuino. Se vuelve entonces autoconciencia, su reflexión se hace autorreflexión. La propia filosofía europea viene así a prohijar o suscitar la personalidad de la filosofía americana, proporcionándole el instrumento de la emancipación, su herramienta ideológica” (Medin 1994:171).

<sup>8</sup> “Derecha e izquierda lo niegan acusándolo de todo lo que no es e identificándolo con sus enemigos. [...] Algunos acrecientan las dimensiones de su flanco izquierdo, otros las de su flanco derecho, pero parece que ninguno logra minimizar su altura y convertirlo en un enano intelectual. Por el contrario, es el reconocimiento de su estatura el que produce la multiplicación de los diversos espacios recordados” (Medin 1994:230-231).

<sup>9</sup> “Siempre he estudiado a Ortega desde su posición frente a la dictadura [...] creo que era un hombre muy inteligente pero con posiciones equívocas respecto a la dictadura” (Zorrilla 1998).

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