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Author(s): A. MacC. Armstrong

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF ORTEGA Y GASSET

Ἐὰν μὴ ἔλπηται ἀνέλπιστον οὐκ
 ἐξευρήσει ἀνεξερεύνητον ἔδν καὶ
 ἄπορον.

HERACLITUS, fr. 18.

It is curious that while this country has a not unmerited reputation for moral philosophy, it has produced no serious philosophical study of sport, although not only is sport a department of life in which we pride ourselves on having been unrivalled, but also it was, and has not wholly ceased to be, a keen reproach for a man or his conduct to be styled 'unsporting'. Yet our professional moralists have not accorded the theme the recognition that for a century it has received in popular literature, and it has been a Spanish professor of philosophy, Don José Ortega y Gasset, born in Madrid in 1883, who has appreciated and elucidated its significance.

The importance which Ortega attaches to sport springs from its being the plainest example, which can therefore stand as a symbol, of disinterested action, i.e. action carried out not for the sake of anything to result from it but for the sheer joy of doing it. As against the nineteenth century utilitarian view which regarded all manifestations of life, the forms and movements of animals and the spirit and actions of men, as a response to inescapable demands imposed by the environment, Ortega was convinced by biological and historical studies that the original and primary activity of life was a free expansion of a pre-existent energy. According to the conclusions of more recent biology, it is not the necessity or advantage of sight for the struggle for life in face of the environment which produces some species provided with eyes; such a species actually appears suddenly and proceeds to modify its environment by creating its visible aspect. The eye is not produced because it is needed, but because it makes its appearance it can be employed as a useful instrument. What is useful is merely secondary and derivative, being selected from the repertory of disinterested and superfluous actions, though of course it may give rise to new creations of the originative capacity. Whereas in physics there are causes, in biology there are stimuli, the difference being that a cause produces no more than an effect proportionate to it. When one billiard ball hits another, the impelling force which it transmits is in principle equal to the force which it possessed itself. On the other hand, when a thoroughbred receives the slightest prick of the spur, it gives a magnificent spring forward which is generously disproportionate to the impulsion of the spur. The spur is not a cause but a stimulus (*incitación*), and the thoroughbred's responding to an external impulsion is much more a case of its letting itself go.

The main instance of action undertaken not for its own sake but to

satisfy some pressing need imposed from without is work, and the clearest instance of action undertaken for its own sake is sport, which differs from a pure game because of the element of risk, if only the risk of over-fatigue. Scientific and artistic creation, political and moral heroism and religious saintliness are all the sublime results of sport (*Obras*¹ pp. 470 ; 629-33 ; 874). In this way, by exhibiting action which conduces to our interests as a selection from action in which we are interested, Ortega clears the obstacles which bring down the Utilitarians, who are embarrassed by the occurrence of disinterested action, and also Kant and the Deontologists, who simply sever duty from interest as though there were no difference between being disinterested and being uninterested, or as though in cases of a clash between duty and interest it were wholly inappropriate to speak of a choice between the two.

Ortega illuminates even the origin of the State by deriving it not from some admittedly unhistorical recognition by primitive men of the advantage of joining together, but from the association of young men who band together for sport. It is the club of the young men which produces the things actually found both among primitive peoples to-day and in the early history of Greece and Rome, viz. exogamy, war, authoritarian organization, discipline, law, cultural association, the festival of masked dances or carnival, and the secret society (pp. 634-43). Who brings these societies into being ? Primitive legends of the origins of peoples and tribes attribute their foundation to certain heroic figures endowed with prodigious capacities. This is not the consequence of posterior idealization of their characters by later generations, for unless these men had really been ideals or patterns, capable of arousing enthusiasm, they would never have succeeded in bringing the society into being.

Any society, from the humblest to a great nation, is an organized human mass, with a structure given to it by a minority of select individuals. The Christian Church is constituted in the last resort by Christ and his followers. The very word *society* derives from the Latin root *seq* = *follow*,² and the matter is obvious in the simplest form of society, in conversation. In a group of half a dozen people talking together, the undifferentiated mass of speakers is soon articulated into two parts, one of which directs the other in the conversation, giving more than it receives. Otherwise, if the inferior part refuses to be directed and influenced by the superior, conversation becomes impossible. It is futile to discuss whether a society ought to be aristocratic, though the criterion of selecting the aristocracy is open to question. 'Where there is not a minority acting on a collective mass and a mass capable of accepting the influence of a minority, there is no society or it comes very near not being one' (pp. 407 ; 800 sq.).

Hence a nation rises and falls with the rise and fall of its aristocracy.

¹Where not otherwise stated, references are to the pages of the two volumes of collected works : *Obras de José Ortega y Gasset*, tercera edición, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 1943.

²Ortega has Vico's gift of extracting from words the history preserved in them.

