Laval théologique et philosophique

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Conrad R. Dietz

Volume 26, numéro 2, 1970

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020166ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1020166ar

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Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)
1703-8804 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Dietz, C. R. (1970). Ortega's Attempt to Restore the World. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, *26*(2), 131–146. https://doi.org/10.7202/1020166ar

ORTEGA'S ATTEMPT TO RESTORE THE WORLD

Conrad R. DIETZ

No matter how firmly convinced an individual may be about the permanence and independent existence of the external world, he still experiences a certain fascination while reading those modern philosophers who argue that the status of the external world is a pressing problem which must be discussed at the beginning of philosophy. Accompanying this fascination is the desire to know the reasons which can cause thoughtful men either to doubt or to deny the world affirmed by so many humans without the slightest hesitation. What line of argumentation can persuade a philosopher to refuse assent to one of the mind's most deep-seated convictions and certitudes ?

José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) must be numbered among those philosophers for whom the independent existence of the external world is a genuine problem.

> It is certain that the presumed external reality of the world is only a presumption ; that is to say, a reality in itself and independent of me is highly problematical. Therefore philosophy can not accept it. [1]

While adhering to this position he is nevertheless quick to concede that the difficulties about the external world raised by many idealist philosophers do not meet with ready acceptance by the ordinary mind. And yet, every philosopher deserving of the title must begin his investigations by acknowledging the problematical and doubtful existence of the world.

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[1] *¿ Qué es filosofía ?* in *Obras Completas de José Ortega y Gasset* (Madrid : Revista de Occidente, 1963-1966), VII, p. 400. All references to the writings of Ortega will be taken from this edition. The English translation is by Mildred Adams in *What Is Philosophy ?* (New York : W. W. Norton Co., 1964), p. 195.

Although agreeing with idealism's initial attitude towards the world, Ortega expresses deep dissatisfaction over the failure of modern philosophy to reassure men that their affirmation of the world is valid and correct. He argues that adoption of what he calls the idealist starting point need not in the final analysis deprive man of the external world wherein he believes he lives and works. Philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley and Hume would have discovered the world had they accurately analyzed the data with which they started.

Ortega's preoccupation with issues relating to idealism spanned a long period in his career and is incorporated in many of his writings. The present discussion will limit itself to only one facet of his studies, viz., his efforts to restore the world supposedly lost at the hands of idealism. More specifically, the discussion will concentrate upon a series of lectures he delivered in Madrid in 1929, but did not publish. After his death the editors of the *Revista de Occidente* combined his lecture notes with several magazine and newspaper articles to form the work entitled *¿ Qué es filosofía ?* which appeared in 1957.

Some use will also be made of Ortega's *La idea de principio en Leibniz y la evolución de la teoría deductiva,* published posthumously in 1958. This work contains a lengthy critique directed against Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy, helping to clarify why Ortega defends the starting point proposed by idealism.

As a necessary preliminary to the entire discussion, Ortega's usage of the terms "idealism" and "idealist" must be clarified, especially since these terms are commonly employed in reference to theories as varied as those of Berkeley, Kant, Fichte and Hegel. For Ortega, "idealist" is a synonym for "subjectivistic", and describes the tendency of modern philosophy to stress man's immanent activities as the only acceptable point of departure for philosophy. This means that philosophy does not begin with knowledge of things themselves as known by intelligence through the senses, but rather with the knowledge we have of our own internal states or thoughts. Here it might be well to observe that when Ortega uses the word "thought", he himself extends its meaning to embrace activities such as "seeing and hearing, imagining, conceiving of ideas, feeling, loving, hating, wishing or not wishing, having a toothache". [2]

Philosophy Is an Autonomous Science

That many modern philosophers do employ a subjectivistic approach is a fact easily verified, but their mode of procedure is not simply an historical phenomenon reflecting a common indebtedness to Descartes, the father of modern philosophy. According to Ortega, those who correctly understand the nature and challenge of philosophy will also understand that there is no other way in which it can begin. Ancient philosophers were wrong when they began by affirming the external world, and by accepting the value of sense knowledge along with the

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 368.

certainty of first intellectual principles. Their initial convictions were nothing more than unwarranted assumptions, disclosing a failure on their part to recognize that philosophy is a totally autonomous science which must renounce every conviction acquired before or outside philosophy. [3] In quest of a foundation which is certain and unassailable, the philosopher must reject every certitude, even those which are most common among men. The authentic philosopher must begin in absolute poverty, looking askance at the certainties with which the ordinary man, and even the philosopher himself, carry out their daily lives.

