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# New Liberalisms for the Masses: Ontological Aristocratism and Equal Rights in José Ortega y Gasset's *La rebelión de las masas* (1930) and María Zambrano's *Horizonte del liberalismo* (1930)

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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## New Liberalisms for the Masses: Ontological Aristocratism and Equal Rights in José Ortega y Gasset's *La rebelión de las masas* (1930) and María Zambrano's *Horizonte del liberalismo* (1930)

*In view of the importance of mass movements and the sociopolitical crises in the early twentieth century, this article offers close readings of the liberalisms proposed in *La rebelión de las masas* and *Horizonte del liberalismo*. Ortega posits an ontological differentiation between *masas* and *minorías excelentes* based on the notion of “effort,” allowing individuals not belonging to hereditary aristocracies to ideologically appropriate aristocratic prestige. By contrast, Zambrano emphasizes the power of reform invested in the liberal subject. Although they assess the equality of rights divergently, both philosophers coincide in situating aristocratism at the core of liberalism.*

Keywords: Ortega y Gasset, Zambrano, liberalism, social class, ideology

*Dada la importancia de los movimientos de masas y las crisis sociopolíticas a principios del siglo XX, este artículo realiza una lectura minuciosa de los liberalismos en *La rebelión de las masas* y *Horizonte del liberalismo*. Ortega plantea una diferencia ontológica entre “masas” y “minorías excelentes” de acuerdo con la noción del “esfuerzo”, permitiendo que los individuos puedan apropiarse ideológicamente del prestigio aristocrático sin haberlo heredado. En cambio, Zambrano subraya el poder de reforma invertido en el sujeto liberal. Si bien se diferencian al valorar la igualdad de derechos, ambos coinciden en situar el aristocratismo en el núcleo del liberalismo.*

Palabras clave: Ortega y Gasset, Zambrano, liberalismo, clase social, ideología

In a letter from February 11, 1930, philosopher María Zambrano (1904-1991) addressed her mentor José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) concerning his public activity and his text “Organización de la decencia nacional,” which appeared in *El Sol* on February 5 after General Dámaso Berenguer's ascent to power on January 30 (Mora 7-8). In an increasingly fractured and unstable political

environment, Zambrano anticipates the inadequacy of the Spanish monarchy and “el advenimiento del régimen republicano:” “Un rey constitucional es un contrasentido; sólo como lujo se le puede tolerar, siempre que no estorbe; pero ya sabemos que no es éste el caso de nuestra España” (“Tres” 14). While recognizing the vital influence of Ortega upon her generation, she is frustrated with his lack of political commitment, strikingly calling upon him to act:

De usted – que es de las pocas conciencias históricas de esta invertebrada España – me duele en lo más profundo su tangencia en este momento. ... Debe y puede usted hacer más, señor Ortega y Gasset; su misión con España está más alta. Y no es que yo, ni nadie individualmente, ni aun la juventud como tal, podamos exigirle más. A nosotros – todos los que le hemos leído y escuchado – sólo un profundo agradecimiento nos queda por todo lo que de usted hemos recibido y por todo lo que por usted ha germinado. Pero si hay una conciencia histórica nacional, ésa sí puede exigirle mayores cosas ... (“Tres” 15)

These remarks not only give constancy to Ortega’s important role with regard to Zambrano and her contemporaries, but also expose philosophical and political discrepancies between these two Spanish thinkers. Their divergences become all the more clear as she considers the place of the intellectual, as well as notions of political and cultural *aristocracies*:

Me hace el efecto – y no soy sola – de que una política aristocrática conservadora se prepara. Me parecería bien; y usted, como supremo valor de cultura, tendría que estar en la aristocracia, y, como intelectual, tendría que ser en el momento presente conservador (conservador ahora es liberal, claro). ... Cumplirá usted su misión con toda dignidad, en su puesto conservador aristocrático, guardador de la cultura de hoy. Lo otro sería superarse genialmente en posición y en edad, y lo genial no puede nunca exigirse. (16)<sup>1</sup>

While research frequently acknowledges Ortega’s influence on the philosophy of Zambrano, we see here how the pupil may have influenced the teacher. Critic Magdalena Mora speculates as to whether Ortega would have been thinking of Zambrano’s letter when, in his November 15, 1930 article “El error Berenguer,” he would condemn the *dictablanda* and the monarchy with the decisive expression, “Delenda est monarchia” (8). Ortega’s posture is to be seen as a support to the Republic, even though Zambrano deems him something of an *intellectual aristocrat*, demanding that he *exert* himself more as a public figure – “exigirle” – a term that resonates with the concept of “effort” (“esfuerzo”) in his own essay *La*

*rebelión de las masas* (1930).<sup>2</sup> Zambrano alludes to a “conservative aristocratic politics,” a formulation crucial to my study, while she also comments that “conservative is now liberal,” implying a continuum between liberalism and a certain understanding of aristocratism. This continuum is infused by central questions of European political thought regarding not only who, but also how many persons, should rule. As such, I incorporate into my discussion ideas of philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) concerning the problem of the rule of the few (aristocracy) vis-à-vis the rule of the many (democracy).

In the present study, I analyze the ontological aristocratism of Ortega y Gasset’s *La rebelión de las masas* (1930), and I address Zambrano’s implicit critiques of his positions by considering her ontology and stance on liberal politics in her contemporaneous 1930 essay *Horizonte del liberalismo*.<sup>3</sup> Though it might appear a contradiction in terms, Zambrano qualifies liberalism as “aristocratic” in this essay, which is a particularly relevant work to compare the two philosophers’ viewpoints. In a review of her essay published in the periodical *El Socialista*, Pablo de A. Cobos would write: “ved por donde esta devota discípula del filósofo Ortega se pone frente al maestro” (qtd. in Zambrano, “Tres” 17). This review prompts Zambrano to write another letter to Ortega in which she conveys that the review mischaracterized both her opinion of her mentor and her essay, in such a way that “me ha hecho mucho daño” (17-18, 20).<sup>4</sup> Mortified by the review’s claims and assumptions, Zambrano’s epistle is markedly different in tone: she commends Ortega’s awareness of Spanish politics, notes that she has addressed herself directly to him when she did not understand his “actuación,” and qualifies her essay as a modest attempt to examine contemporary political conditions (20-21). It is noteworthy that Zambrano is both astonished and humbled that anyone would see resemblances between her work and that of Ortega: “es muy curioso que muchas de las personas que me han leído hayan creído encontrar un gran influjo de su pensamiento en mis líneas. Fenómeno que de ser cierto me honraría grandemente y tendrá fácil explicación” (“Tres” 20). Despite similarities in these two 1930 essays, Zambrano underscores equal rights, while criticizing the exploitative conditions endured by the masses, thereby separating her from Ortega. Thus, while *Horizonte del liberalismo* has been seen as an early text that exemplifies his influence, I maintain that it should be read as a mark of independence that signifies the uniqueness of her path.<sup>5</sup>

While seemingly at odds with Western liberal values, Zambrano draws attention to an aristocratic tendency in liberalism. This peculiarity opens up the possibility of reading Ortega’s “radically aristocratic” approach to history and his emphasis on the role of the few within his ontology, which

posits two different kinds of humans: those who exert themselves and those who do not. This ontology informs Ortega's differentiation of *minorías excelentes* (an elite grouping of individuals) and *masas* (the social masses).<sup>6</sup> I suggest that this distinction is comparable to Zambrano's dichotomy of *individuo* and *masas*.<sup>7</sup> Her ontology postulates political activity – specifically reform – as reserved for the liberal subject of the individual. Moreover, Ortega and Zambrano differ in their assessments of the discourse of equal rights in connection with liberalism. Yet, Ortega significantly advances the “generosity” of liberal democracy – allowing for a numerical form of equality – while Zambrano manifests a concern for the “slavery” of the *masas*, as she criticizes liberal economics. Nevertheless, alongside classist elements, both essays are haunted by the prospect of rule by the masses, seeming to presage the death knell of the elites' dominance of political and economic life.

#### BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND ARISTOCRACY: DERRIDA AND THE POLITICS OF NUMBER

The opposition between elites and masses is organized by the political problem of number, of the few set against the many. Crucial to my analysis is Derrida's commentary upon the interrelationship of number, calculation, and forms of governance: “If the word ‘democracy’ allies itself or competes with that of aristocracy, it is because of number, of the reference to the required approbation of the greatest number” (*Politics* 101). In this light, *La rebelión de las masas* and *Horizonte del liberalismo* interrogate the conceptual tension between democracy and aristocracy, between the rule (*kratos*) of the many (*dēmos*), and the rule of the few and the best (*aristos*). Moreover, the dichotomy of *masas* and *minorías* involves quantitative and qualitative components. *Masas* quantitatively denotes the numerous and qualitatively evokes largely negative associations, including undifferentiation, amalgamation, and a dearth of individuality. *Minorías excelentes*, by contrast, implies the quantitatively few, and qualitatively connotes prestige, selection, and individualization.

In theory and practice, democracies, too, share in this imbrication of issues relating to quantity and quality. As Derrida writes, “Democracy counts, it counts votes and subjects, but it does not count, should not count, ordinary singularities ... It is perhaps still necessary to calculate, but differently, differently with one and with the other” (*Politics* x). Not only is rule in a democracy determined and legitimized by the numerical victory of one group through voting, but it is also structured by how those who live in a democracy are defined as participants. Accordingly, a foremost democratic concern is equality, which Derrida binds to freedom:

As soon as everyone (or anyone ... ) is equally (*homoioḥs*) free, equality becomes an integral part of freedom and is thus no longer calculable. This equality in freedom no longer has anything to do with numerical equality or equality according to worth, proportion or *logos*. It is itself an incalculable and incommensurable equality; it is the unconditional condition of freedom, its sharing... (*Rogues* 49)

Thus, the struggle for the democratic consists of relentlessly attempting to effectuate an “equality in freedom” that is “an incalculable and incommensurable equality” beyond measure. The “sharing” of such an equality could bring about a politics deserving of the name *democracy*. Yet, the quantitative and qualitative singularity of every person presents an incalculability that exceeds any form of measurement or calculation. Hence, these two types of equality – of number and of worth – expose an aporia at the center of both democracy and aristocracy. Specifically, calculation is perforce introduced into the action of politics when positing the equality of all persons – indeed, of all that lives. Derrida describes “the two calculable equalities (numerical or according to worth or a proportional *logos*),” which are intersected by matters of calculation and freedom: “the two calculable equalities lend themselves to and call for calculation only for living beings who are also assumed to be free, that is, equally endowed with freedoms, who are, incommensurably, incalculably, unconditionally equal in their freedom” (*Rogues* 49). Thus, by engaging Derrida’s conceptualization of the politics of number, I analyze how Zambrano and Ortega evaluate the numerical, calculable facets of equality, along with the aspects of equality that remain beyond the domain of calculation and quantification. These problems structure the philosophers’ dichotomies of masses vis-à-vis elites, as well as their appraisals of rights and of liberalism.