A nation grows not by an expansion of some original nucleus, but by incorporating other elements. A sheer extension of boundaries produces no lasting organization. Every lasting organization like Rome proceeded by synoecism or incorporation, not by swallowing up other entities but by including both the others and itself in a higher unity. Incorporation consists in bringing together into a new whole social groups which previously were independent wholes, and conversely disintegration implies that the component parts begin to live as separate wholes.

How is incorporation achieved? To command is not simply to compel or simply to persuade, but an exquisite mixture of both. Force is required to prevent chaos, but in every genuine incorporation it has an adjectival character, and the substantial power which impels and nourishes the process is a national dogma, an exciting project of life together. The groups which make up a state live together not because they exist side by side, but in order to do something together. Thus it was Castile which brought Spain together, when Spain was an ideal to be realized and not an already existent entity, by inventing grand enterprises and placing itself at the service of lofty legal, moral and religious ideas. In this way it overcame its own *particularism* and invited the other peoples of the Peninsula to join in a gigantic project of life together. When in the time of Philip III the Castilian nobles became suspicious, narrow-minded and no longer interested in other regions, they unmade Spain just as they had made it. Gradually the overseas possessions fell away, until in the present century separatism affected the Peninsula itself. The Basques' and Catalans' complaints of being oppressed, though certainly unjustified, sprang from a genuine feeling that they no longer counted.

Particularism implies the division into water-tight compartments of groups that do not reckon with the ideas of the rest or even have any curiosity about them. It is even worse when particularism affects not only regions but also social groups like the bourgeoisie, the army and the proletariat, for the different regions can at a pinch live in separation from each other, whereas social classes are from their nature interconnected. From particularism flows a propensity to direct action, in contempt of the public institutions which exist for the sake of bringing different individuals and groups into contact with each other.

Epochs of decadence are those in which the governing minority has lost the good qualities which occasioned its rise. The masses rightly rebel against an ineffective and corrupt aristocracy, but generalizing their objection to that particular aristocracy, they attempt to eliminate the possibility of any such superior minority and feel rancour against anyone who actually is outstanding. This is not a matter of politics alone, for the field of politics comprises only the surface of society, and political sickness does not involve the sickness of the whole national body, as is patent from the example of the U.S.A., which made gigantic advances despite the immorality of its political life. Nor does this rebellion against any aristocracy concern only the labouring classes, for it affects the technical experts outside

their special subject, and indeed the decay begins among the upper classes, who first refuse to follow and be taught by any outstanding minority. This rebellion is not a genuine rebellion, for 'the only genuine rebellion is creation—a rebellion against nothing' (p. 1354), but there is no hope of overcoming *aristophobia* by reasoning, just because the masses refuse to be taught. Only by suffering can they learn that things are more complicated than they suppose and that it is their mission not to rule but to follow. When this frame of mind is reached, a new aristocracy is usually formed.

To begin with, however, the rebellion of the masses leads to historical spinelessness, the extreme case of which is seen in peoples without an aristocracy, peoples of peasants, fellahin or mujiks. People of this sort do not participate in great historic struggles; they spend their time in sowing and reaping and tasks of that nature, 'prisoners in the unvarying cycle of their vegetative destiny' (p. 823). There is an instructive difference between the colonization of S. America, which was a popular movement, and the colonization of N. America, which was carried out by select minorities, either powerful commercial interests or a select group seeking lands where they might serve God better. The Spanish *people* populated and cultivated their new lands, but they could not give to the nations they engendered what they did not possess themselves, a superior discipline, a lively culture, and a progressive civilization (p. 822).

The unity of a nation is dynamic, not static, and its strength derives from the strength of the units previously independent. Owing to the weakness of feudalism in their country the Spaniards attained a unified system sooner than the English and the French and so got ahead of them, but they fell away equally quickly. The weakness of their nobility was a misfortune. Indeed if they had had the same sort of vigorous nobility as in England and France, they would probably not have taken eight centuries to win back the Peninsula from the Moors but would have effected a real Reconquest, 'as elsewhere there were the Crusades, marvellous examples of vital exuberance, of superabundant energy, of sublime historic sportsmanship' (p. 819).

The sporting character of human existence which Ortega emphasises in every branch of human conduct entails a certain utopianism. He distinguishes between the bad utopianism which consists in supposing that what is desirable is possible and indeed quite easy just because it is desirable, and the good utopianism which means reckoning with nature, seeing things in their crude reality, and then opposing nature and gaily endeavouring to reform it so as to realize what is impossible of achievement. The good utopian recognizes that what is desirable, such as understanding someone, is very difficult and can only be achieved approximately, but that it is possible to approximate more or less closely. Human existence consists of endeavour which finds its fulfilment in itself and not in its result, so that universal history displays man's inexhaustible capacity for inventing unrealizable projects. In the endeavour to achieve these he does not achieve what he set out to achieve, but he does succeed in creating countless things that nature could never produce by itself (pp. 1367 ff.).