The principle of autonomy has important implications for understanding Ortega's defense of the idealist or subjectivistic starting point. Great benefit can be derived from examining how this principle affects several specific beliefs accepted by those who recognize no problem in affirming the external world.

The first conviction which must be sacrificed to the principle of autonomy is man's confidence in the worth of sense knowledge. Far too many philosophers have followed in the footsteps of Aristotle, convinced that sense knowledge should enjoy in speculative activity an acceptance comparable to that enjoyed in the affairs of daily life. Their naive acceptance of Aristotle's lead would be shaken if they knew the reasons underlying his "empiricism" and "sensualism". [4] The Greek tradition in which he was formed was not far removed from the primitive mind's fascination and absorption in the external world. Accompanying this cultural influence was Aristotle's personal interest in biological studies, a preoccupation centering around the corporeal and the sensible. Finally, all men spontaneously believe that the senses put them into direct contact with the external world, even though this belief is only one of many non-reasoned and unsubstantiated convictions dominating human conduct. Because Aristotle was too much a man of the people, he was incapable of challenging this deep-seated belief. His unjustified reliance upon the senses was later adopted by the scholastics, but finally met its deserved fate at the hands of Descartes, who insisted that man's instinctive and animal belief in the senses must be uprooted before truth can be acquired.

Besides relying upon the cognitive value of the senses, Aristotle also began philosophy by assenting to certain intellectual principles such as the principles of contradiction and the excluded middle. Ortega's loyalty to the principle of autonomy will not allow him to accept first principles, which he dismisses as arbitrary, unfounded presumptions needed for rational thought. He argues that Aristotle, desiring to avoid a *regressus ad infinitum* in demonstration, hit upon first principles as ultimate propositions having no need of proof. Indeed, the charge is levelled against Aristotle that he introduced these principles not because of their unquestionable truth, but because they were needed to demonstrate other truths. Ortega objects to the claim that first principles are self-evident. Because Aristotle needed them but could not offer a demonstration lest they lose their status as ultimate

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 335.

[4] *La idea de principio en Leibniz* in *Obras Completas,* VIII, p. 174.

propositions, he took refuge in the supposed ability of first principles to justify themselves. Unable to accept this, Ortega describes first principles as arbitrary, *a priori* axioms proposed, without justification, as valid for all alleged objects of experience. [5] He further objects that Aristotle's slavery to first principles had the same source as his slavery to the senses. He allowed himself to be swayed excessively by the convictions of ordinary men, who in their practical conduct are forced to live as if the principles of contradiction and the excluded middle were valid. Influenced by the precedent set by Aristotle, many philosophers have gratuitously accepted these principles. The authentic philosopher, however, is an intellectual hero who sets himself above the crowd, looking with suspicion at any principle having behind it the acceptance of the common man.

Closely related to Ortega's rejection of first principles is his objection to the traditional concept of being :

> You are invited to drop respect for the most venerable, persistent and entrenched concept which exists in our mental tradition : the concept of being. I announce a checkmate to being as Plato knew it, and Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant and even Descartes. Anyone who stays stubbornly tied to a traditional meaning of the phrase "to be", which is just what I intend to reform, can not understand what I am going to say. [6]

Once again, much is made of the reputed dichotomy found between what can be accepted in the speculative and in the practical order. In everyday activities the ordinary man affirms at least implicitly the independent existence of the objects he encounters and uses. The attitude of the more learned physical scientist is the same. The philosopher, however, going beyond this naive realism, can not affirm the existence of the objects supposedly confronting him. This is so because he recognizes that the alleged objects of experience do not fully explain or justify themselves. Beyond them must be something which completes and supports them, affording an explanation of why they exist.

Ortega's claim that objects do not fully explain themselves is somewhat puzzling. Perhaps some clarification can be obtained by comparing it with the findings advanced by a realist philosophy which affirms the existence of objects, even though admitting that the same objects are contingent. Faced with the same situation Ortega contends that the object is "not a being, but a pseudo-being, something which ought not to be". [7] In response to the possible retort that philosophy therefore begins in a vacuum and concerns itself with nothing, Ortega counters that speculative activity would never arise unless objects "in one sense or another" [8] had being, suggesting that "to be" has one signification for practical affairs and another for theoretical activity.