#### TWO LIVES, TWO LIBERALISMS: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO ORTEGA AND ZAMBRANO

The biographical and philosophical linkages and tensions between Ortega and Zambrano have often been explored by critics. Antolín Sánchez Cuervo, thus, regards the study of the two authors to be “un lugar común para encuadrar, precisar, revisar o calibrar cuestiones bien diversas” (62). Meanwhile, Ana Bundgård elucidates Ortega’s view of the role of elites or “minorías,” their relationship with the masses, and the way in which Zambrano addresses these aspects of his thought:

insistirá Ortega en la postulación de las minorías “en forma”, llamadas a la ejemplaridad estética y ética, con capacidad para imponerse al espíritu plebeyo de las masas y a la por él denominada “democracia morbosa”. Este aspecto del pensamiento orteguiano ... será el que con más énfasis problematizará Zambrano en

*Horizonte del liberalismo*. Y lo hará no porque rechace o ignore el valor de las minorías, sino porque rechaza el abstencionismo de las minorías cuando su actuación se hace imprescindible. (*Compromiso* 132-33)

Bundgård acutely signals that Zambrano does not deny the importance of Ortega's *minorías excelentes*, but rather seeks a recasting of the interdependence between masses and elites, the latter of which can no longer continue their "abstencionismo." While this assessment contains key observations, it should be emphasized that *Horizonte del liberalismo* remains caught up in the Orteguian bind of masses and elites, a dualism that, when maintained, often proves to be an obstacle for egalitarian potentials. Moreover, Zambrano's 1930 essay can be positioned within a wider European trend aiming to rethink liberalism starting in the second part of the nineteenth century and gaining force in view of the aggravation of "la cuestión social" after World War I (Bundgård, *Compromiso* 129). The sources of Zambrano's liberalism include "las culturas liberales españolas más progresistas," such as the Krausist liberal thought of Julián Sanz del Río, the liberalisms advocated by Ortega and Unamuno prior to World War I, as well as Fernando de los Ríos's "socialismo liberal" (130). Varied Spanish liberal strains run through *Horizonte del liberalismo*, proceeding from not only Ortega y Gasset, but also from figures of the Generations of 1898 and 1914, including Unamuno, Azorín, Machado, Marañón, and Pérez de Ayala (133). Such thinkers' liberal formulations would influence Zambrano along with other members of her generation (133).

Notwithstanding Zambrano's denunciation of conservatism, the primary target in *Horizonte del liberalismo* is communism. Significantly, there is no discussion of fascism in this 1930 essay, although Zambrano does make note of how conservative politics can feign a revolutionary character in her description of conservative revolutions or restorations (*Horizonte* 64).<sup>8</sup> In this text, she pursues a "new liberalism," which is distinguished only briefly from capitalism.<sup>9</sup> We should also bear in mind that Zambrano highlights, as a major challenge in Spain's history, "el vacío efectivo de una verdadera y honda revolución liberal" (*Horizonte* 73).<sup>10</sup> Yet, the philosopher is distressed by not only the possibility of mass rule in her representation of communism, but also by the more generalized lack of harmony between the masses and political-intellectual elites. Despite continuing to privilege the place of elites, Zambrano is often concerned with equality, as evidenced by her perception of rights and the exploitation of the masses. Nevertheless, we also witness conceptual moves in *Horizonte del liberalismo* that coincide with the ontological aristocratism of *La rebelión de las masas*.

While some critics do not find Ortega's aristocratism problematic, others address this component of his philosophy and its political implications. Pedro Cerezo Galán affirms that, in Ortega's thought, aristocratic elements have an *ethical* relation to democracy: "El aristocratismo que tan a menudo se le reprocha a Ortega constituye, a mi juicio, la sustancia ética de la democracia genuina" (52-53). Similarly, Víctor Ouimette asserts the need to have a balanced view of the aristocratism of Ortega's thought with regard to equality and democracy: "la interpretación aristocrática de la estructuración social puede sugerir de antemano que Ortega no creía en la igualdad. Sin embargo, el caso era más matizado. En nombre de los valores del liberalismo había que saber distinguir entre lo mediocre y lo excelso, para evitar toda beatería del democratismo nivelador" (226). By contrast, Sánchez Cuervo describes the development of Ortega's liberalism – not from the early twentieth century in which his positioning would be "cercano al socialismo de Pablo Iglesias" –, but rather his later liberal posture: "Liberalismo [de Ortega] en un caso moderado, rápidamente desencantado del proyecto republicano y cada vez más escorado hacia el conservadurismo hasta aceptar posturas autoritarias e incluso connivencias, aun coyunturales más que ideológicas y sobre todo muy frustrantes, con el peculiar fascismo franquista" (65). These distressing features are brought into relief by the two philosophers' starkly dissimilar uses of the phrase "nuevo liberalismo," discussed at the end of the article.

#### PARLIAMENTARISM AND *PRONUNCIAMIENTOS* IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The philosophical writings and political engagements of Ortega and Zambrano emanate from and respond to the crisis of liberalism in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the years surrounding the First World War (1914-1918), global instabilities give rise to military coups and authoritarian governments, including the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera in Spain (1923-1930). In this period, military interventions in politics can be partially attributed to anti-parliamentary tendencies that emerge primarily in Europe before World War I (González Calleja 18). Closely related to such military coups are circumstances of post-World War I sociopolitical and financial volatility, in which democracies are not able to remediate economic difficulties, such as increased levels of unemployment, thereby exposing the "desprestigio que sufrían las instituciones democráticas" (Carrellán Ruiz 42).

Even though Spain was a neutral power during the war, it was afflicted by similar ailments in national politics and continued to experience the ideological haunting of the *Desastre del '98*. Eduardo González Calleja indicates that societal exigencies, including "la crisis 'estructural' del Estado



de la Restauración,” repeated military interventions, accountability for the Disaster of Annual in 1921, and issues of public safety, particularly in Barcelona, contribute to Primo de Rivera’s *pronunciamiento* and should be connected to “el proceso de deslegitimación y derrumbe del régimen liberal” (17).

During Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, Ortega y Gasset advocated liberalism as a political form that could safeguard “los derechos cívicos” (Bundgård, “Liberalismo” 29). From 1923 to 1930, he increased his visibility as an intellectual with a political vocation, while becoming a central figure for young Spaniards of the so-called Generation of 1927 (29). During this time, Zambrano joins the writers surrounding *Revista de Occidente*, sustaining friendships with members of the Generation of 1927 (Pérez, “*Circunstancia*” 150). Starting in 1926, Zambrano studied with philosophers in Spain, including Ortega y Gasset, commencing “doctoral work” in 1928 and completing a dissertation about Spinoza in 1936 (Pérez, “*Circunstancia*” 149; Pérez, “*Razón*” 57). In addition to instructing at the Residencia de Señoritas and Instituto Escuela, Zambrano started to lecture in philosophy in the Universidad Central in 1930 (Pérez, “*Circunstancia*” 149). She also contributed to the Madrid newspaper *El Liberal* (149). Furthermore, Zambrano assisted in establishing “the Liga de Educación Social under the aegis of Ortega y Gasset and Pérez de Ayala,” though, under Primo de Rivera, the police put an end to the group in 1929 (149). Significantly, the Spanish monarchy’s abolition and the formation, in 1931, of the *Segunda República* follow the collapse of Primo de Rivera’s rule in 1930. Although the publications of *La rebelión de las masas* and *Horizonte del liberalismo* predate some of these events, I focus on the proposals of Ortega and Zambrano for renewed liberalisms that could effectively respond to the turbulent conditions of the epoch.

#### LIBERALISM AND THE SUBJECTIVE MODEL OF THE INDIVIDUAL

To address how and why both philosophers recuperate aspects of the liberal tradition in the midst of the dire interwar years, I consider the historical advent of liberalism as detailed by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein. Despite differences in their analyses, Ortega and Zambrano employ similar concepts, implicitly pointing to the same source of the modern Western political lexicon, thereby suggesting that the sociological instabilities of the early twentieth century may be traced back to the violent upheaval of the *Ancien Régime*. Many terms they use, as well as their assessments of rights, belong to the political framework emerging from the French Revolution (1789-1799). This historical constellation, according to Wallerstein, is pivotal in the ideological foundations of liberalism and conservatism: “liberalism as

an ideology is itself a consequence of the French Revolution, and not a description of its political culture" (2). However, the terms *liberal* and *conservative* surface only in 1810 and 1818, respectively (2). If liberalism can partly be defined as opposing conservatism, as "universalist," and as seeking to free humankind from figures of tradition, proponents of liberalism would argue "that progress, even though it was inevitable, could not be achieved without some human effort, without a political program" (5-6).<sup>11</sup> Central to the ontology of *Horizonte del liberalismo* is the liberal ideal of reform, which embodies the tenet of a continually perfectible political order. As Wallerstein points out, "[l]iberal ideology was thus the belief that, in order for history to follow its natural course, it was necessary to engage in conscious, continual, intelligent reformism" (6). In addition to the French Revolution, it would be essential to cite the complex inheritances of the Protestant Reformation, the War of Religions, the Enlightenment, and subsequent philosophical movements in the grounding and development of different varieties of liberalism, to which John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill, among others, would contribute (Audard and Raynaud 571).

Thus, despite the intricacy of the sources and events that shape the modalities of liberal thought, and although the historical distance between the French Revolution and the convulsions of the early twentieth century might appear significant, Ortega and Zambrano invoke the political vocabulary and concerns that have shaped the history of liberalism. In particular, we observe in the Spanish philosophers' writing the salience of the liberal subject, the individual, whether as the persons composing Ortega's *minorías excelentes*, or as Zambrano's *individuo*. Concomitantly, subjectivity and sovereignty are closely related. According to Wallerstein, the subjective model of the individual is paramount to liberalism, suggesting that ideologies can be understood as "political programs to deal with modernity" and, consequently, "each one needs a 'subject,' or a principal political actor. In the terminology of the modern world, this has been referred to as the question of sovereignty" (11). Wallerstein advances that the events of the French Revolution would be crucial in framing the problem of modern sovereignty: "against the sovereignty of the absolute monarch, it [the French Revolution] had proclaimed the sovereignty of the 'people'" (11). Even though the political positions of conservatism, liberalism, and socialism would diverge regarding which persons constitute "the 'people'" (11), for proponents of liberalism, the predominant figure is endowed with "rights" and political agency: "the 'people' was the sum of all the 'individuals' who are each the ultimate holder of political, economic, and cultural rights. The individual is the historic 'subject' of modernity par excellence" (11-12).

In *La rebelión de las masas* and *Horizonte del liberalismo*, the subjective model of the “individual” as bearer of rights enters into conflict with the collective subject of the masses, who demand the rights and equality historically promised to them.