This recognition of the sporting character of human life involves the negation of the transcendence or extraneousness of value to human life. Ortega persistently satirizes what he styles cultural bigotry (*beatería de la cultura*), bigotry being neither worship nor enthusiasm but an excess of both. The cultural bigot forgets that culture has been produced for the sake of human life and would have it as an end to be served by life. Equally Ortega opposes the conception of life as pure natural existence, brute impulse and appetite. In an essay of 1909, he dealt sarcastically with the kind of sincerity championed by Miguel de Unamuno. Sincerity, he then remarked, seems to consist in everyone's having to say what he thinks, in the avoidance of all conventionality, whether it be called logic, ethics, aesthetics or good breeding. Sincerity is the demand of people who feel themselves weak and cannot thrive in austere surroundings, among firm and adamant standards. 'When anyone tells me that he is going to be sincere with me, I always expect either that he is going to relate some personal incident which is interesting only to him, or else that he is going to offer me some piece of rudeness. All the cynic philosophers have made their entry into society draped in the rags of frankness. What should we be without conventionalities? What is culture without some conventionality? The sincere, the spontaneous in man is unquestionably the gorilla. The rest, that which transcends and overcomes the gorilla, is the reflective, the conventional, the artificial'. The logical law, the moral rule, the aesthetic ideal, all these standards are conventions, not corresponding to any material reality. They are not things but condensations of spirit, the superfluous gratuity with which we enrich nature's avarice. As soon as we are sincere, the gorilla in us rises and reclaims its rights: only by dint of fictions and phantasmagorias do we keep it chained (*Mocedades* pp. 51-3).³

The importance of this passage as heralding the later developments of Ortega's thought is rightly emphasised by a Mexican Jesuit, José Sánchez Villaseñor, in his book *Ortega y Gasset, Existentialist* (Am. tr. Joseph Small, S.J. pp. 29 sqq.). Admittedly, by representing as Ortega's own views what Ortega propounds as the outcome of Unamuno's false standpoint of sincerity, viz. that the Muse is only the exciting name given by the poets to their cerebral congestions, that Virtue is reduced to a particular class of muscular inhibitions, and that Truth is a normal hallucination, and by glossing Ortega's championed conventionalities as mere conventions, values in which no credence is placed, Father Sánchez is out to build up his indictment of Ortega as a bitter sceptic, a pessimist, a dilettante, an existentialist, in short, as tainted with a multitude of hideous errors flowing from the Reformation. Seriously, however, Ortega's vindication of conventionality is important because it involves the reversal of the old Greek preference of what exists by nature (*φύσει*) and is accordingly uniform and invariable, like fire which burns the same in the East as in the West and the stone which always falls to the ground however often thrown up, to what exists

³*Mocedades* (i.e. Juvenilia) segunda edición, Espasa-Calpe, Argentina.

by convention or institution (*νόμος, θέσει*) and being the product of human effort varies from place to place and generation to generation. So strong was this preference that the Sophists' attribution of morality to the sphere of institution left Socrates and his successors no remedy but to attempt to transfer morality to the sphere of nature, either by arguing that morality was the only means of attaining happiness, understood as the end at which every human being aimed directly or indirectly in every action, or else by claiming the existence of an unalterable natural law as the pattern and ground of human laws and morals. This preference is discarded in the New Testament, e.g. Mk. 3,35 'For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother', and I Jn. 5,1 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God'. The Greek Fathers, however, when considering whether Jesus was the Son of God *φύσει* (*by nature*) or *θέσει* (*by institution*, in this context—as in classical Greek—*by adoption*) decided for the former alternative. Indeed the Greek preference is tempting so long as man is conceived as having a nature, i.e. a fixed structure underlying all the vicissitudes of his history.

Ortega, far from seeking to derive human values from nature, endorses the Christian doctrine that by nature man is an evil beast. The mission of man, that which gives meaning to his endeavours, is to struggle against nature (pp. 1368 sq.). The term mission (*misión*) is Ortega's favourite ethical term. Its theological associations could have no terrors for him, in view of his avowed theism (pp. 529-31), and it has the merit of bringing out straight away that an obligation concerns an individual in a concrete situation. A mission, Ortega himself explains, is what a man has to do in his life. This necessity of having to do something is, however, a strange condition quite unlike the necessity by which a stone gravitates towards the centre of the earth. The stone cannot help falling, but a man can quite well not do what he has to do. In the second case 'the necessity is clean contrary to any sort of compulsion, it is an invitation. Could there be anything more courtly? Man sees himself invited to give his assent to what is necessary'. Now this privilege of man in having proposed to him, and not imposed on him, what he has to do implies that in every moment of his life he encounters different possibilities of action and being, that he has himself to decide on one of them and that it is his sole responsibility. Whereas other entities have a being that is given to them ready-made and are what they are straight away, human life has the character of the realization of an imperative. It rests in our hands to will to realize it or not, to be faithful or unfaithful to our vocation, the call to the type of life which most appeals to us when we picture different types in our imagination. But what we truly have to do does not rest with us, it is inexorably proposed. In this connection Ortega draws attention to the Latin word for duty, *officium*. The word comes from *ob* and *facere*, the preposition *ob* meaning as usual to go out to meet something readily, in this case an action. *Officium* is doing without hesitation or delay what is due, the task that presents itself as admitting of no excuse. Every human life has a mission.