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[6] *¿ Qué es filosofía ? loc. cit.*, p. 394 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 186).

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 322.

[8] *Ibid.*

A second reason why Ortega rejects the traditional concept of being is his assertion that being is a naive belief of mankind, understanding "belief" in the specialized sense distinguishing it from an "idea". Because an idea is produced by the intellectual activity of an individual, it is a thought which can be accepted or rejected after sufficient examination and substantiation. A belief, on the other hand, is not arrived at through a rational or discursive process, but is a thought taken for granted and commonly received from the society into which a man is born. This distinction at first occasions no surprise because it is a commonplace that men subscribe to the customs and practices of a particular society without knowing the justifications behind their accepted modes of conduct. However, it must be noted that for Ortega the true significance of the term "belief" goes far beyond social customs and can only be appreciated by cataloguing some of the convictions to which the designation is applicable. A man who decides to go for a walk *believes* that outside his house is a street upon which he can walk. Similarly, a man finding himself on the tenth floor of a building *believes* that there are many stories beneath him supporting the floor upon which he stands. Although such beliefs suffice for life, philosophy must "stand consciously aside from vital beliefs". [9]

External World Can Not Be Affirmed

Although there are other convictions which Ortega argues must be set aside in order to comply with the principle of autonomy, those already cited should give adequate indication of the renunciations demanded. They should also help set the scene for Ortega's handling of the conviction with which this study is principally involved, viz., the permanent and independent existence of the external world. Naturally, a philosopher who attacks sense knowledge, first principles, and the concept of being, can also be expected to have some reservations about the world.

As philosophy begins its quest for "knowledge of the Universe, or of whatever there is", [10] the world of common sense and daily experience clamors for recognition as something that truly exists independently of the knowing subject. Before such recognition can be granted, the enduring, permanent existence of the world must be subjected to careful scrutiny. Inability to withstand the test will eventuate in Ortega's decision that the external world is a belief or supposition not to be admitted as a starting point for philosophy. At the same time, however, it should be noted that philosophy does not begin with an outright denial of the world, since such a view would also be a supposition. In short, the philosopher adopts a neutral position towards the world. However, since refusal to affirm the world is the position evoking most surprise, the basis for this attitude should be analysed.

For one claiming to reject philosophy's purported overemphasis on sense knowledge, Ortega attributes to the senses a surprising importance when he ex-

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 364.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.

amines the status of the world. Introducing the example of a garden to illustrate his case, he is willing to affirm the existence of the garden as long as its blossoms are seen and its fragrances smelled. The same garden appears to suffer annihilation when no longer present to the senses.

> Our eyelids, closing like the guillotine's knife, cut it from the world. Nothing of it remains, not a grain of earth, nor a petal, nor the indentation of a leaf. But if I open my eyes again, the garden with no less speed comes back into being ; like a transcendent dancer, it springs in a leap from non-being into being, and bearing no trace of its momentary death, sets itself courteously before me. The same thing happens with its fragrances, or its tactile qualities, if I manipulate the corresponding senses. [11]

Doubt arises when, as Ortega remarks, the garden "pretends to exist when I do not see it". [12] This last observation raises the question how it can be known that the garden pretends to exist while not being perceived. Is this simply the naive belief of the non-philosophical or practical mind ?

The permanence of the garden, however, it not the only questionable component in the experience. What assurance is there that it is a real garden, and not like those encountered in dreams or in hallucinations ? Attaching great importance to the perennial problem of differentiating the real from the imaginary world, Ortega argues that the real world and the dream world are not basically different in content. "Perhaps everything that surrounds me, the whole external world in which I live, is only one vast hallucination". [13]

By way of brief comment, Ortega is somewhat naive if he thinks that the problem of hallucinations casts suspicion upon all sense knowledge. How can he even introduce the possibility of hallucinations without admitting that there is an experience of the real world against which illusions can be compared ? Indeed, the real world is implied in the problem of hallucinations, just as truth is implied in the problem of error.

Ortega's attitude towards the whole world can now be summarized in terms of his attitude towards the garden. From a doubt centering around the enduring existence of the garden apart from being experienced, he advances a step further by questioning the ability of the knower to distinguish a so-called real garden from one found in the imagination. A similar doubt must be predicated of everything else supposedly comprising the world. Just like the garden, everything else is doubtful.

Primacy Assigned to Thought

The disclosure that everything is engulfed by doubt is not viewed by Ortega as a cause for scepticism or despair, but rather as a situation holding out great

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 363 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 140).

