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# JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

(1883–1955)

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## **The problem of Spain is one of education**

If there is one special characteristic that draws the attention of the reader of Ortega y Gasset, it is his remarkable curiosity: no subject or event was too insignificant not to arouse his interest and be given his attention, as can be seen from his voluminous writings<sup>2</sup>. Our author has a number of features that distinguish him from the stereotype of the philosopher. His thought does not seem to be structured in the form of a system; it is frequently expressed in newspaper articles, and his most important works were published in the form of essays; lastly, the elegance of his style sweeps the reader along, making rigorous analysis of the ideas which it presents rather difficult.

The question of the systematicity of the philosophy of Ortega, its thematic dispersion and its literary qualities have already been dealt with by specialists in the various areas. In this article we shall confine ourselves to those questions which lead to an understanding of the educational dimension of Ortega's work, which I feel to be important and to which little attention has been paid so far. Although he himself considered his vocation to be the cultivation of thought, which for him could only be philosophical thought<sup>3</sup>, Ortega's great passion was the education of the Spanish people. As has been shown by Cerezo<sup>4</sup>, the driving force behind Ortega's thought was his continuous and intensive meditation on the problem of Spain, and his own intellectual evolution is indissolubly linked with this concern. This is the key to any interpretation of his political, cultural and philosophical activities; they were all geared to the socio-political reform of his country, although focused on different levels and spheres of the life of society. Ortega was, first and foremost, an educator on a national scale whose aim was the reform and transformation of Spain. To attain his goal he felt that all means could and should be used: newspapers, magazines, books, his influence as a university professor, politics, etc.

The transformation of Spain was seen by the young Ortega as its incorporation into European culture. This was, in essence, what he felt to be his public calling as an intellectual, and his destiny as an educator, almost as a social reformer: to strive to place Spain on an equal cultural footing with Europe. The diversity of Ortega's approaches to culture and the problem of Spain will help us to follow the evolution of his thought, in both its philosophical and its pedagogical aspects. How did Ortega develop his function as an educator? As he himself constantly repeated, in the light of circumstances.

## **Ortega and his circumstances**

In order to understand a person we need to follow his life story and its development, in terms of the various situations in which it has been his lot to live. This is particularly important in Ortega's case, because it was one of his central themes. In a lecture that he gave for the fourth centenary of Juan Luis Vives, he describes how a serious biography should be written.<sup>5</sup> He tells us that it involves

making an intellectual reconstruction of a 'bios', of a human life. For human beings the business of living means coping with the world around us, our geographical and social environment. For a serious biographer it is the social environment in which we are born and live that is most important. This social world is made up of people, but also of habits, tastes, customs and the whole system of beliefs, ideas, preferences and standards which make up what is variously referred to as the life of society, contemporary trends, or the spirit of the time. All this is inculcated into children by family, school, social relations, reading and the system of law. A large portion of this social world becomes part of the authentic 'I' which each one of us is; but there also emerge beliefs, opinions, aspirations and tastes which, to one degree or the other, are in conflict with our surroundings. This is the stuff of the combat which is life, especially that of an outstanding life.

With what type of environment did Ortega have to deal, and how did he react to it? The limitations of a work of this type force us to consider only those circumstances which help us to understand our subject as an educator<sup>6</sup>, eschewing—among other things—analysis of the influences on his philosophical thought, which has been dealt with in a number of excellent works<sup>7</sup>.

José Ortega y Gasset was born in Madrid on 9 May 1883. As the son of José Ortega Munilla and Dolores Gasset, he was connected on both sides of his family to the most representative cultural and political circles in Spain at that time. His father, who was by no means an insignificant writer himself, became a member of the Spanish Royal Academy in 1902; he was above all a journalist and contributed to the literary section of the newspaper *El Imparcial*, the most prestigious publication of its day—founded by our subject's maternal grandfather, Eduardo Gasset, a liberal monarchist. José Ortega y Gasset embarked on his career as a journalist at an early age; at nineteen he published his first article, belonging to a family in which public life—in the realms of letters and politics—always found an immediate response. His family environment was decisive for his concern with the social and cultural problems of Spanish society, sometimes leading him into active political life and always making him regard his work as a service to Spain. I believe that his love of journalism and his preference for newspapers as a means of expressing his thought—as well as the fact that he did so with literary elegance—are the result of his family environment.

In 1891, at the age of eight, he was sent as a boarder to the school which the Jesuits ran in Miraflores del Palo, Málaga, and he remained there until 1897. He began his university studies—in law and philosophy—at the University of Deusto (1897–1898), also run by the Jesuits, and went on to the Universidad Central de Madrid, from which he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Philosophy (1902), and a doctorate (1904), with a thesis entitled *The terrors of the year 1000: critique of a legend* (*Los terrores del año mil: crítica de una leyenda*). He criticized his Jesuit educators for the style and negativism of their teachings, their intolerance and, above all, their limited knowledge and intellectual incompetence<sup>8</sup>. Ortega's experience at university in Madrid was also disappointing, and he described the teaching there as being of the utmost mediocrity<sup>9</sup>. Justified or not, Ortega's overall view of the education he received is a negative one.