A mission is the consciousness that every man has of his wholly genuine being which he is called to realize. Hence just as there is no mission without a man, so without a mission, there is no man (pp. 1300-05).

What, then, is a man? A man is not his body, which he finds and has to live with whether it be healthy or not. Nor is he even his mind, which again he finds and has to use in order to live; he is not his memory, retentive or poor, nor his will, firm or weak, nor his intelligence, keen or dull. A man's life is nothing but the effort to realize a definite programme or project of existence, and his self is this imaginary programme, not a thing, as body and mind are, but a programme as such, something that does not yet exist but aspires to be. This programme is not a plan or idea conceived by a man and freely chosen. It is prior to all the ideas formed by his intelligence and to all the decisions of his will (p. 1399).

Human life is accordingly self-fabrication (*autofabricarse*), not a state of being but a task, the remoulding of nature to realize a human programme. Man has no fixed structure because he makes himself what he is. History is a dialectic in which man invents a programme of life to give an answer to the difficulties put to him by his surroundings, finds by experience its shortcomings, both its inadequacy to meet the original difficulties and its production of fresh ones, and then draws up a new programme in the light both of his surroundings and of his experience with the former programme.⁴ This view of history comprehends two insights constantly recurring in Ortega's works, the first, our indebtedness to past traditions which enable us to avoid starting from scratch, and the second, the need for continual effort and inventiveness on our part to escape not only the mummification familiar as Byzantinism or mandarinism, but even a total reversion to the animal stage from which, with occasional and partial retrogressions, we have managed to rise.

Nature is remoulded through technique. Technique is the invention and execution of the means of satisfying human necessities in the world, which itself offers both facilities and difficulties, such as distance which is a help when it is between a man and his foes and a hindrance when it is between him and his food. Human necessities are not the same as the prerequisites of survival, for the latter are merely hypothetical necessities, depending on the wish to survive. A necessity in human life is that without which a man does not choose to live, something superfluous for the mere protraction of existence. In fact it is a matter of dispute whether fire was first used to keep away the cold or to produce an intoxicating stupor, and whether the hunting bow preceded the musical bow. The programme of life comprising such human necessities is pre-technical, the invention par excellence.

Ortega expects to be confronted with the objection that this conception of a programme of life is mystical and abstract. He counters this objection by mentioning some actual programmes which have been made concrete

⁴ 'History as a System' *passim* in *Philosophy and History*—Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer, ed. R. Klibansky and H. J. Paton, pp. 283-322.

in history : the Bodhisattva, the athletic man of the sixth century Greek aristocracy, the good republican of early Rome and the Stoic of the Empire, the medieval ascetic, the sixteenth century Spanish *hidalgo*, the seventeenth century French *homme de bonne compagnie*, the German *schöne Seele* of the end of the eighteenth century, the *Dichter und Denker* of the beginning of the nineteenth, and the English gentleman of 1850.

It is worth dwelling on Ortega's elucidation of the ideal of the English gentleman (although it was written in 1933, when already he feared the rapid disappearance of the type from Britain) because, as he observes himself, it shows in striking form the extranatural character of a programme of life. To be a gentleman is to apply to the serious things of life the kind of behaviour usually adopted in the brief moments in which a man ceases to be oppressed with the cares and serious concerns of life and devotes himself to a game. The ideal is that a man should be in the unavoidable struggle with his environment what he is in the unreal and purely invented recess of his games and sports. A game is a luxury of life and presupposes a mastery over the lower zones of existence sufficient to allow an ample margin of calm and serenity instead of the flurry and frantic haste of a life in which everything is a terrible problem. In a game a man permits himself the luxury of fair play, of being just, of defending his own rights while respecting other peoples', and of refraining from lies. To lie is to falsify the game, and so not to play it. A game is an effort, but because it is not one imposed by circumstances it is self-subsistent and free from the anxiety which injects into work the necessity of attaining its aim at any cost.

This accounts for the manners of the gentleman, his spirit of justice, his truthfulness, his complete control over himself based on his previous control over his surroundings, his clear consciousness of his rights at others' hands and of theirs at his, i.e. of his duties. Deceit has no meaning for him. What he does, he has to do well without concerning himself further. With the English industrial product similarly everything is good, solid and finished, both the materials and the workmanship. It is not made to be sold regardless of what it is, and there is little advertisement. In politics again there are no phrases or shams, no intolerance, and few laws. A people of gentlemen do not need a constitution ; hence strictly England got on very well without one. Although this ideal was invented by the upper classes, it was possible for the middle and even the lower classes to share it in some measure, and this will always remain one of the marvels of history.