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 363.

promise. While the world may be doubtful, there can be no doubt about the reality of doubt. Why this is the case can be readily apprehended : "to doubt means that it *seems to me* that something is doubtful and problematical. For something to seem to me, and to think it, these are one and the same thing. Doubt is no more and no less than a thought". [14]

Although unable to affirm the reality and independence of the garden or anything else in the world, the philosopher can be certain that he doubts or thinks about any given object. The existence of thought *(cogitatio est)* thus becomes the starting point for philosophy. Immediately, however, there arises the complication that Ortega's imprecise terminology uses the word "thought" to designate seeing, hearing, imagining, conceiving of ideas, loving, hating, and other immanent activities. As a result, "thought" could mean the intellect's preoccupation with a concept, or it could mean the pleasurable sensation occasioned by the beauty of a garden, or it could mean the perception of a simple sense datum. The confusion is further compounded when synonyms are proposed by Ortega in the hope of clarifying the nature of thought. Terms such as "mind", "conscious state", "spirit" and "ego" are offered as equivalent expressions. [15]

The ostensible reason why Ortega feels justified in grouping together such varied activities as seeing, imagining, loving, etc., is the circumstance that they are all internal experiences not to be denied or doubted as long as they are immediately present and totally evident to the person who lives them. In spite of this common trait the criticism still stands that the nature of thought can only be obscured by applying this term indiscriminately to activities which are so different. Even though a philosopher may minimize their importance, sense knowledge and appetitive functions should be recognized as distinct from what is commonly designated as thought.

Realization of the many activities encompassed by thought must not be lost, especially when examining various passages wherein Ortega stresses those attributes which impart to thought its unique value and primacy.

> In order that a thought may exist, may have a being, it is enough that it be thought ; to think it is to make it, to give it being, and it exists only while and because I think it, make it, execute it, activate it. [16]

> Thought, which exists exclusively in taking account of itself, can not doubt its own existence ; if I think A, it is obvious that thinking about A must exist. Hence the first truth concerning what there is can be put this way — thought exists, *cogitatio est*. Thus we complete our earlier circle. All other realities may be illusory, but this — the illusion itself, the seeming this or that to myself, the thinking — this without any possible doubt does exist. [17]

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 366 *(What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 145).

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 394 *(What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 186).

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 395 *(What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 187).

> Thought exists in the measure and extent to which it is concerned with itself — it consists of taking account of itself, appearing to itself, reflecting on itself. It is not, then, mere quiet being, but reflection. [18]

In light of these texts, thought would be an activity which both fully explains itself and seems to feed upon itself. Because a cloud of doubt has previously cast suspicion upon the external world, thought need not imply communion with the real, nor submission to that which is. Indeed, no concession need be made at this time that thought bears any relationship to a transcendent or external object, nor need allowance be made for the possible dependence of thought upon sensation. Failure to acknowledge the possible contribution of the senses is consonant with a previously mentioned disparagement of sense knowledge, and is also a consequence of Ortega's acceptance of the complete Cartesian dichotomy between body and mind : "But the *cogitatio* has nothing to do with the body. For the moment, my body is only an idea held within my mind". [19] Thought is produced by the mind in supposed independence of the body, and is so totally under the control of, and present to, the subject that there is no hesitancy about accepting thought as truly existing.

For Ortega, the most striking quality of thought is summarized in the observation : "Of no other single thing is it enough to say that in order for it to exist, I have only to think it". [20] This phrase reveals its true significance when the claim is recalled that philosophy must seek out the reality which exists beyond all possible doubt, [21] and can accept only those truths proved and constructed by the philosopher himself. [22]

World Must and Can Be Restored

The enshrinement of thought as the incontestable reality sought by the philosopher recalls to mind Descartes' classic formulation of the Cogito. While claiming that *cogitatio est* is equivalent to the Cogito, Ortega repudiates any attempt at reasoning from the reality of thought to the existence of a *substantial* subject to whom thought is attributable. Whatever the subject or the self may be, it must not be explained in terms of the invalid, traditional notion of substance. This reservation is consistent with Ortega's dismissal of all talk about being and substance as an invention or naive belief of man. The self is not a substance,

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 394 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 186).

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 372.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] "The first thing we must do is to find what reality, among whatever there may be, is really undoubtedly existent, that is to say, what in the Universe is given to us." *Ibid.*, p. 393.