Another typically liberal posture of Ortega and Zambrano – exemplified by their anxieties about mass politics – is their defense of individuals and their freedoms against statism and rule by the many. Catherine Audard and Philippe Raynaud indicate how such components of liberal philosophy derive from the Glorious Revolution and John Locke’s thought: “liberalism in the sense of an affirmation of the priority of individual liberties, and their protection against the abuses of the sovereign or the collectivity, represents a national cultural tradition that spread across the rest of Europe” (570). Considering this lineage of liberalism, Ortega and Zambrano divergently evaluate rights, an issue closely tied to the liberal problematic of the “liberties” guaranteed to individuals. Their trepidation regarding governance by the masses, however, is not out of line with certain strains of liberal thought. Indeed, liberalism and democracy are not synonymous and historically have been at odds: “liberalism traditionally mistrusted democracies, and was suspicious of the ‘despotism’ of majorities” (Audard and Raynaud 571). Zambrano’s description of liberalism as “aristocratic” epitomizes this tension between liberal and democratic values, a problem echoed by the persistent interrogation of the place and duties of elites and of masses.

#### THEORIZING THE MASSES

As both Spanish philosophers seek to realign their liberal projects in view of the phenomenon of the so-called masses, I turn to Salvador Giner’s discussion of mass society. Giner notes that, although the expression “mass society” is used by Karl Mannheim in 1935, Ortega y Gasset in *La rebelión de las masas* offers “the first general description of a mass society” (9369). Giner further argues that though the concept is developed in the twentieth century, formulations about masses or crowds “are truly ancient,” with modern conceptions originating in nineteenth-century figures like Tocqueville and “crowd psychologists,” sociologists, and philosophers from before World War I (9369). Giner remarks upon the broad societal ramifications of this concept:

“Mass society” is a notion central to the assumption that modern, advanced societies possess the following features: a growing internal homogeneity, a combination of elite and bureaucratic control over the majority of the population (the so-called

"masses"), a specific kind of predominant culture ("mass culture," linked to the "mass media"), and an illiberal form of politics ("mass politics" and "mass parties"). (9368)

While some of the above-cited ideas relate to post-World War II theorizations of mass society, other notions pertain to the interwar period and are points of contention for Ortega and Zambrano, as both thinkers calibrate the relationship between masses and elites in liberal states. Consequently, matters of political direction – regarding who should lead and who should follow – are fundamental in the ontology of *La rebelión de las masas*, and will be taken up, with some reservations, by Zambrano in her essay. Despite accepting some of Ortega's premises, including the binarism of masses and elites, she critiques liberal economics and the exploitation of the *masas*, while searching for the elements that she views as indispensable for a "new liberalism." Nevertheless, as I will discuss below, *Horizonte del liberalismo* does not evade all of the paradoxes of a liberalism with aristocratic inclinations.<sup>12</sup>

#### ORTEGA'S ARISTOCRATIC ONTOLOGY AND THE NOTION OF "EFFORT"

Ortega contends that the difference between *masas* and *minorías excelentes* is not bound to social class, but we observe an aristocratism governing his interpretations of history and society. The following remarks contradict the purported absence of matters of class in his argumentation, while also demonstrating the extent to which the political problem of number – in terms of quality and quantity – traverses his philosophical outlook:

La división de la sociedad en masas y minorías excelentes no es, por tanto, una división en clases sociales, sino en clases de hombres, y no puede coincidir con la jerarquización en clases superiores e inferiores. Claro está que en las superiores, cuando llegan a serlo y mientras lo fueron de verdad, hay más verosimilitud de hallar hombres que adoptan el "gran vehículo", mientras las inferiores están normalmente constituidas por individuos sin calidad. Pero, en rigor, dentro de cada clase social hay masa y minoría auténtica. (*Rebelión* 138)

Ortega presents an aporia containing two mutually exclusive assertions: at the same time, there are particularly special individuals in each social class, but more often such special individuals – of great *quality* – belong to the upper classes. That is to say, it is more frequent for there to be *minorías excelentes* in "superior" classes, while "inferior" classes have a greater *number* of "individuals without quality." His description of the sociological "division" into these two categories can be described as aristocratic both quantitatively and qualitatively: the *minorías excelentes* are not only

numerically few, but they are the best (*aristos*). He goes as far as to posit *minorías excelentes* and *masas* as the elemental classifications of being: “La sociedad es siempre una unidad dinámica de dos factores: minorías y masas. Las minorías son individuos o grupos de individuos especialmente cualificados. La masa es el conjunto de personas no especialmente cualificadas” (*Rebelión* 135).<sup>13</sup> If “society is always” constituted by the relationship between these two types of human beings, it is imperative to investigate how aristocratic concepts operate in Ortega’s approach to historical and sociological conditions:

[S]ustento una interpretación de la historia radicalmente aristocrática. Es radical, porque yo no he dicho nunca que la sociedad humana *deba* ser aristocrática, sino mucho más que eso. He dicho, y sigo creyendo, cada día con más enérgica convicción, que la sociedad humana *es* aristocrática siempre, quiera o no, por su esencia misma, hasta el punto de que es sociedad en la medida en que sea aristocrática, y deja de serlo en la medida en que se desaristocrate. (*Rebelión* 145)

Society is naturally aristocratic, according to Ortega; indeed, by its very “essence,” it ceases to be society when it ceases to be aristocratic. His uneasiness about the “revolt of the masses” could be related to a *de-aristocratizing* of society. Here, it is instructive to consider the two main usages of aristocracy in *La rebelión de las masas*: the first relates “to a privileged social class whose titles of nobility are conferred upon them by descent” (Vandebosch 121). The second usage of the term aristocracy “is used to indicate a group of morally and intellectually superior people. ... Ortega indeed claims to ‘uphold a radically aristocratic interpretation of history,’ *not in a prescriptive but in an ontological way*, which stems from the conviction that society is ‘aristocratic by its very essence’” (121; emphasis added). Dagmar Vandebosch’s important reflections can be connected to my analysis of Ortega’s aristocratic ontology, orienting not only the latter’s approach to history, but also his dualism of *masas* and *minorías excelentes*. The philosopher’s aristocratism is apparent in his definitions of the “nobility” and the masses:

[N]obleza es sinónimo de vida esforzada, puesta siempre a superarse a sí misma, a trascender de lo que ya es hacia lo que se propone como deber y exigencia. De esta manera, la vida noble queda contrapuesta a la vida vulgar e inerte, que, estáticamente, se recluye a sí misma ... De aquí que llamemos masa a este modo de ser hombre – no tanto porque sea multitudinario, cuanto porque es inerte. (Ortega, *Rebelión* 202)

There is insight in Ortega's view of the importance of striving and overcoming in life, of *transcending* "what already is towards what is proposed as duty and demand." Issues of quantity and quality oscillate here, as Ortega comments upon the "mass" as a "mode of being man" characterized not as much by being "multitudinous" as by being "inert."<sup>14</sup> The classism of this ontology can be identified by the way in which "noble life" is structured by activity and exertion, while "vulgar life" is determined by passivity and inertness. It should not be seen as incidental, thus, that "nobleza" is glossed as "*vida esforzada*," a theoretical move that can be linked to a pivotal element in Ortega's ontology: the notion of "effort" ("*esfuerzo*"), which determines his binarism of *masas* and *minorías excelentes*:

[L]a división más radical que cabe hacer en la humanidad es ésta, en dos clases de criaturas: las que se exigen mucho y acumulan sobre sí mismas dificultades y deberes y las que no se exigen nada especial, sino que para ellas vivir es ser en cada instante lo que ya son, sin *esfuerzo* de perfección sobre sí mismas, boyas que van a la deriva. (*Rebelión* 137; emphasis added)

This formulation of "*esfuerzo*" entails a redirection of class antagonism via an ontological differentiation of humans that *aristocratically* favors the few and the best (*aristos*). Significant in this problematic is how such aristocratic appeals – as typified in Ortega's ontological aristocratism – may allow for individuals, who are not members of hereditary aristocracies, to ideologically appropriate (non-hereditary) aristocratic prestige and values, by means of their "effort."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Cerezo Galán upholds that Ortega's discussion of "el alma noble" in *La rebelión de las masas* should be understood *existentially* rather than *sociologically*:

Hay que superar de una vez por todas el contumaz error de estimativa de interpretar el alma noble más en términos sociológicos que existenciales. Más bien se trata, como puntualiza Luciano Pellicani, de "un modo de ser hombre". Tal modo de ser no depende en absoluto de dotes naturales o privilegios de la fortuna, sino, sencilla y escuetamente, del ejercicio de la libertad. El hombre/masa es una libertad dimitida, inerte; el alma noble es una libertad dando de sí. ... quiero significar lo que en el alma noble hay de entrenamiento y esfuerzo, de disciplina y exigencia. (51-52)

Cerezo Galán appropriately identifies the importance of "effort" in relation to "the noble soul," the *masas*, and "liberty." Yet, his objection to prioritizing the *sociological* over the *existential* is precisely where we can address matters of classism in Ortega's arguments. Moreover, *La rebelión de las*

*masas* is perhaps most fascinating at such aporetic moments that lack a clear-cut hierarchization, but rather offer a conflation of the *sociological* and the *existential*. In this light, the usage of metaphysical terms like “alma” is evidence – in the spirit of a Derridean contamination – of the frailty of unambiguous demarcations of realms of being and of conceptualization. Additionally, should we consider Ortega’s ontology as a “modo de ser” and a question of “libertad” extricated from issues of class – along with gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and other factors – we lose sight of how individuals’ capacities to exercise their freedoms are necessarily structured by historically-specific socioeconomic, political, and ideological circumstances.

#### ORTEGA ON RECEIVING RIGHTS AND *CONQUERING* PRIVILEGES

The topic of the equality of rights allows for reflection on the manner in which Ortega’s ontology informs his standpoint on historical developments relating to liberalism, as well as Zambrano’s departure from his assessment. His argumentation concerns how discourses on rights have been *naturalized* by the masses. Ortega considers that such liberties would have required struggles in previous epochs, such that he depicts “the nobility” as the persons who are governed by “obligations” and engage in the *active conquering* of “privileges,” rather than the *passive* reception of “rights:”

La nobleza se define por la exigencia, por las obligaciones, no por los derechos. *Noblesse oblige*. “Vivir a gusto es de plebeyo: el noble aspira a ordenación y a ley” (Goethe). Los privilegios de la nobleza no son originariamente concesiones o favores, sino, por el contrario, son conquistas. Y, en principio, supone su mantenimiento, que el privilegiado sería capaz de reconquistarlas en todo instante, si fuese necesario y alguien se lo disputase. Los derechos privados *privi-legios* no son, pues, pasiva posesión y simple goce, sino que representan el perfil adonde llega el esfuerzo de la persona. (*Rebelión* 200-01)

The nobility’s “privileges” dictate a striving for their attainment and “maintenance,” should it be necessary for them to be *reconquered*. Ortega also levels a critique of hereditary nobles who feel entitled to what was acquired by their ancestors (*Rebelión* 201). By contrast, alluding to the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* of the French Revolution, Ortega describes the *passive* enjoyment of “rights” that does not involve “effort” (“esfuerzo”):

[L]os derechos comunes, como son los “del hombre y del ciudadano”, son propiedad pasiva, puro usufructo y beneficio, don generoso del destino con que todo hombre se

encuentra, y que no responde a esfuerzo ninguno, como no sea el respirar y evitar la demencia. Yo diría, pues, que el derecho impersonal se tiene y el personal se sostiene. (201)