In contrast to the Bodhisattva, who aspires to live as little as he can and accordingly devises the techniques of insensibility, catalepsy, concentration, etc., the gentleman aspires to live intensely in this world, to centre on himself and nourish himself with a sense of independence of everything. In heaven it will be meaningless to be a gentleman, for there existence itself will as a matter of fact be the delight of a game, and what the gentleman aspires to be is a sportsman in the crudity of this world. Because he knows the difficulty of turning existence into a sport, he sets about securing the requisite mastery over circumstances, and therefore he has been the great technician and the great statesman.

His desire to be an individual and give his wordly destiny the grace of a game makes him feel the necessity of separating himself even physically from other people and things and of attending to the care of his body. Cleanliness, his change of linen and his bath are matters that the gentleman takes very seriously, and the water-closet was invented in England. This ideal, however, presupposes the wealth that it strives to create, and can it persist in poverty? A model type of life needs to be excogitated which will preserve the best in the gentleman and also be compatible with the poverty which threatens our planet (pp. 1570-1576).

Now obviously the realization of any project implies a conception of the world in which it is to be realized. Ortega distinguishes between an idea, something which occurs to us whether we originate it ourselves or adopt it from somebody else, and a belief, something on which we count whether we think of it or not. When we go out of the house we do not assert, deny or doubt the existence of the street; we do not question it at all. It is a presupposition, nevertheless, on which we count, for we should be tremendously surprised if we came on an abyss instead of the street. Reality for us is constituted by our beliefs rather than by our ideas, for to ask whether an idea is true implies that it is other than the reality to which it relates, and even though an idea commands our assent when we think of it, we need not be thinking of it, whereas a belief is that on which we count whether we are thinking of it or not. Hence for the understanding of a man or an age, of what marks them off from other men and ages, it is the beliefs that are more important than the ideas. As an instance of such a fundamental belief Ortega gives our belief that the earth is firm⁵ despite the earthquakes that occasionally shake it, and suggests as an instructive introductory exercise in historical thinking working out the main lines of the radical changes in human life that would follow from the disappearance of this belief.

It is interesting that Ortega should be drawing this distinction between ideas and beliefs in an essay *Ideas y creencias* dated 1934, shortly before R. G. Collingwood wrote his *Essay on Metaphysics*, which puts forward a similar distinction between propositions and presuppositions. Yet there is an important divergence between the two philosophers. According to Collingwood there are absolute presuppositions which are not the answer to any question and therefore are neither true nor false; but there is no one constellation of presuppositions common to every age; different ages have different sets of presuppositions, for a constellation of such presuppositions, and with it the entire fabric of civilisation gives place to another owing to its own 'internal strains'. With this conception Collingwood plunges headlong into the positivism from which he was struggling to rise. For if an absolute presupposition, or a constellation of them, is simply either held or abandoned and does not admit of justification, and if the change from one to another is due to the 'strain' to which the first is sub-

⁵In a characteristic footnote Ortega remarks that the Spanish word for earth, *tierra*, comes from the Latin **tersa* = dry, solid.

jected, then historiography becomes a reconstruction in the last resort not of actions but of events or phenomena, not of the criteriological but of the merely factual, the breaking under strain of an absolute presupposition like the breaking of a shoelace.

On Ortega's view, on the other hand, not only do ideas have to be invented as a life-belt to save us from sinking when a belief of ours is shattered by a doubt (which is not unbelief or disbelief, for these are as stable as belief, but an unstable fluctuation between two beliefs) but every belief begins as an idea and is only subsequently accepted and consolidated into a belief. On his view, then, the succession of beliefs belongs to the historical level and is not a sheer natural fact. The truth of this view is indirectly confirmed by Collingwood's own discussion of the position of Thales, for he says that Thales was 'fighting for' a principle 'we so lightly take for granted' (*op. cit.*, p. 206), and there could be no fighting for, i.e. striving to establish against resistance, an absolute presupposition that is neither better nor worse than any other absolute presupposition, i.e. something that would not admit of being established.

There is the same divergence between the two over the articulation of beliefs. Collingwood, denying that a constellation of presuppositions forms a deductive system, considers that they are no more than compatible with each other and that none can be deduced from any other any more than waistcoat can be deduced from trousers or from trousers and coat together (*op. cit.*, p. 67). Ortega, on the other hand, contends that beliefs, while an incoherent repertory as ideas, do constitute a system in so far as they are effective beliefs, that they function as a hierarchy in so far as they are acted upon (*History as a System*, p. 284).