[22] "Philosophy is a science without suppositions. I understand by this a system of truths which has been constructed without admitting as groundwork any truth that is given as proven outside that system. So there is no philosophic admission which the philosopher does not have to forge with his own means. Philosophy is an intellectual law unto itself, it is self-contained." *Ibid.*, p. 335 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 101).

and of this Ortega is convinced. And yet, he is equally convinced that the great contribution and advance made by idealism is the discovery of the self. Ancient man, too preoccupied with the external world, only rarely achieved awareness of himself because his attention was habitually riveted upon the cosmos. Thanks to the doubts and suspicions generated by idealism, the external world has gradually receded into the background, forcing man to concentrate more and more upon the inner world of the self. Unfortunately, idealism did not stop there, but went on to say that the self exists *alone,* i.e., without the external world. For this reason idealism must be superseded.

> If idealism were to say no more than this — that thought, the subject, the self, exists — it would be saying something that, though incomplete, would be true, but it is not content with this. It adds that *only* thought, the subject, the self exists. This is false. If the subject exists, so does the object, inseparably and vice versa. [23]
> Insofar as is possible the self would like to overcome its solitude even at the cost of not being all-powerful ; what it wants now is to be a little less in order to live a little more — to have things about it which are different, other and different selves with whom to converse . . . [24]

For Ortega, the defense of idealism must be brought to a halt when the point is reached depriving man of the external world and of the much needed companionship of other selves. At no time, however, is Ortega willing to reexamine the validity of the idealist starting point on the possibility that it is theoretically or methodically unsound. Unswerving in his loyalty to subjectivism, he raises a voice of protest only when man is consigned to a self-made prison. Idealism need not result in such isolation, and Ortega is confident that he can restore the external world without abandoning his serious reservations about sense knowledge, and while still holding fast to his objections against the traditional teachings about being and first intellectual principles.

The philosopher can begin with no conviction other than *cogitatio est,* since this alone has withstood the full force of doubt and is totally under the control of the knowing subject. As a result, restoration of the world can only be achieved through analysis of thought. Fortunately, the ambiguity previously noted in the word "thought" is dispelled as it becomes obvious that the human activity to be analyzed is sense knowledge, specifically knowledge of the theatre in which Ortega gave his lectures on idealism. Even though the independent existence of the theatre can not be affirmed at the outset, there can be no doubt that something is being experienced, and the problem as posed by Ortega is the location of the theatre. Serious objections can be raised to introducing a spatial metaphor into the study of knowledge, but still this is the approach to be followed. In response to the query about its location, some idealists might insist that since the subject can

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 409 (*What Is Philosophy ?,* p. 208).
[24] *Ibid.,* p. 390. (*What Is Philosophy ?,* p. 180).

not go outside himself to verify the existence of an object, the only alternative is to locate the theatre in the subject as a "mental content".

The phrase "mental content" becomes the pivotal point for the entire discussion as arguments are advanced by Ortega to show that such a phrase is devoid of intelligibility. Because the theatre has dimensions, and contains chairs, curtains and other appointments, any attempt to locate the theatre physically in the knowing subject results in the absurdity that the subject is the height, width, color and other attributes of the theatre.

Naturally, the idealist himself may be well aware of this absurdity, seeking perhaps to clarify his position by suggesting that the subject does not physically house the theatre, but has only an image or a representation of it. Ortega, however, is totally unwilling to become embroiled in any form of representationism or indirect realism wherein the knowing subject has direct contact only with an image, and then reasons or infers to the existence in the external world of an object corresponding to the subjective datum. A correct analysis of the data of experience will not countenance any interpretation denying that the theatre itself is the object of knowledge. [25]

Since the theatre is neither a physical content of the subject, nor an image or representation, it can not be said to exist in the knower : "The theatre, the external reality, always remains outside me, it is not within me". [26] Without attempting to explain the mechanics or process of knowledge and without discussing the problem of "presence", Ortega dwells upon the alterity of the object and its location outside the subject.

> The relationship between thinking and the objects of that thinking can not be, as the idealist pretended, a matter of having them within me, as though they were ingredients of me ; on the contrary, it is a matter of my finding them different from and outside myself. So it is false to think that the conscious self is closed, that it recognizes only itself, only what it has within. [27]
>
> The tragedy of idealism stems from the fact that having transmuted the world as an alchemist might, into "subject", into the content of subject, it enclosed this subject within itself ; then there was no way of explaining clearly how, if this theatre is only my image and a piece of me, it appears to be so completely different from me [28].