By conceiving of rights as a “generous gift of destiny” bestowed upon future generations, Ortega appears to deny the struggle for freedom and the “effort” required to initially *conquer* such rights from the *Ancien Régime*. At the same time, there does not seem to be a recognition that different groups must *actively* defend their rights from political forces that would aim to curtail or eradicate rights and their foundations. Ortega recounts, as a kind of *naturalizing*, the process by which individuals felt that they were warranted rights. The philosopher proposes that, in the eighteenth century, some “minorías” “discovered” (“descubrieron”) that all individuals (“todo individuo humano”) – by simply being born – have “ciertos derechos políticos fundamentales, los llamados derechos del hombre y del ciudadano” (*Rebelión* 148-49). He believes that this intellectual production by “las minorías mejores” would be assimilated by the masses:

Fue esto, primero, un puro teorema e idea de unos pocos; luego, esos pocos comenzaron a usar prácticamente de esa idea, a imponerla y reclamarla: las minorías mejores. Sin embargo, durante todo el siglo XIX, la masa, que iba entusiasmándose con la idea de esos derechos como con un ideal, no los sentía en sí, no los ejercitaba ni hacía valer, sino que, de hecho, bajo las legislaciones democráticas, seguía viviendo, seguía sintiéndose a sí misma como en el antiguo régimen. ... el “pueblo” sabía ya que era soberano; pero no lo creía. Hoy aquel ideal se ha convertido en una realidad, no ya en las legislaciones, que son esquemas externos de la vida pública, sino en el corazón de todo individuo, cualesquiera que sean sus ideas, inclusive cuando sus ideas son reaccionarias ... . (*Rebelión* 149)

The numerical dimension of this account is decisive: in a rather hierarchical characterization of ideological divulgation, a few individuals (“unos pocos”) – the “minorías mejores” – are regarded as the agents of change, having produced the theoretical constructs that are then appropriated by the masses, who naturalize the discourse on rights. This top-down account could point to the conceptual force and integrity of theories of natural rights. While Ortega is critical of this development, Zambrano, as we shall see, judges this naturalizing of rights as a consequential innovation in the history of liberalism.



ORTEGA'S LIBERALISM: LIBERTY, "GENEROSITY," AND THE *MINORÍAS EXCELENTES*

In *La rebelión de las masas*, the philosopher's aristocratism and the attendant notion of "effort" generate an emphasis on liberty, rather than equality, a movement mirrored by his theorization of liberal politics. In this regard, Ouimette explains the prominence of "libertad" in Ortega's liberalism that causes friction in view of democratic forms that would underscore "igualdad:"

Si el liberalismo consistía para Ortega en los impulsos y emociones que rodeaban la idea de "libertad", la democracia era un sistema que tenía su centro conceptual en la idea de "igualdad". La corrupción que esta idea había sufrido a manos de los partidos y las ideologías hacía que el debate se centrara en si la igualdad social debía permitirse o no, y casi nunca en una reflexión sobre lo que podía significar. Mucho más importante para Ortega era el problema, previo a la política, de determinar lo que podía ser la igualdad entre seres humanos, de si era posible, o si era sólo una fantasía, una abstracción idealista y una utopía, y por lo mismo sin posible aplicación política. Declarar iguales sin más a todos los miembros de una colectividad social carecía de sentido si no lo admitía la realidad ... (226)

Ouimette importantly contextualizes equality in relation to liberty, the latter of which we can associate with Ortega's ontology grounded by the freedom to *exert* oneself. However, the political matter of the *declaring equality* ("Declarar iguales") of all individuals fundamentally determines the ability of all individuals to exercise their liberty in the first place. There are socially perilous implications in the perspective that there should be an interrogation of political equality because there is not *ontological* equality among human subjects.

The aristocratic concept of "effort" organizes Ortega's liberalism, which embodies some of the less egalitarian attributes of the liberal tradition. At the same time, however, the philosopher also puts forward vital observations about the *generous* nature of democracy, concerning the participation of majorities and minorities. According to Bundgård, Ortega's understanding of "vida esforzada" and his peculiar sense of nobility are intimately related to his conception of political vocation and liberalism: "Para Ortega y Gasset la virtud cívica fundamental en la forma de vida liberal se encontraba en 'la nobleza', entendido el término como sinónimo de vida esforzada con sentido de responsabilidad y deber" (*Compromiso* 132). The idea of "liberal life" necessitates a "civic virtue" bound to striving and exertion, notions which, as discussed above, are linked to Ortega's vision of nobility and "noble life" as constituted by "effort." His ontological split of humans – regulated by the opposition between activity and passivity – has explicit ramifications for political existence. Specifically, Ortega refutes the masses' capacity for governance, as he crowns the *minorías excelentes* as

subjects of political decision. In his account of liberalism, rather than a sharing of rule (*kratos*), there is a transfer of the force from the arithmetic majority (*dēmos*) to “las minorías” (*aristos*):

El liberalismo es el principio de derecho político según el cual el Poder público, no obstante ser omnipotente, se limita a sí mismo y procura, aun a su costa, dejar hueco en el Estado que él impera para que puedan vivir los que ni piensan ni sienten como él, es decir, como los más fuertes, como la mayoría. El liberalismo ... es la suprema generosidad: es el derecho que la mayoría otorga a las minorías y es, por tanto, el más noble grito que ha sonado en el planeta. Proclama la decisión de convivir con el enemigo; más aún, con el enemigo débil. (*Rebelión* 217)

In a democracy, as Derrida might note, there is a circulation of force (*kratos*) from one faction to another, a process which gives legitimacy to this political form. The conferral of the power of decision on the *minorías excelentes* by the majority conjures up thoughts of the mythical origin of representative democracy, in which each election would consist of such a transfer of force. Moreover, Ortega appears to claim that the rights enjoyed by the numerically few, by minorities – who, crucially, may or may not be the *minorías excelentes* – should be the same rights enjoyed by the majority, despite and because of the fact that they are quantitatively fewer. In comparison with the aristocratism of other facets of *La rebelión de las masas*, Ortega in this case provides a major formulation of democratic equality: the greater number does not invalidate the rights of the minority. Otherwise, the will of a majority could infringe upon the rights of numerical minorities determined by gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and political beliefs, among other categories. Commenting on part of this passage, Cerezo Galán draws our attention to some key liberal aspects found in Ortega’s philosophy: “la limitación del poder, la renuncia a la acción directa, el respeto a las minorías, el derecho a la diferencia, el pluralismo cultural ... en una palabra, razón práctica desde el subsuelo de la razón vital” (53). This *limitational* nature of liberalism – also mentioned by Zambrano – is an essential principle.<sup>16</sup> For Ortega, liberalism places limits upon the state, which, “no obstante ser omnipotente,” permits the existence of a “hueco” for those who might or could question that government. We may thus understand why he stresses “the supreme generosity” of a “decision” of *living together* (“convivir”) with the “enemy.”<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding this association of “generosity” with liberalism, the rather hostile lexical selection of the term “enemigo” could be connected not only to the class antagonisms of the dichotomy of *minorías excelentes* and *masas*, but also to more radical conceptions of agonism in democracy. Hence, this hostile vocabulary may potentialize the

idea of the enemy as one's past or future friend, such that the enemy was or could be a reflection of oneself in a democratic order.

Ortega underscores the need for liberalism as a result of his pressing concern about the "triumph of the masses."<sup>18</sup> He suggests that previously, in "la democracia liberal,"<sup>19</sup> the masses would charge "personas especiales" to the exercise of government: "La masa presumía que, al fin y al cabo, con todos sus defectos y lacras, las minorías de los políticos entendían un poco más de los problemas públicos que ella" (*Rebelión* 140-41). Ortega depicts the following dynamic between *masas* and *minorías excelentes* "en la época de la democracia, del sufragio universal:"

En el sufragio universal no deciden las masas, sino que su papel consistió en adherir a la decisión de una u otra minoría. Éstas presentaban sus "programas" ... Los programas eran, en efecto, programas de vida colectiva. En ellos se invitaba a la masa a aceptar un proyecto de decisión. (*Rebelión* 182-83)

Ortega theorizes democratic politics as the *adhering* of the masses to a "decision" made by a "minoría" regarding "programs for collective life." In this way, he privileges the passing of force (*kratos*) from a majority – the *masas* – to a *minoría*, implicitly valorized as the best (*aristos*) partly because they are the few. His liberalism, thus, entails features of an aristocracy, semantically and conceptually. The masses' "role" is that of an *adherence* to a previously made decision by an elite. However, this aristocratizing determination is not merely political, but ontological, as demonstrated by Ortega's "definition" of "the masses:"

Como las masas, por definición, no deben ni pueden dirigir su propia existencia, y menos regentar la sociedad, quiere decirse que Europa sufre ahora la más grave crisis que a pueblos, naciones, culturas, cabe padecer. Esta crisis ha sobrevenido más de una vez en la historia. ... Se llama la rebelión de las masas. (*Rebelión* 132)

He negates the agency of the masses, who *cannot* and *should not* direct "their own existence." Consequently, in his era, Ortega decries the autonomous action of the *masas* for their intervention in the public sphere, as they, by his own designation, are deprived of the ability to decide. However, in the context of an ideal polity, the masses passively exist in order to be led by an "instancia superior" that is made up by "las minorías excelentes" (although he notes that the masses could hypothetically *aspire* to cease to be masses):

En una buena ordenación de las cosas públicas, la masa es lo que no actúa por sí misma. Tal es su misión. Ha venido al mundo para ser dirigida, influida, representada, organizada – hasta para dejar de ser masa, o por lo menos, aspirar a

ello – . Pero no ha venido al mundo para hacer todo eso por sí. Necesita referir su vida a la instancia superior, constituida por las minorías excelentes. (*Rebelión* 267)

For Ortega, the consolidation of “una minoría” involves the rejection of “el gran número” and isolation from “la muchedumbre” (136). As such, the numerical tension between democracy and aristocracy is intensified, as a small group of elites – *individualized* individuals – are confronted by multiple persons who, because they are undifferentiated and seemingly homogenous, become considered a *single* object of governance. It would be key to recognize the possible one-mindedness of a group of individuals acting as a mass or a mob, with a potential for violent action in certain contexts. While acknowledging this facet, it remains necessary to analyze the classism at the core of Ortega’s ontology, in which the basic dividing line of human subjects is between *masas* and *minorías excelentes* via the concept of “effort,” permitting anyone, by way of their exertion, to be psychologically *masa* or *minoría*. Indeed, the very existence of the *masa* is predicated upon its *direction*, *governance*, and *representation* by the *minorías excelentes*. In such instances, Ortega’s liberalism fluctuates from the democratic to the aristocratic: while postulating an apparent numerical equality of majorities and minorities, equality of worth – as addressed in Derrida’s theorization above – is *de facto* emphasized, such that there is a privileging of the rule of the few and the best (*aristos*), who would correspond to the *minorías excelentes*.