If beliefs were originally ideas, human inventions interpreting reality, what is the primary, naked, genuine reality? According to Ortega it is a pure enigma, a pre-intellectual enigma to which we react by operating our intellectual apparatus, which is mainly imagination. Science as well as poetry belongs to the realm of imagination, and the exactitude of the triangle or of the physicist's atom is like that of Hamlet, an exactitude belonging not to reality but to the imagination; they are solutions to our problems but not what sets the problems. Not content with having thus distinguished (a) bare primary reality, (b) the external world that we call reality because constituted by our beliefs, and (c) the inner world of imagination, Ortega desiderates the articulation of this inner world, the determination of the connexion between science, religion, worldly wisdom, poetry, and philosophy, a task in his view hardly attempted yet and mishandled owing to the treatment of these various activities as permanent faculties or resources, when actually they all had a definite beginning in history. Philosophy, for example, becomes clearly distinguishable in the fifth century B.C., while science appears with marked features of its own only in the seventeenth century A.D. What has been done, he remarks, has been to form a clear idea of some chronologically determined activity, look for something like it in every epoch, even though there is nothing very like it and the idea is made

so vague that its original point is lost, and then conclude that man in every epoch has been religious, scientific, etc. (pp. 1681-85).

The justice of Ortega's remark is confirmed by a study of Croce and the Actualists, Giovanni Gentile and Guido de Ruggiero. For although Croce commences by making poetry identical with art and a moment of spirit, he comes in *La Poesia* to treat it more and more narrowly as a rare achievement. Gentile, on the other hand, who adheres tenaciously to the conception of the universality of philosophy as the concrete synthesis of art and religion, the two abstract moments of spirit, proceeds in consistency to maintain that as philosophy is the solving of the problem how to conceive the world so as to be able to live in it, even a man satisfying his hunger is philosophizing, because hunger is a problem the solution of which is eating, and this problem is a matter of his intellect, seeing that with his intellect he can blunt the stimuli that he localizes in his stomach and let himself die of starvation, so that the solution of that problem coincides with the problem of realizing his own life (*Sistema di logica*² Vol. II, pp. 223-30). De Ruggiero, again, recognizes that the result of Gentile's line of thought, a result with which he concurs, is to make philosophy no longer a particular moment of spirit but the very fulness of spirit in all its forms (*Modern Philosophy*, Eng. tr. Hannay & Collingwood, p. 359). Certainly it is of vast importance to have shown that philosophy as a professional activity is only doing wittingly what everyone does whether he is aware of it or not, and the conception of philosophy as not merely professed but also lived leads to the historical examination of the ideas on which people have acted, which is just what Ortega advocates. Nevertheless, Gentile, in the lightning sketches wherewith he follows his own doctrine that the justification of a conception is its history, begins with Thales or Parmenides, and De Ruggiero likewise begins his history of philosophy with the Greeks.

Not that Ortega himself does not take thought to be strictly philosophy, all other forms of intellection being secondary or derived from it or consisting in more or less arbitrary limitations of the philosophical adventure, which is coming to know what the world is in order to ascertain our genuine business in it (pp. xv sq.). Experimental science maintains itself on a plane of secondary problems, leaving untouched the ultimate decisive questions (p. 628), while mathematics consists of inert thought, which proceeds along indefinitely and mechanically in the same direction, as opposed to alert thought, which is always ready to correct its trajectory, attentive to the reality outside it.⁶ Ortega can and does hold, however, both that thought is strictly philosophy and that philosophy began one day in Greece, because he accepts the Aristotelian definition of man as a rational animal only in the sense that rationality is the goal to which mankind is striving, not that reason is a permanently available resource of every man.

Ortega attributes a peculiar importance to the study of the origin of philosophy, in that it discloses what genuine philosophy is. Philosophy is

⁶*Dos prólogos— a un tratado de montería, a una historia de la filosofía, Revista de Occidente, Madrid, 1944, p. 53.*

now a social institution, and shares in the spuriousness appertaining to everything social. It may be taken up as a career or from a liking for it, motives which betray their spuriousness by presupposing philosophy as already in existence. Only by retracing the course of philosophy to its source, to the time when it did not yet exist and was first invented, is it possible to liberate ourselves in some measure from the traditions to which we belong and to discern what genuine philosophy is. There is no need to labour this point of Ortega's; it is enough to recall the case of a celebrated thinker who was trained in a school of philosophy which pretty well reduced philosophy to inflated lexicography and who has been proclaiming in all innocence that philosophical disputes are just disputes over the meanings of words, being trammelled by the traditions of his preceptors and oblivious to the possibility that their philosophy was not what it purported to be.

It is certainly hard to admit the indispensability of the history of philosophy in view of the ordinary histories of philosophy, but then the ordinary textbooks dissatisfy Ortega too. These textbooks, he argues, despite all their undoubted and valuable erudition, provide expositions of doctrine which are nothing more than useful summaries for the present-day philosopher's laboratory, for his private alchemy. Their defect is that they represent philosophies as though they were written by the unknown philosopher, and put all philosophers on the same plane as though they were our contemporaries. Plato, Kant, etc., are simply labels attached to the systems expounded, and when it is said that Plato belonged to the fourth century B.C. this is a chronological note which adds nothing to the exposition of his ideas. An idea, however, is an action devised to meet a definite situation, and it can be grasped only when that situation is understood. Otherwise all that is grasped is the highly abstract ingredient in it which refers to a situation common to everyone. Historical thinking entails taking the standpoint of the past—no matter how we appraise it eventually—because we cannot expect the dead, as we expect the living, to adopt our point of view, and what is required now is not to show how close to us the philosophers of the past are but how far removed from us. Owing to the failure to appreciate this requirement, the ordinary textbooks do not, for instance, take seriously the solemn declarations of Plato and Aristotle that the aim of philosophy is assimilation to God.