Do these admissions pave the way to affirming the absolute, independent existence of the theatre, and of the entire world ? No, because such a conclusion would be a retrogression to the naive realism of primitive and ancient man. Philosophy must avoid this error along with the accompanying notions about being and substance. Even though the external world is not a content of the subject, it can not be said to exist independently of the subject.

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[25] "This theatre and I confront one another with no intermediary between us . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 402.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 401.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 409 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 208).

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 403 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 200).

There is a third possibility, involving a relationship or union between the subject and the world, a situation in which the world does not exist without a subject and the subject is never found without a world. The introduction of this third possibility is the cause of much difficulty in understanding the outcome of Ortega's efforts to supersede idealism. For him, the world is definitely *other*, and not a content of the knowing subject. At the same time the world and the subject are *immediate* to each other, as well as *inseparable* and *together*. This relationship between the self and the world becomes even more baffling when it is couched in language serving only to intensify the mystery.

> And as philosophy aspires to be composed only of indisputable facts, one need only take things as they are and say : the external world does not exist except in my thinking of it, but the external world is not my thought ; I am neither the theatre nor the world, I am confronting this theatre, I am linked with the world, together we are the world and I. [29]

Just as there was ambiguity and equivocation in using the word "thought", so now there emerges a comparable confusion in the use of words such as "confronting" and "linked". At times the words clearly indicate a noetic activity. At other times contact with the world goes beyond mere cognition, referring to activities involving the will, the emotions and even physical labor. The ease with which cognitional and non-cognitional activities are classified together gives rise to the criticism that extrinsic factors are being improperly used to solve an epistemological-metaphysical problem. Sometimes the reality of the world is discussed strictly in terms of knowledge ; at other times the affirmation of the world is made to depend upon activities that are not purely cognitive. Even if knowledge is in some way implied in these other activities, they are still not exclusively noetic.

Ortega's findings thus far can be summarized. The external world grasped by knowledge can not be identified with, or situated in, the subject because this same world presents itself as totally distinct and different. Both characteristics are ignored by idealism when it makes man swallow the world. At the same time, the world depends upon the subject since the world can properly be said to exist only to the extent that it appears to the subject. Any attempt to introduce a substance or reality behind that appearance is both invalid and unnecessary. Moreover, besides the existence of the world depending upon the subject, the subject must also be said to depend upon the world. The subject discovers himself while thinking about objects, or while in some way preoccupied with them. There is consequently a mutual dependence and relationship, signifying that the self is always with a world and the world always with a self. In this formula is found the escape from the loneliness too often generated by idealism. [30]

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[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 401-402 *(What Is Philosophy ?*, pp. 197-198).

[30] "In short, on searching carefully for the basic data of the Universe — which undoubtedly exist in the Universe — and on exaggerating the factor of doubt, I find that there is one primary and fundamental fact which carries its own assurance. This fact is the joint existence of a self, a subjectivity, and of its world. The one does not exist without the other." *Ibid.*, p. 403 *(What Is Philosophy ?*, pp. 199-200).

Without further discussion Ortega declares that he has established that the external world is not an illusion or an hallucination, i.e., it is not a subjective world. However, this assertion can be challenged as premature because it leaves unanswered the problem of distinguishing the real from the imaginary world. What differences can be noted between the real world and that encountered in dreams and abnormal states ? Since the criterion has been adopted that only those things "exist" which are present to the subject, the imaginary world could be put on an equal footing with the real world. Since he attaches such great importance to the problem of the real versus the imaginary world, Ortega should discuss the problem in this specific context.

A New Starting Point of Philosophy

The discovery that the subject is always found with a world distinct and different from itself is proposed not only as a purported escape from idealism, but also as the much sought after datum with which philosophy begins.

> We need, then, to correct philosophy's point of departure. The basic datum of the Universe is not simply that either thought exists or I, the thinker, exist, but that if thought exists, *ipso facto,* I who think and the world about which I think also exist ; the one exists with the other, having no possible separation between them. [31]

This new situation is termed "my life", the indubitable reality to which philosophy assents as it begins its task. Ancient philosophy accepted the external world as beyond question, while modern philosophy has accentuated the subject as the reality beyond all dispute. Both views are surpassed (but also conserved) by proposing life as the reality that includes both the world and the subject.