#### ZAMBRANO’S ONTOLOGY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Having examined the tenets and political ramifications of the ontological aristocratism in *La rebelión de las masas*, I now turn to the ontology of *Horizonte del liberalismo*. In this 1930 essay, Zambrano’s ontological approach consists of three interlocking terms: life, the idea, and the individual. Such components of her philosophy are developed at a later date, as in her 1958 work *Persona y democracia*, where she contrasts the notion of “persona” with that of “individuo” (*Persona* 143). However, even if embryonic stages of this theoretical schema can be found in *Horizonte del liberalismo*, the opposition between “persona” and “individuo” does not explicitly emerge in this 1930 text.<sup>20</sup> Zambrano does, however, juxtapose the individual with the masses, a collective subject that she associates with the Russian Revolution and communism. She describes “a political attitude” assumed when facing life, which is that of reform: “Hay una actitud política ante la vida, que es, simplemente, el intervenir en ella con un afán o voluntad de reforma. Se hace política siempre que se piensa en dirigir la vida” (*Horizonte* 58). What Zambrano states regarding politics, religion, and ethics specifies how reform and the liberal subject of the

individual are entwined: although there are “concepciones de la vida en que religión, ética y política se confunden,” she proposes that these groupings share the following: “Tienen, sin duda, este origen común: el no conformismo – protesta ante *lo que es* – y el ansia de *lo que debe ser*. Es, pues, un problema entre dos términos: *un individuo que actúa y una vida que se ofrece como materia reformable*” (58; emphasis added). The pursuit of reform – a basic liberal value – is motivated by an ontological “protest” when confronted by “what is” (“lo que es”), towards the direction of “what should be” (“lo que debe ser”). This position partially recalls Ortega’s depiction of “noble life,” comprising the struggle to *transcend* what is through self-imposed demand. Here and elsewhere, we find aristocratic remainders in *Horizonte del liberalismo*. Such aristocratism is evident in the primacy afforded to the reforming action of a small group of individuals who are set against the many.

However, there are moments in the text which destabilize this emphasis on the individual in a less aristocratic and more democratic direction. In this regard, some formulations offered by Zambrano complicate the ontological centrality of the liberal subject: if the individual “acts” upon “life” in her/his reforming activity, there is an agonistic struggle between “individuo” and “vida.” In the following passage, illuminating the elliptical and suggestive style of enunciation characteristic of Zambrano’s essay, the three main parts her ontology are introduced: “Una materia – la vida actual –, una forma ideal, que se pretende hacer real, y un individuo... un hombre. (Hombre es aquella criatura que está entre dos orbes, mediadora, enviada entre ellos)” (58). She posits three areas that ground her ontology: “life”/“matter” (“vida”/“materia”); the “individual” (“individuo”);<sup>21</sup> and the “ideal form” that one endeavors to create in reality. In attempting to move between the poles of life and the idea, the individual is often affected by life as a *mediator* between life and the realization of the idea: “la vida también reforma al individuo” (59). While underscoring the individual’s ontological – and thus political – capacity to *reform*, Zambrano clarifies her vision of the human subject vis-à-vis life:

la “voluntad de reforma”, que es la política, depende por entero de la vida misma, de la vida que está por crear; y nunca del individuo. Ella es el personaje principal, la protagonista, y el individuo sobresaliente es su emisario, su representante, que debe toda su alcurnia tan sólo a lo que representa. (*Horizonte* 75)

Consequently, this “individuo sobresaliente” is the “emisario” of life. Yet, the entirety of politics “depends” on life, and “never” on the individual, who attempts to *direct life* in accordance with an idea. If the individual is

a *mediating* force between the poles of life and the “ideal form,” s/he is frequently changed and *reformed* by life, which Zambrano perceives as “the protagonist.” Thus, the prioritization of the liberal subject of the individual is disrupted: politics, defined as a “will to reform” – reminiscent of Ortega’s *razón vital* – does not rest on the reforming decision of the individual, but rather on life itself, and particularly, on the life that is to come and be created. Zambrano’s powerful ontological remarks divest elements of the text that concentrate on the activity of the individual, by expressing an openness to the absolute unknowability of the future of being. Relatedly, she is concerned with not only the singular human subject, but also with the forms of “supraindividual organization” that manage human relations.

#### GROUNDING IN NATURE, NOT CULTURE: ZAMBRANO’S CONCEPTION OF RIGHTS

In comparison to Ortega y Gasset, Zambrano regards the naturalization of rights as a major accomplishment related to her view of liberalism’s history. Jesús Moreno Sanz draws attention to Zambrano’s recognition of “una insalvable contradicción práctica [del liberalismo] entre sus postulados de libertad, igualdad y derechos del hombre (indiscutibles para Z. [Zambrano]) y su realidad, en cuanto a la escisión e injusticia económica y cultural que provoca (completamente inadmisible para esta autora)” (“Estudio” 164). She describes how “liberty” was, before liberal tendencies, limited to the aristocracy and established by “culture” instead of “nature:”

Pues antes pudo haber libertad, pero restringida a una clase aristocrática, mediatizada, condicionada por ciertos valores, era una libertad de cultura, y no de naturaleza. El postulado nuevo del liberalismo son los derechos del individuo en cuanto tal, los famosos derechos del hombre. Todo el afán de Rousseau significa un esfuerzo de naturalizar, de fundar en naturaleza y no en cultura los postulados liberales. Ellos, como todo lo específicamente humano, son problemáticos, inestables, de fácil pérdida, como demuestra la historia. Su naturalidad les daría seguridad. (*Horizonte* 91)

The notion of “liberty” as “restricted” (“restringida”) to members of the aristocracy displays Zambrano’s movement away from Ortega, who might posit that such “liberty,” like other *privileges*, would have to be *conquered* by those who are *psychologically aristocratic* through their willing and “effort.” She, by contrast, foregrounds the “effort of naturalizing,” of grounding in “nature” rather than “culture,” liberal ideals like the “rights of man.” Even though she is cognizant of the “problematic” and “unstable” character of these rights, the aspiration to expand and guarantee equal rights to all members of humanity – and possibly to non-humans – is one

of the more democratizing strands of some variants of liberal thought. Thus, *Horizonte del liberalismo*, despite some of its elitist gestures, contains the theoretical resources by which each *individual* who composes the masses could be afforded rights. Zambrano calls these rights “los derechos del individuo” (*Horizonte* 91), while referring to the uncertainty of “los individuos cultivados” (93), thereby encouraging reflection upon the subject of liberalism, and her concomitant approach to governance, the elites, and the masses.

THE REFORMATION, HUMANITY, AND THE “SUPERVALORACIÓN DEL INDIVIDUO”:  
TOWARD ZAMBRANO’S LIBERALISM

The genealogy of liberalism set forth by Zambrano encompasses developments that she views as being partly responsible for the masses’ contemporary claims for equality. In this regard, for Zambrano, Martin Luther’s Reformation is pivotal in articulating the individual’s self-understanding and her/his relationships with others.<sup>22</sup> Zambrano comments upon the *application* of what she calls “liberal, humanist postulates” to the religious sphere which would affect conceptions of subjectivity and community:

Fue ... el sentido de la reforma religiosa de Lutero el aplicar a la religión los postulados liberales, humanistas: libre examen, empleo de la razón, comercio directo con la divinidad. Ya el individuo vale de por sí y no necesita estar inmerso en una organización superior que posea en sí, y como tal, el poder administrativo de las gracias divinas. Esto encierra dentro la antigua y peligrosa cuestión – ya planteada desde los albores del pensar sistematizado – del individuo y la especie, del individuo y toda organización supraindividual. (*Horizonte* 90-91)

These “liberal postulates” allow for the singular, fallen human, by way of her/his own reason, to have “comercio directo con la divinidad” without mediation of “una organización superior” – an apparent reference to the hierarchy of Catholic institutions – such that “el individuo vale de por sí.” (In this context, it should be noted that she calls “la Iglesia Católica” a “sagrada institución” [75], while she also values the inventive spirit of “heterodoxia” [68].) According to Zambrano, while the theological, subjective, and political consequences of the Reformation involve a mode of liberation of the individual, this historical process also causes, in part, an abandonment that problematizes the position of the singular individual within social structures that transcend all individuals and, at the same time, immanently organize their relations. This issue – which she designates as an “organización supraindividual” – recurs not only in her assessment of liberalism’s history, but also in her project of a “nuevo liberalismo.”

Despite the absence of a sustained discussion of democracy in this 1930 essay, Zambrano emphasizes equality in her definition of liberalism, in which interaction is arranged by the “supraindividual organization” of “humanity:”

Es [el liberalismo], ante todo, una supervaloración del individuo, destacado en sí mismo como un fin, sin referencia ni utilización con un fin más alto. Pues *la humanidad*, única organización supraindividual que admite el liberal, es suma de individuos en igualdad, no en superposición; es la consecuencia material y no la unidad formal, anterior e independiente de los miembros. (*Horizonte* 79-80)

With Kantian echoes, liberalism posits the individual as an end in itself. Ostensibly a cornerstone of liberal thought, the abstract idea of “humanity” also reveals an exception to the role of the individual *qua* liberal subject: the amalgamation of entirely singular individuals becomes unified by the totality of “humanity” understood as a “supraindividual organization.” Instead of a “superposición,” potentially implying a vertical social structure, the concept of “humanidad,” composed of “individuals in equality,” seems to place individuals in horizontal relations. But quantitative and qualitative tensions organize this depiction, involving the “supervaloración del individuo,” along with the gathering of “individuos en igualdad.” As a result, in light of Derrida’s analysis of the intersection of freedom and equality, Zambrano presents an aporia that binds the freedom and the incalculable singularity of every individual, to the possibility of equality among them, which would entail, in practice, some type of calculus to enact or legislate. This aporia, in turn, determines other contradictory moments in which she affirms the need for elites in society, while also criticizing the elites’ oppression of the *masas*. Indeed, the idea of a single individual, who is valorized to such a high degree, could obstruct the hope for mutual obligation among individuals, and impede the egalitarian promises contained in parts of the liberal tradition. Moreover, the individual’s “supervaloración” encourages reflection on how incalculably important singularities can be counted and represented in a (liberal) democratic state. Additionally, this characterization of liberalism positions “humanity” as a transcendental unifying principle situated above the horizontal interactions among equal individuals. This horizontality could be interpreted as a means of ideologically combatting the hierarchical verticality of previous social formations, such as the socioeconomic relations and ideology of a feudal mode of production. Consequently, Zambrano’s description could be connected to the ideological notion, in a capitalist mode of production, of the horizontal contract between pairs of “*sujetos libres*,” as discussed by Juan Carlos Rodríguez (73).