When the course of philosophy is traced back to its origin in the sixth century, it turns out to have been devised as a substitute for tradition, which was then failing. After the despair manifested in the Greek wisdom literature, men found in philosophy a way out⁷ of the morass of doubt, and thus the curious tradition of philosophy is to be a tradition of non-tradition. Every philosophy aspires to rise above tradition and is nevertheless in the stream of one. Yet there has been a progress in philosophy, and this we can discern by relating all philosophies to our own, which is true not if it be definitive (an impossibility) but if it contains its predecessors in its own

⁷Ortega recalls the significance of the words *ὁδός* and *μέθοδος* and the converse *ἀπορία*.

vitals, recognizing them all as necessary, particularly in the sense that but for their errors we should not have been able to attain our truths. Philosophy is accordingly history of philosophy and *vice versa* (*Dos prólogos*, pp. 139-207).

It is worth observing that this conception of the identity of philosophy with its history had previously been propounded by Gentile, for it illustrates Ortega's own doctrine that a philosopher belongs to his age. Ortega's main philosophical affinities—not that I have any reason for supposing him to be acquainted with their writings—are with Collingwood and the Actualists, i.e. with those who for doxographical convenience may be styled Neo-hegelians. They all take up the Hegelian standpoint that reality is not ready-made but in the making, and that in particular man is to be conceived in terms not of substance but of activity. If, said Hegel, you ask who the English are, the answer is that they are the people who sail the seven seas. Where, however, the Neo-hegelians depart from Hegel is that for him human history is only a reflection in time of the eternal process by which spirit attains consciousness of itself, so that in principle, i.e. in so far as Hegel's own philosophy succeeded in exhibiting this eternal process—though Hegel was very far from claiming such success—it was definitive. For these thinkers, on the other hand, such an eternal process as envisaged by Hegel is not a genuine process because it has from eternity reached its conclusion and therefore admits of no novelty. The real process for them is the continuing process of human history, that process, not admitting of anticipation, in which man makes himself what he is, a process in which Hegel's philosophy has simply one place like any other philosophy. Ortega finds more awareness of the true being of life in Fichte than in Hegel (*History as a System*, p. 301).

The allusion to Fichte is somewhat surprising, but yet it points to a certain Fichtian strain in Ortega's thought. For, if I am not mistaken, Ortega has fallen, despite his avowed antagonism to epistemological idealism, into a sort of Fichtian idealism with the transcendence of a bare enigmatic reality corresponding to Fichte's *Anstoss*, i.e. the reality outside our thinking which cannot be characterized as a thing but only as an impact which sets us off thinking, in an effort, which can never be wholly satisfied, to attain consciousness of the real. Hence while for both Ortega and the Actualists knowledge is coming to know, for Ortega this is because human life is only an effort after clarity, only partial illumination (p. 1694), i.e. a defective condition, whereas for the Actualists the solution of no problem is definitive 'because history is the systematization of the past in an ever new present' (Adolfo Omodeo, *Paolo di Tarso*. p. viii), i.e. the condition is one of indefeasible creativeness.

The bare enigmatic reality of Ortega betrays itself at least as badly as Fichte's *Anstoss*, for an enigma is an obstacle or irritation to our thinking; and therefore a pre-intellectual enigma, if not a contradiction in terms, is a name for the absolutely indeterminate, or just nothing at all. Yet the conception is not a negligible relic in Ortega's thought and must be taken

entirely seriously, since he regards the belief of the intellect that it is the sole reality as the sin of Lucifer who pretended to be like God. If Lucifer imagined that he was like God, that means he supposed that there were within him all the ingredients and conditions to make him the full reality, and not merely a reality obliged to reckon with a higher reality, God. With the idealism begun by Descartes the intellect began to declare itself the sole reality, but though it is directed to reality, it contains things only in the sense of reflecting them like a mirror. The voluntarism which since 1900 has been displacing the old idealism, maintaining that it is the will alone that matters, is not likely to prove an enduring attitude, for it is the intellect which creates the projects among which the will has to decide and for that purpose seeks to penetrate to the truth of the world and of man. Probably once again man will discover that he is not alone, that there are around him strange powers distinct from him with which he has to reckon, and that there are above him higher powers, under whose hand he purely and simply is (pp. 1713-17).