Of great significance is the manner in which Ortega depicts the world and the self which constitute "my life". Alluding to the influence of Heidegger upon his own thought, Ortega describes what he means by the world :

> The world in which we find ourselves living is composed of some things which are agreeable and others which are disagreeable, of the atrocious and the benevolent, the pleasant and the perilous ; the important thing is not whether things are or are not bodies, but that they affect us, caress us, threaten us and torment us. Originally, what we call a body is only something that either resists us and obstructs us, or upholds us and sustains us ; therefore it is something either favorable or unfavorable. *Sensu stricto,* the world is that which affects us. [32]

Emphasis is placed quite clearly on the meaning or value that an object has for a subject. In this way the judgment that the object exists is either ignored, or made completely subordinate to the value judgment.

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 402 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 199).

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 416 (*What Is Philosophy ?*, p. 218).

When the nature of the subject is discussed, activity and the possibility for activity replace traditional teaching about the self as a substantial subject. Furthermore, much is made of the future into which man is constantly projecting himself by his activities. And yet, it is difficult to understand how there can be a future for a subject which is not substantial, and therefore deprived of the permanence and duration needed for a true self-identity and for continuity.

New Concept of Being

"My life", besides promising an escape from the unwanted effects of idealism and also providing the point of departure for philosophy, furnishes the new concept of being promised by Ortega. Traditional thought explains being as an absolute value to which only non-being is opposed. Everything which exists can be signified or represented by the transcendental concept of being. At the same time, being denotes that which exists in complete independence of finite thought. Thought does not produce or make the object which is known, since knowledge is a submission to being and a communion with the real. Technical language would designate this second aspect as the priority of being over cognition, i.e., the knower knows a being because the being exists, the being does not exist because it is known.

Ortega's use of terms such as *existence, being* and *real* must be weighed against the background of the traditional concept of being in order to ascertain what being means for him. Unfortunately, his equivocal usage allows being to signify sometimes *existence,* sometimes *activity,* and at other times *utility* or *value.*

The problems to be faced present themselves in a typical declaration such as "I exist for the world and the world exists for me. If there were nothing to be seen, thought about, and imagined, I would not see, think, or imagine ; that is to say, I would not exist." [33] The declaration that the existence of the subject depends upon objects ("the world exists for me") is consistent with rejecting the substantial nature of the self, and reducing the subject to nothing more than the sum total of its activities. To be is to be active, and the world furnishes the objects towards which man's activities can be directed.

Of greater interest is the ontological status of the objects needed for human activity. The being of these objects apparently depends upon the subject, a circumstance implied by insisting that "I exist for the world". What does the subject do for the world ? Because it has been conceded that the self needs the world, does this mean that the subject in some way makes or posits the world in order to satisfy its own needs ? In short, does Ortega unwittingly entrap himself in some form of Fichtean ethical idealism ? Although their interpretation seems opposed to Fichte's intentions, some critics suggest that Fichte's subjective idealism means

[33] *Ibid.,* p. 403 *(What Is Philosophy ?,* p. 199).

that the finite subject unknowingly posits in consciousness objects intended to serve as obstacles so that self-consciousness might be awakened and self-realization achieved through moral activity.

Even though the influence of Fichte is quite obvious in his philosophy, Ortega does not teach that the object is produced by the subject. Is not the principal motive for superseding idealism the desire to restore a world other than, and different from, the subject ? Because of this, no quarter was shown to those philosophers who reduce the object to a "mental content" or to a representation in consciousness. "The theatre, the external reality, always remains outside me, it is not within me." [34] And yet, the dependence of the world upon the subject is still clearly affirmed by Ortega : "And generalizing, we will say : the world is not a reality subsisting in itself and independent of me — it is what it is *for* me, and for the moment it is nothing more." [35]

Some light is cast upon the mystery of how the world depends upon the subject when in various passages it becomes clear that the object does not receive existence, but *meaning* and *value* whenever a subject directs its attention towards the object. In one outstanding passage, Ortega details his new concept of being with relation to the act of rolling a cigarette.