## LIBERALISM AS "ARISTOCRATIC" AND THE "SLAVERY" OF THE MASSES

Even though Zambrano envisions equality among individuals as a primary liberal concern, she also refers to an "aristocratic" nature of liberalism, such that *Horizonte del liberalismo* coincides with aspects of *La rebelión de las masas*. She notes the following: "el liberalismo en su origen es esencialmente aristocrático. Aristocrático del hombre, de todo hombre, y no de una clase" (*Horizonte* 79). Zambrano sees liberalism as aristocratizing all of humankind, in a way that is not confined to a particular social class. This statement is akin to Ortega's assertion regarding the non-class-based nature of his distinction between *minorías excelentes* and *masas*, consequently allowing the notion of "effort" to transcend or ideologically occupy the place of a class distinction. This aristocratic quality could possibly account for the paradoxes of liberalism, whose "esencia," according to Zambrano, appears to be "la contradicción" (98). In consideration of the politics of number, we may inquire as to how liberalism could be "aristocratic" for "all men" ("todo hombre"), when an aristocracy, theoretically and etymologically, is bound to the force of rule (*kratos*) of the few, not the many. Therefore, *Horizonte del liberalismo* parallels aspects of Ortega's argumentation, as demonstrated, for example, by his claim that "dentro de cada clase social hay masa y minoría auténtica" (*Rebelión* 138). As I intimated in my discussion of Ortega's notion of "effort," if Zambrano calls liberalism "aristocratic" of all humankind, but not of a specific class, it is possible to propose that this conceptual gambit has a compensatory ideological function for persons not born into hereditary aristocracies, such as some (petty) bourgeoisie, who may now lay claim to aristocratic status and beliefs.

Echoing the Orteguian struggle between *minorías excelentes* and *masas*, Zambrano addresses the lack of "direction" and the *isolation* of individuals, coupled with the fact that the *masas* do not *listen* to the elite: "Hoy realmente no hay posibilidad de dirección; toda individualidad preeminente se encuentra aislada, desarraigada frente a una masa indócil que no le escucha. Todo está desintegrado" (*Horizonte* 99). She juxtaposes active, reforming and "preeminent" individuals ("toda individualidad preeminente"), with the masses, who no longer abide by the prescriptions of the elite, making them "unmanageable" ("indócil"). Zambrano's framing of the contemporary sociopolitical situation also concerns the possibility of *solidarity* between the masses and the political-intellectual elites, that is, those who "direct." "Se precisa una nueva economía, un nuevo liberalismo, amplio y fecundo, y un estado social y cultural en el que se sienta solidaria la masa con el político, con el intelectual, con todo el que dirige" (99). While

Ortega's liberalism accentuates the necessity of the masses' *adherence* to a *minoría excelente*, Zambrano comparably locates in the Russian Revolution and communism the overwhelming of the individual by the *masas*, who, similarly, no longer follow the elite.<sup>23</sup>

However, despite these noteworthy similarities in the essays of the two Spanish thinkers, Zambrano differs from Ortega as she decries the unjust conditions of the masses, extols the naturalization of rights, and understands liberalism as entailing a "suma de individuos en igualdad" (*Horizonte* 79-80). As such, I concur with Moreno Sanz, who specifies Zambrano's movement away from the elitism of Ortega: "su concepción radical [de Zambrano] de la política, de la sociedad y sus demandas, de la esclavitud de las masas, y de la misma necesidad de llegar a una equilibrada y justa conexión de cultura y economía, está distanciándose enormemente de los postulados elitistas de Ortega" ("Estudio" 118). Relatedly, notions of debt also separate both philosophers. Ortega believes that the masses are indebted to the *minorías excelentes* who sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the many. By contrast, Zambrano insists that the elites must recompense the long-standing debt to the masses, who have materially supported the intellectual endeavors of the elites. In this way, she illustrates the historical quandary of liberalism, its contradictory movements towards freedom and equality, on the one hand, and oppression and exploitation, on the other.

Accordingly, *Horizonte del liberalismo* attends to the economic inequalities produced by liberalism, including the "slavery" of the *masas*. Central to Zambrano's form of critique is a conceptual inversion of terms relating to "libertad," such that they become semanticized negatively, nearly approaching "esclavitud."<sup>24</sup> Liberal economics promotes the *freedoms* of commerce and trade ("libre cambio" along with "libre concurrencia" [96]). As such, she maintains that the principles of economic liberalism bring about the following conditions: "libertad diferenciadora, injusta, engendradora de dictaduras individuales, de miserias colectivas, explotación de la masa por el individuo" (*Horizonte* 96-97). Liberal economics produces "libertad," which paradoxically – or perhaps structurally – causes "individual dictatorships" and "collective suffering." Moreover, her concern for "miserias colectivas" contributes to the destabilizing of the ontological priority of the individual vis-à-vis the masses, who are *exploited* by individuals. Reflecting on the nature of the economy, she addresses issues relating to "liberty" and "the direction of the masses:"

La economía, al fin, representa una dependencia del hombre, una necesidad en que se halla de procurar su sustento, algo ciertamente no creado por él, no humano.

Reconozcamos esta esclavitud y no nos importe ser esclavos de la necesidad – que bajo una u otra forma siempre ha de pesar sobre nosotros – para ser libres en nuestro orbe propio. Libertad de que nos veríamos privados fatalmente *si abandonásemos este problema a la dirección de las masas*. (*Horizonte* 103; emphasis added)

These observations reveal the boundaries of a theoretical framework organized by the categories of masses and elites. Specifically, Zambrano implicitly includes herself among the elites whose “libertad” could be jeopardized if the current dilemmas would be left up to the decision of the masses.

However, while the binarism of the individual and the masses debilitates some of the emancipatory potentials of *Horizonte del liberalismo*, Zambrano, in a key rhetorical gesture, adopts the position and preoccupations of the *masas*. She addresses the political-intellectual elites who should be cognizant of their privileges and should remunerate the majority of society that has supported them:

Y los de abajo dicen: no; bastante se ha caminado ya; es preciso detenerse y mirar hacia atrás. Vosotros, los de la vanguardia, sois *los más obligados – por más capacitados* – para ello. Bastante tiempo os hemos sustentado con *nuestro esfuerzo* y con *nuestra esclavitud* para que os destaquéis en las avanzadas donde el horizonte es ancho. Hora es ya de que regreséis de vuestra excursión a las ideas y vengáis a la tarea de las realidades. Es el momento en que *al aristócrata, al intelectual*, se le presenta *el pagaré*, realmente ya demorado en largas esperas. (*Horizonte* 97; emphasis added)

Zambrano again highlights the role played by members of the elite, qualifying them as possessing great *obligations* as they are “más capacitados.” Nonetheless, she draws attention to the “esclavitud” of the *masas*, who have established the conditions required for the elites’ detachment from physical labor in order to pursue their speculations and ventures. Whereas Ortega sees “effort” as a necessarily aristocratic attribute and activity, Zambrano inverts his duality of *minorías excelentes* and *masas* by focusing on how “los de abajo” – the masses – have materially supported, with their “effort” (“nuestro esfuerzo”), the members of the elite, “los de la vanguardia.” This passage accentuates the obligations of the elite – significantly called “the aristocrat” and “the intellectual” – to rectify the insalubrious social, political, and economic circumstances to which they have contributed.

Zambrano recognizes the paradoxical nature of liberalism, which would advocate for “los derechos del hombre;” nevertheless, in her contemporary situation, for these rights to become “efectivos,” a novel organization of the economy is requisite (*Horizonte* 98). Therefore, the theorization of a reinvigorated liberalism becomes imperative, since “*los postulados espirituales del liberalismo no pueden realizarse con la economía liberal*” (98). Nevertheless, in a predictably liberal impasse, the philosopher juxtaposes individuals who produce culture, with the masses who support those individuals: “Por un lado, los altos valores espirituales, culturales, que hay que salvar y acrecentar. Por otro, el espectáculo de *la esclavitud* efectiva de inmensas masas humanas, sustentadora de *la aristocracia* que crea la cultura” (97; emphasis added). Zambrano conflictingly seems to corroborate the significance and continued vitality of cultural production limited to an elite, an “aristocracia.” But she also undermines this idea by isolating the masses’ “slavery” that makes possible the existence of the elites, who, in turn, are *free* from physical demands, such that they may continue to create “culture.” Tellingly, Zambrano declares that liberalism cannot exist without a basis in “slavery:” “El liberalismo se asienta sobre la esclavitud, y sólo sobre ella puede alcanzar su perfección. ... esclavitud disimulada ‘cristianamente’ en las sociedades liberales modernas (Inglaterra, Estados Unidos), pero no menos auténtica en su terrible realidad” (80-81). Her perception brings us to one of the most overt incongruities of liberalism’s historical embodiments in the context of capitalist modes of production: a structural basis in human exploitation – both unwaged and waged –, and a simultaneous professing of equal rights, at least for some groups, differentially and unevenly depending on the area and epoch.

While identifying these inconsistencies of liberal theory and practice, Zambrano strives to reposition a “new liberalism” in light of the more egalitarian motivations of this tradition. Nonetheless, we also notice aristocratic ideas in her portrayal of liberalism:

El liberalismo es un desafío, un reto a la necesidad; a todas las fuerzas gravitatorias que empujan al hombre hacia las bajas zonas del universo. Es el empeño que el hombre pone en *superar toda esclavitud*, en ser hombre sólo; es decir, árbitro, *señor de sí mismo y de la vida*, y, sin embargo, *esforzado*. Esfuerzo éste que se goza en sí mismo y que en sí tiene su fin; *esfuerzo heroico*, del más puro y descarnado heroísmo. De *tan aristocrática esencia*, era prematuro. Se había ido demasiado lejos en la privilegiada vanguardia – mientras la inmensa retaguardia seguía pegada a la tierra –. Y entonces surgió el drama, el conflicto, por entonces irresoluble. Aristocracia o

democracia; heroísmo o necesidad; libertad o esclavitud. (*Horizonte* 80; emphasis added)

Liberalism is intended to unfetter and make each human subject “a lord of himself and of life” (“señor de sí mismo y de la vida”), an expression that brings to mind the image of a feudal aristocrat. For Zambrano, decisive in this process of *overcoming* (“superar”) toward liberation is “effort” (“esfuerzo”). In this way, she seems to partially duplicate the functioning of Ortega’s aristocratic notion of “effort” as not being limited to – although characterizing – the constitution of a *minoría excelente*, whether in terms of social class or psychological striving. Nevertheless, while Zambrano concedes that “effort” is important – and perhaps conditions liberalism’s “aristocratic” nature – liberalism has left behind, in a type of “slavery,” those who have laid the foundations for the “liberty” of the few. She overtly frames one of liberalism’s primordial incongruities in the opposition of “Aristocracia o democracia,” as if interrogating the Orteguian dichotomy of *minorías excelentes* and *masas*. Immediately after listing this series of theoretical dyads – “Aristocracia o democracia; heroísmo o necesidad; libertad o esclavitud” – , Zambrano explicates the consequences of the “aristocratic essence” of liberalism, its conflicting pulsions, and the ensuing *division* of “human unity”:

Y sucedió lo que en todas las contradicciones insuperables; que sólo tienen solución por la violencia, mutilando, sacrificando. Y aquí se sacrificó *la unidad humana*. “Libertad, igualdad, fraternidad”, reza el venerable lema en su última encarnación. Pero ya desde el principio se sacrificaron los dos últimos al primero. Era ineludible. *Se dividió la humanidad*, por no perder *la conquista*. Unos perseguirían la superación, el *record*; otros pagarían por ellos el tributo a la necesidad. Unos, afán heroico; otros, *trabajoso esfuerzo sin horizontes*. (*Horizonte* 80; emphasis added, “*record*” italicized in original)

Invoking the French Revolutionary motto of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, Zambrano highlights that the *sacrifice* of “equality” and “fraternity” to “liberty” has *divided* humanity, a situation which could be construed as a possible reference to the separation of elites and masses. Her account of this state of affairs – in which this *sacrifice* was made so that “the conquest” would not be *lost* – resembles the conceptual and lexical parameters of Ortega’s discussion of the “effort” of those (psychological) aristocrats who actively *conquer* and *uphold* their privileges. Concurrently, while she notes that some sought “la superación,” others struggled with “trabajoso esfuerzo sin horizontes.” In this case, unlike Ortega, Zambrano crucially links the

term “effort” (“esfuerzo”) to the physical toil of the masses, rather than to the intellectual *exertion* of elites. Similarly, she considers that “liberty” – supposedly for all persons – has remained in the purview of the “aristocracies,” to the exclusion of the masses: “La libertad seguía siendo – no en teoría, pero sí en la auténtica realidad – don de aristocracias; y, sin embargo, ya se llegaba a la disgregación. Los elegidos siguieron su olímpica carrera, abandonando a la masa, que todavía ignoraba su existencia” (*Horizonte* 93). This incongruity, for Zambrano, underlies the “inmenso, gravísimo problema social” of the present epoch (93). If because of this problematic “los individuos cultivados” are experiencing “cansancio y desorientación,” the masses manifest “sed, violencia de palpitaciones que piden cauce” (93). Accordingly, she declares the following: “se rompió el equilibrio. Y es necesario crear otro” (93). The pursuit to forge another “equilibrium” orients Zambrano’s “nuevo liberalismo.”