The need for some such conception of a transcendent reality as entertained by Ortega, however untenable such a conception always proves to be, vanishes only when our knowledge of other persons and things is conceived Actualistically as the self-knowledge in us of the whole which contains the other persons, the things and ourselves, this self-knowledge being the act of thinking whereby we deny our isolated singularity and think not for ourselves but for every thinking being. As explained by Gentile when defending Actualism from the charge of pantheism (*Sistema di logica*² Vol. II, p. 339), the divinity of spirit asserted is the divinity of that through which, in the words of Paul of Tarsus, man dies to himself to be reborn in Christ. This is the divinity implicit in Luther's declaration that the human will, while ineffective by itself, with the operation of divine Grace possesses divine power. God for Ortega still seems to be only above us and not working in us when we do anything of any worth, although human life could not really be self-fabrication were it conditioned by a transcendent God or nature. 'Hearken not to me but to the Logos' said Heraclitus, and no thinker, however modest, can refrain from claiming universality for his actual thinking. When we question some thought, even our own, we are not questioning the actual thought which is thinking the questionability of what was our thought. It is significant that in his *Prologue to a History of Philosophy* Ortega objects to Hegel's notion of philosophical progress towards a definitive philosophy transcending history that it would imply the arresting and freezing of thought (precisely the Actualist objection from the standpoint not of the defectiveness but of the creativeness of human thought) and advocates constructing the progress of philosophy towards our own philosophy as the only possible criterion.

Because philosophy is self-instantiating, the final test of anyone's philosophy is to ascertain whether it practises what it expounds. How does Ortega's philosophy emerge from this test? The facts speak for themselves. His works have the freshness that, as emphasised by Croce, belongs

to occasional pieces, because they were deliberately addressed to audiences and readers in Spain and Argentina, and it is only in his old age that he is beginning works of consolidation. In considering art, history, philosophy, librarianship and so on, he asks both what they have been and what they ought to be. Has not art gone sour because too high a place in the scale of values was claimed for it and it was elevated to the level of religion? Thus he discusses all problems with reference to historical situations and with an eye to future action.

Yet the self-instantiation of his philosophy goes even further. While he belongs in general to the Neo-hegelians, he is characterized specifically by being the philosopher of sport, for neither in Collingwood nor in the Actualists is there his awareness of man as essentially a sporting being. Collingwood went no further than distinguishing an action from an event, his attitude to sport and fair play being distinctly condescending (*Principles of Art*, p. 73 sq.), and even in De Ruggiero's 1946 Philip Maurice Deneke Lecture *Myths and Ideals* there is not Ortega's firm grasp of the concrete way in which ideals have been the driving force in history. The Actualists espied the promised land rather than entered upon it, for they saw that without an ideal a man degenerates into a beast but hardly recognized the concrete ideals which constitute what the eighteenth century philosophers call the spirit of an age or people. In the eighteenth century conception the spirit of an age is that of which all activities are manifestations, but as it is not determined by itself it remains in any actual case either a concealed tautology (like a force behind the manifestations of that force) or else an exigency, a mere demand that all the activities of an age must in some way be interconnected.

Now in his philosophizing Ortega sallies out gaily in search of the truth, accepting every opportunity to uncover the universal latent in the particular, whether a lecture to librarians, a preface to a book on big game hunting, or a preface to a collection of photographs of Spanish costume. Nor does he blench at expounding Hegel's philosophy of history to the señoritas, though he takes care to dress it in a more gay and attractive garb than the Suabian's own tortured metaphors. He despises the attempt to explain the higher by the lower, which among British philosophers masquerades under the guise of a preference for the 'minimum interpretation'. He advances paradoxes, thinking the existence of professional thinkers pointless if all they are to do is to repeat current opinions (p. 1370), and even predictions, holding it to be the mission of a writer to foresee what is going to be a problem for his readers and give them clear ideas on the question while there is still a breathing-space (p. 1546). Yet the torrent of his ideas, which is capable of sweeping one on from a consideration of picture-frames to a discussion of art, is kept within bounds by a self-discipline mainly attributable, from his own account, to his training at Marburg (p. 587). There is no stravaiging over the universe after the fashion of Coleridge, and all sorts of avenues of thought are merely hinted at or mentioned in footnotes.

What he says, he says because he thinks it worth saying, even granted the possibility of its being totally erroneous. His own philosophy he sets up to be shot down like any other philosophy, in accordance with the Libyan proverb quoted at the end of his *Prologue to a History of Philosophy*: 'Drink of the well, and make way for another'. His philosophy is accordingly not only a philosophy of sport but also a sporting philosophy. Father Sánchez's picture of Ortega as 'the unapproachable gentleman, on whose lips skepticism has painted a thin sneer of irony' and behind whom 'lies the scoffing features of the Nietzschean Zarathustra' (*op. cit.*, p. 136), though quaintly redolent of the Cynic Antisthenes's outburst against Plato for looking like a high-stepping charger (Diog. Laert. VI, 7), is not wholly wayward, for Ortega's philosophy just is the philosophy of a gentleman.

A. MACC. ARMSTRONG

Bromley.