> In itself and apart from my activity, the cigarette has no primary being ; this was the ancient error. The cigarette is what I manipulate in making it, and when I have finished my activity and the object of my rolling has ceased to be, it is converted into another object — it is that which someone must light and must then smoke. Its true being is reduced to what it represents as the object of my occupation. [36]

Since it is denied that the cigarette apart from human preoccupation has any "primary being", would it not seem to follow that the same cigarette loses its being as soon as it ceases to be an object for human activity ? Such, however, is not the case, and Ortega further complicates an already confused theory of being by allowing that the traditional concept of being becomes applicable to the cigarette when the subject no longer attends to it. When no longer actually serviceable or functional, the cigarette is set aside with the possibility that a later time will again bring it within the orbit of the subject's life. During the time it is set aside and no longer "lived" by the subject, the cigarette or any other object can be studied or contemplated, i.e., man can theorize about it. Theory looks upon the object as having a true self, recognizing in the object an independence that comes to the fore when all ties with human activity are severed. For Ortega, the term "being" consequently has two significations, a primary one, synonymous with meaning or value and always requiring a relation to a subject, and a secondary one, understood in the traditional sense of existence.

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 401.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 402.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 428 *(What Is Philosophy ?,* p. 237).

Some General Criticisms

Because Ortega's efforts to restore the external world have been the central issue in this discussion, the concluding observations will also concentrate upon those efforts. Naturally, this procedure implies no attempt to minimize the more fundamental problems in Ortega's writings, e.g., his disdain for sense knowledge, and his repudiation of first intellectual principles and the concept of being. Let it simply be remarked that analysis shows that in actual practice he does rely upon the senses and does assume the validity of first principles, revealing thereby that his verbal attacks against Aristotle and traditional philosophy are contradicted by his own procedures. In spite of his staunch advocacy of the principle of autonomy he does not begin philosophy in absolute poverty, and his own inconsistency is a telling argument against the possibility of such a project.

In relation to the reputed restoration of the world, the first problem area is Ortega's contention that he begins by adopting the idealist starting point wherein the subject knows only himself and his own immanent activities. It seems unlikely that his starting point is in keeping with that of idealism, in spite of the many idealist premises he espouses. True, the catalogue of those premises is impressive : philosophy can not begin with an affirmation of the world ; the senses are untrustworthy ; the philosopher himself must prove or construct the truths to which he assents ; the real world is a naive belief of the common man ; thought is the one indubitable reality.

And yet, when the experience is described and analyzed whereby the world is restored, these premises seem to have exerted little, if any, influence. The consciousness subjected to analysis does not reveal their impact, and actually seems no different from the consciousness of the non-philosopher who, having never heard of these objections, affirms the existence of the world. Ortega appeals to the members of a theatre audience who are expected to acknowledge without any hesitation that the theatre they see is neither a physical content nor mere representation found in consciousness. Every possibility of any type of indirect realism or representationism is ruled out by insisting that the theatre itself is the object perceived. Unfortunately, Ortega never adequately acknowledges the contributions of the senses and his own dependence upon the data they supply, since he much prefers to use the term *cogitatio*. However, this term should not mislead anyone into thinking that some special mode of knowledge is being employed. On the contrary, it can be argued that he discovers the world in the same way as realist philosophers do, even though he belittles the senses and fails to show their relationship to the intellect's affirmation of existence.

The second problem area in Ortega's escape from the undesirable consequences of idealism is his questionable claim that the world he restores is one in which philosophy can discard the outmoded concept of being and the category of substance. He attaches great importance to the discovery that human consciousness experiences an objective pole which is other than, or distinct from, the knowing

self. Can this position be adopted without affirming that the objective pole *exists ?* In the specific example of the theatre, the objective pole is described as possessing particular quantitative and qualitative attributes. Because the theatre imposes itself as *other, distinct, different, quantified* and *qualified,* the knowing subject is obliged to affirm these data. However, affirmation of these attributes is impossible without affirming at the same time that *they exist.* Refusal to give at least implicit expression to this judgment of existence would reduce these attributes to non-being, rendering the entire experience an impossibility. Perhaps these attributes do not belong to a transcendent object which exists independently of the subject. At the moment this is not the point at issue. The only demand made upon the subject is the admission "the attributes exist". Metaphysics must ultimately answer questions about the continued existence of objects when they are no longer experienced or found in consciousness.

The final problem area centers around the supposed dependence of the world upon the knowing subject, a situation best exemplified by Ortega's declaration that "the external world does not exist except in my thinking of it". As already remarked, a probable solution to this difficulty derives from an ambiguous usage of the term "being", which is used to denote meaning and value, as well as existence. In terms of meaning and value, the world can be said to depend upon the subject, but not to the extent that the subject gives the act of existence to the world.