CONFLICTING LIBERALISMS: FROM ZAMBRANO’S “ORGANIZACIONES SUPRA-INDIVIDUALES” TO ORTEGA’S *TEMPERING* OF AUTHORITARIANISM

Zambrano devises a reinvigorated liberal program that intends to ameliorate the current social crises, while preserving certain ideals:

Después de la crítica a que hemos sometido en todos sus aspectos a nuestro liberalismo, hemos hallado dos que nos pueden conducir a una solución. Y son, por una parte, su inmenso amor al hombre, a todo hombre, y no a una clase. Esto nos conduce justamente a la democracia económica. Aceptémosla. Además de que, realizado este cambio económico por los propios liberales, queda conjurado el gran peligro del materialismo histórico, que nos parece amenaza a la cultura. (*Horizonte* 103-04)

Zambrano, with a humanistic emphasis, refuses to prioritize class relations: “love of all man,” but not of a certain class, nor of a particular sex or gender. Concomitantly, she rejects historical materialism, which she believes jeopardizes “culture.” The philosopher also endorses “la democracia económica,” an idea that, while evocative, is not further addressed in this 1930 essay. Additionally, Zambrano aims to preserve liberal principles comprising “libertad de pensar, de investigar, de enseñar” (*Horizonte* 104). She discusses her project in relation to a cultural sphere under the auspices of liberalism: “El otro aspecto esencial a que aludíamos es el amor a los valores suprahumanos que el hombre encarna en la cultura; *la aristocracia espiritual*, la libre intelectualidad, que es la esencia del vivir culto. Aceptémoslo también” (104; emphasis added). Similar to components of Ortega’s aristocratism, she recognizes the place of a “spiritual aristocracy”

in cultural affairs. Alongside these aristocratic invocations, Zambrano incorporates other elements into her project that are not habitually associated with liberalism:

La reconstrucción, la integración de un mundo estructurado; *la vuelta a un universo que conexione al hombre sin disolverle ni encadenarle*; el retorno a la fe, a una fe timonel de la inteligencia y no su prisión; el reconocimiento de la legitimidad del instinto, de la pasión, de lo irracional, ¿no podrían ser la base y la meta de las tareas de nuestros días? (*Horizonte* 88; emphasis added)

Instead of categorically asserting these notions, Zambrano carefully posits them. Noteworthy is her use of the conditional in this line of inquiry: it is not that these values *must* structure “las tareas de nuestros días;” rather, she asks if they *could* (“podrían”) organize such a project. This passage exemplifies some of the most valuable qualities of Zambrano’s prose and thought, particularly in terms of an openness to alterity that undermines dogmatic attitudes and pretensions to absolute certainty. Moreover, she includes in her vision a liberating and non-constrictive notion of “faith,” as well as “passion,” “instinct,” and “the irrational.” Zambrano’s project of a “new liberalism” also comprises democratizing and communitarian elements that could be placed under the rubric of “fraternity” which would be *sacrificed* – alongside “equality” – to “liberty,” in her assessment discussed above. Consequently, I would propose that the question of fraternity – understood within the tripartite motto of the French and Haitian Revolutionary traditions – can be localized in the way that Zambrano addresses the individual’s need for “organizaciones supraindividuales” and for a recuperation of “la unidad humana.” However, caution is in order regarding the usage of the term fraternity, which implies, as Derrida has notably expressed, a paradigm of friendship that revolves around the notion of the brother, leading to political forms arranged by a symbolic fellowship of fictive male siblings brought together by figurative bonds relating to kinship and nationhood, while simultaneously producing the ideological and empirical exclusion of women and of the image of the sister in political life.<sup>25</sup> Zambrano places faith in “the return to a universe that connects man without dissolving or enchaining him,” a characterization that allows for a communitarian dimension that would redress the *division* of “human unity” brought about by liberal economics. I would maintain that this phrase – “la vuelta a un universo que conexione al hombre sin disolverle ni encadenarle” – condenses Zambrano’s critiques of both communism and liberalism in *Horizonte del liberalismo*. Firstly, the search for a *connection* that would not *dissolve* would seem to counter what Zambrano perceives as being most

troubling in her portrayal of communism (namely, the *crushing* of the individual).<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the image of *enchaining* recalls the detrimental *connection* linking the individual and the masses in liberalism (namely, the “slavery” of the masses that has provided the conditions of possibility of the elites’ liberty). Relatedly, Zambrano questions the ontological centrality of the liberal subject of the individual by indicating that an acknowledgement of the rights of the individual would not entail a repudiation of “organizaciones supraindividuales,” which, so long as they preserve the integrity of the individual, can provide substantial modes of “unidad” in human experience: “La existencia de sus derechos no implica el no reconocimiento de organizaciones supraindividuales, que, sin destruir las esencias del individuo, den unidad a la historia, a la política y al pensamiento” (*Horizonte* 93). Nevertheless, she remains troubled by the separation among individuals and the need “to be connected to something:”

Tampoco el individuo, por fuerte que sea, puede existir aislado: necesita, para tener sentido, sentirse vinculado a algo, referirse a algo, llevar a alguien tras de sí. Es una figura – no un punto – pero incompleta en su actualidad. (Por esto, tal vez, toda vida sea un girar. Incompleto, sin base de sustentación en sí mismo, el individuo, como peón inestable, sólo moviéndose alrededor de un eje encuentra su equilibrio). (93)

We see again an unease concerning the increasingly unsteady position of the individual, who needs to not only “feel linked to something,” but also “carry someone” behind; these statements could possibly allude to the masses’ *direction* by elites. However, as evinced by the above-cited passage, Zambrano challenges the centrality of the liberal subject, by implying that the individual requires some form of social life in “organizaciones supraindividuales.” Indeed, the individual suggestively remains a “figure” – “incomplete” –, an “unstable pawn” that may only discover “equilibrium” by its orbit around an “axis.” Zambrano’s portrayal of “all life” (“toda vida”) as “a rotating” (“un girar”) perhaps contains the most resplendent of the internal textual resources that could displace the ontological priority of the individual and hold the promise of a democratizing vision of subjectivity and political existence in her “new liberalism.”

By way of conclusion, we should take note of the very different tonality with which Ortega y Gasset employs the phrase “nuevo liberalismo,” which appears in his “En cuanto al pacifismo...,” included in the 1938 edition of *La rebelión de las masas*. He argues that “liberalism” will be *saved* by “totalitarianism:”



vendrá una *articulación* de Europa en dos formas distintas de vida pública: la forma de un nuevo liberalismo y la forma que, con un nombre impropio, se suele llamar “totalitaria”. Los pueblos menores adoptarán figuras de transición e intermediarias. Esto salvará a Europa. Una vez más resultará patente que toda forma de vida ha menester de su antagonista. El “totalitarismo” salvará al “liberalismo”, destiñendo sobre él, depurándolo, y gracias a ello veremos pronto a un nuevo liberalismo templar los regímenes autoritarios. (*Rebelión* 411-12)

Ortega’s disquieting verdict that totalitarian governance could pave the way for a “new liberalism” that would *temper* “authoritarian regimes,” could not come at a more ominous juncture. Indeed, the *Bando sublevado* has, at this time, the upper hand in the Spanish Civil War (Sánchez Cuervo 66). These conditions of societal upheaval are in some ways paralleled by the deteriorating rapport between the two philosophers. Sánchez Cuervo perceives a fracture in the relationship between Ortega and Zambrano that would begin with the appearance of *Horizonte del liberalismo*, and would be irremediable after “el célebre desencuentro entre ambos en julio de 1936 en la Residencia de Estudiantes, cuando Zambrano solicitara a Ortega su apoyo en la firma del manifiesto de apoyo a la República” (67). As Ortega is in Paris, with the Civil War raging, the Second Republic in ruins, and the dictum “Delenda est monarchia” a distant memory, Zambrano finds herself in Madrid, working with *Hora de España* and *El mono azul*, defending the cause of the Republic (66-67). This historical freeze-frame in the lives of Ortega and Zambrano places in bleak contrast their philosophical and biographical trajectories, reflected and perhaps portended by *La rebelión de las masas* and *Horizonte del liberalismo*, which, notwithstanding their similarities, depict divergent – and ultimately irreconcilable – new liberalisms for the masses.

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## NOTES

- 1 Zambrano describes, in the nineteenth century, the “conservative” character of intellectuals, especially in the context of “liberal culture” and the “revolt of the masses:” “El siglo XIX engañó a las gentes sobre la significación política del intelectual; le creyeron *per se* de vanguardia porque entonces – desde la Revolución francesa – coincidía el individualismo del momento con el individualismo del intelectual. Pero el intelectual es conservador de siempre, y

si no lo fuera, lo tendría que ser ahora, que una cultura y una aristocracia parecen estar en peligro y con ellas la libertad individual; el intelectual será de vanguardia mientras una cultura – forma de vida – se esté plasmando; será revolucionario cuando la vea aplastada; pero dentro de la actual cultura liberal y ante la ‘rebelión de las masas’, será siempre conservador” (“Tres” 16).

- 2 In terms of the evolution and publication of Ortega’s essay, Domingo Hernández Sánchez signals the following: “su origen [*La rebelión de las masas*] tiene lugar en dos series diferentes de artículos en *El Sol*, publicados entre 1929 y 1930. Ya ahí se producen las primeras variantes en el paso al libro, al margen del último capítulo, que no apareció en la prensa. Ese libro ... ve la luz en agosto de 1930 ... En 1937 se le añade un prólogo (y se realiza una primera revisión del texto); en 1938 un epílogo” (21-22). In this article, I cite from Hernández Sánchez’s excellent critical edition of *La rebelión de las masas*.
- 3 Jesús Moreno Sanz details the publication history of Zambrano’s essay, which has three different titles: “*Nuevo Liberalismo*, según portada; *Horizonte del liberalismo*, en la cubierta; y *Horizontes de un nuevo liberalismo*, conforme a la publicidad que de él se hizo, tanto por el editor, Javier Morata, como por algunos números de *El Sol*” (“Presentación” 3). In this study, I quote from the text of *Horizonte del liberalismo* proceeding from the outstanding critical edition María Zambrano. *Obras completas I. Libros (1930-1939)*.
- 4 Zambrano writes in her letter: “Mi admirado y querido maestro: Como verá, le remito una nota publicada en *El Socialista* de ayer domingo – llegada a mi vista por casualidad – sobre mi librito. Aunque supongo que no le interesará excesivamente, he sentido el impulso de enviársela, porque en ella se toma a mi pobre libro y hasta a mi pobre persona como pretexto o trampolín, al menos así parece, para criticar agriamente la actuación política de usted. En ella se dice que me he ‘colocado frente a usted’ y se hace pasar una película de actos suyos e imaginados comentarios míos, que me ha hecho mucho daño” (“Tres” 17-18, 20).
- 5 While I make reference to other texts composed by the two philosophers, my objective is not to consider the overall philosophical trajectories of Zambrano and Ortega, pertaining to the opposition, for example, between *razón poética* in the case of the former, and *razón vital* in the case of the latter. Instead, I provide close readings of *La rebelión de las masas* and *Horizonte del liberalismo* in order to examine the intricacies and paradoxes of these two rich and complex texts, whose philosophical and political stakes become all the more significant in light of the crisis of liberalism and the expansion of mass movements in the early twentieth century. Thus, for instance, while making note of the later development of Zambrano’s notion of “persona” in *Persona y democracia* (1958), it is not my intention to assess the evolution of this component of her philosophy. Rather, I analyze how the ontology of *Horizonte*

*del liberalismo* (1930) can be described as liberal, since Zambrano's definition of politics focuses on the principle of reform, an activity that she then links to the individual, historically the subjective model of liberalism.

- 6 In this article, the terms *minorías excelentes* and *masas* will remain in Spanish.
- 7 I would like to thank the anonymous evaluators of this article for their observant readings and thoughtful commentary. I would also like to extend my gratitude to José Manuel Pereiro Otero for his keen insights in our dialogues about Zambrano and Ortega.
- 8 A few years later in *Los intelectuales en el drama de España*, published in 1937, Zambrano recognizes that fascism is produced economically by capitalism, and claims that fascism is related to a failure to overcome European Idealism (*Intelectuales* 151-52).
- 9 Zambrano identifies major inequalities in her present: "Hay además un problema de valores, de cultura, a la que algunos hacen consustancial con el régimen capitalista. Y un problema moral humano, de humanidad que vive desterrada del bienestar" (*Horizonte* 96). Additionally, she differentiates "human liberalism" from "capitalist liberalism," without addressing their imbrication: "hoy el liberalismo de muchos es el liberalismo capitalista, el liberalismo económico burgués, y no el humano" (103).
- 10 Zambrano mentions how some members of the previous liberal generation in Spain had revolutionary ideas, but were conservative in their daily interactions, a situation that inhibited "una verdadera y honda revolución liberal" (*Horizonte* 73). She positions her contemporaries ("nosotros") as the ones who must face and redress the consequences of the absence of such a "revolution" (73). Moreover, it should be noted that it is beyond the aims of my article to compare the "nuevo liberalismo" discussed by Ortega and Zambrano with incipient theories of neoliberalism in the 1930s.
- 11 Wallerstein describes the "reactionary" character of conservatism "in the simple sense that it was a reaction to the coming of what we think of as modernity, and set itself the objective either of reversing the situation entirely (the hard version) or of limiting the damage and holding back as long as possible the changes that were coming (the more sophisticated version)" (3). As such, conservatives would view that those advocating "reform" or "revolution" would produce "social harm" (3).
- 12 The phrase "aristocratic liberalism" is the title of Alan S. Kahan's work on Burckhardt, Mill, and Tocqueville. Kahan delineates the paradoxical consistency of this expression in relation to these thinkers: "Certainly they were not all aristocrats by birth, and none of them wished to revive the Old Regime or to base liberty on a traditional aristocracy. Indeed, they were sharp opponents of those who attempted to restore or continue the Old Regime, whether Bourbon loyalists or Tory aristocrats. It is the Greek and humanist

etymology of aristocracy from the word *aristos* (the best, the elite) that applies here. Their common distaste for the masses and the middle classes, their fear and contempt of mediocrity, the primacy of individuality and diversity among their values persuaded me that this was the proper label" (4-5). Ortega and Zambrano, in the two 1930 texts studied in this article, present certain features of the "aristocratic liberalism" proposed above, such as the emphasis on the individual, along with the etymological sense of *aristos* of aristocracy, which is encapsulated in the Orteguian concept of "effort." However, there are relevant historical and ideological differences with regard to these nineteenth-century "aristocratic liberals." For example, both Spanish philosophers, despite classist elements in their essays, demonstrate trepidation, but perhaps not "distaste," regarding the masses.

- 13 In *La deshumanización del arte* (1925), Ortega says that new forms of art are not understood by the masses. This observation leads him to make a distressing leap in logic to a biological theorizing of difference between the *minorías excelentes* and the *masas* by means of "un órgano de comprensión," which some humans have and others lack. As a result, he suggests the existence of "dos variedades distintas de la especie humana" (47). If Ortega is not referring to a difference of social class, the aforementioned statement places the difference of "the two varieties of the human species" at an even more disturbing biological site of elitist differentiation, upon positing "an organ of comprehension" that distinguishes human beings at the level of physiology rather than ideology; in this way, a classist position becomes positivistically naturalized as a biological datum.
- 14 It is relevant to note how Ortega complicates the notion of "masa" to encompass various social strata, practices, and psychological propensities: "Es intelectualmente masa el que ante un problema cualquiera se contenta con pensar lo que buenamente encuentra en su cabeza. Es, en cambio, egregio el que desestima lo que halla sin previo esfuerzo en su mente, y sólo acepta como digno de él lo que aún está por encima de él y exige un nuevo estirón para alcanzarlo" (*Rebelión* 199).
- 15 Ana Fernández Cebrián and Víctor Pueyo postulate the ideological implications of the invocation of aristocratic ideas in Ortega's thought: "Para [Ramiro] Ledesma [Ramos], al igual que para Ortega y Gasset, los hombres pertenecen a las categorías del 'vulgo' y la 'nobleza'. Frente a la cobardía y la debilidad del vulgo, los hombres nobles han desarrollado a lo largo de la historia los valores del liberalismo que Ortega y Gasset reivindica en su proyecto filosófico ... Este exceso aristocrático, inherente al discurso pequeñoburgués de Ortega y Gasset y de Ledesma, es un ejemplo de lo que Raymond Williams denomina 'ideología residual', segregada en el seno de un modo de producción clausurado, pero todavía activa históricamente" (210).

This “ideología residual” could resemanticize previously feudal aristocratic values within liberal theory. While not conflating a feudal mode of production and its ideology with a capitalist mode of production and its corresponding ideology in the early twentieth century, it would be possible to suggest the presence of a feudalizing ideological remainder in liberalism.

- 16 Zambrano’s liberalism encompasses not only limitation, but also an openness to the arrival of the future: “... – el liberalismo es, ante todo, cuidadosa delimitación de poderes – , cauces siempre abiertos a la posibilidad de un futuro” (*Horizonte* 62).
- 17 Andrew Dobson connects the question of “generosity” in Ortega’s liberalism to the proposals of John Stuart Mill (60).
- 18 At the same time, however, Ortega does not univocally condemn his current sociopolitical situation: “La rebelión de las masas *puede*, en efecto, ser tránsito a una nueva y sin par organización de la humanidad, pero también *puede* ser una catástrofe en el destino humano” (*Rebelión* 220). Despite the grave socioeconomic and political conditions of the 1920s and 1930s, Ortega’s considerations of the social landscape appear, at times, oddly positive. For instance, he comments: “Nunca ha podido el hombre medio resolver con tanta holgura su problema económico. Mientras en proporción menguaban las grandes fortunas, y se hacía más dura la existencia del obrero industrial, el hombre medio de cualquier clase social encontraba cada día más franco su horizonte económico” (191). Similarly, the following remarks demonstrate an unrealistically optimistic opinion of the economic standing of workers: “Desde 1900 comienza también el obrero a ampliar y asegurar su vida. Sin embargo, tiene que luchar para conseguirlo” (191).
- 19 Domingo Hernández Sánchez notes that the adjective “liberal” was added in the first edition in Espasa-Calpe Argentina of *La rebelión de las masas* in 1937 (*Rebelión* 140).
- 20 For a discussion of the development of the idea of “persona” in the philosophy of Zambrano, consult Johnson’s article.
- 21 In Zambrano’s essay, when the term “hombre” is used, I equate it with “individuo” – that is, the figure of the individual – given that in the essay, an elliptical equivalence is established between “individuo” and “hombre”: “Una materia – la vida actual –, una forma ideal, que se pretende hacer real, y un individuo... un hombre” (58). Despite the male denotation of the Spanish word, in Zambrano’s discourse, “hombre” can be understood as “human being” without an assigned gender, while questions of historical distance and what is expressible in a certain epoch remain important considerations.
- 22 Zambrano’s appeal to the Reformation with regard to liberalism is not unique in the history of Spanish liberalism. Two important liberal influences of Zambrano – Ortega and Unamuno – would seek the following in their liberal

- conceptions between 1908 and 1910: "Se trataba para ambos de restaurar el liberalismo, recuperando las raíces originarias de la cultura liberal europea: el Renacimiento, la Reforma y la Ilustración" (Bundgård, *Compromiso* 131).
- 23 In terms of Zambrano's interpretations of liberalism and communism, she acknowledges that both share certain antecedents, yet she remains critical of a materialist theory of history (*Horizonte* 94-95). She deems communism to be a consequence of rationalism, "la reforma religiosa," and the French Revolution (94).
- 24 Moreno Sanz indicates that, besides critiquing liberalism, Zambrano's *Horizonte* evinces "cierta indefinición entre liberalismo (siempre renovado) y socialismo" ("Estudio" 118).
- 25 For example, in *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida observes the following: "If no dialectic of the State ever breaks with what it supercedes [*relève*] and from which it arises [*ce dont elle relève*] (the *life* of the family and civil society), if politics never reduces within itself this adherence to familial generation, if any republican motto almost always associates fraternity with equality and freedom, as for democracy, it is rarely determined in the absence of confraternity or brotherhood" (viii; bracketed phrases in original).
- 26 Zambrano states: "Es una política [el comunismo ruso] inspirada en la vida; en la que la vida predomina y aun aplasta al individuo" (*Horizonte* 61).

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