However, a full understanding of Ortega's educational activity requires consideration not only of his family background and schooling, but also of the special psychological state of Spanish society during those years, since he felt himself to be part of a generation, 'which came of age intellectually in the terrible year of 1898, and which since that time has not only failed to see the dawn of a single day of glory or abundance, but never known an hour of sufficiency'<sup>10</sup>. The year 1898 was a turning-point. With the Treaty of Paris, Spain gave up its rights of sovereignty over Cuba, which became a free nation, and ceded Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam to the United States of America. The loss of their colonies filled the Spanish people with bitterness, anguish and pessimism. Spanish intellectual activity began to focus on what was described as the 'Spanish problem' that, in fact, covered a host of problems. These were analysed, and Spain's historical values mercilessly criticized; each author, whatever his area of activity, sought, each in his own way, an explanation for the 'problem of Spain' and the causes of the country's decline.

This critical period laid the foundations for a scientific, artistic and philosophical movement that was to earn Spain the kind of reputation it had not enjoyed since the sixteenth century<sup>11</sup>. It would be impossible to list the many eminent figures concerned, but we can say that modern Spain began with the ‘generation of 98’, which was innovative in so many ways, but above all had a new way of looking at Spanish society and intellectual topics. Ortega shared his generation’s pain and bitterness at what was felt to be Spain’s prostration; he tried, with that generation, to understand the reasons for the current state of Spanish culture, education, politics and science. But while the others expressed their unhappiness with great lyricism, evoking past glories, Ortega called for hope, action and dedication to change the present painful situation of his country, looking not to the past but to the future, as it was being perceived in the rest of Europe. This seems to be at the root of his love-hate relationship with the most typical representative of the generation of 98, Miguel de Unamuno. He also differed from the rest of his generation in that his approach was theoretical rather than literary. In what crucible, then, did Ortega forge his theoretical framework? This question leads us to the fourth and last environmental influence.

‘Fleeing my country’s mediocrity’<sup>12</sup>, in his own words, Ortega decided in 1905 to study in Germany, beginning with the University of Leipzig, where he studied Kant: ‘there I had my first desperate hand to hand struggle with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, so tremendously difficult for a Latin mind to assimilate’<sup>13</sup>; the following year he visited Nuremberg and studied for a semester in Berlin, under Professor Simmel, who influenced his thinking to some extent. It was his stay in Marburg, however, his third stop, that was crucial. There, for the first time, he studied under two well-known teachers, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, who were leading proponents of Neo-Kantianism. Marburg was to have a profound influence on Ortega, not only intellectually, on his philosophical and pedagogical training, but also on his personality. Natorp’s influence was particularly important for the subject that concerns us here—Ortega as an educator. During his stays in various European countries, Ortega was given an excellent training in philosophy and conceived an admiration for the scientific and technical development which was taking place as well as for tenacity and disciplines especially those of the German people. His Europeanism sprang from an attitude of not uncritical interest, a willingness to incorporate what could be incorporated, without giving up Spanish identity. On his return from Marburg, in 1908, he was appointed Professor of Logic, Psychology and Ethics at the Escuela Superior de Magisterio, and in 1910 he won the competition for the post of Professor of Metaphysics at the Universidad Central de Madrid.

These, then, were the main circumstances of the times which Ortega had to confront and out of which he shaped his own life, and specifically the beliefs which he had adopted by the time he wrote his first pedagogical work, in 1910. However, Ortega’s thought continued to evolve in response to changing circumstances, as he himself declared in 1932, referring back to his words in *Meditations on Quixote* (1914): ‘I am I, and my circumstance. This expression, which appears in my first book and which, in the final volume, condenses my philosophical thought, does not only mean the doctrine which my work expounds and proposes, but also that my work is an effective instance of that same doctrine. My work is, in essence and presence, circumstantial’<sup>14</sup>.

The interpretation which Ortega gives us of his own philosophy makes it impossible to treat it as a system, and much less as a closed system. The driving force behind Ortega’s thinking, focused on the problem of Spain, is the constant search for solutions, including both theoretical approaches and strategies for action—as a result of which the specialists have had some trouble in identifying the various stages of its development<sup>15</sup>. This development can be observed in his pedagogical writings; furthermore, it is my belief that three of these works are the genuine representation of each of the stages of his thought—on which we will now focus our attention.

## An idealistic approach to teaching

Ortega's stay in Marburg, Germany, brought him into contact with Neo-Kantianism, which was a philosophy of culture, of objective order and spheres of value—a critical-transcendental rationalism which analyses the products of modern culture, science, art, law, ethics and politics, in order to identify their underlying principles and criteria of validity.

Neo-Kantianism was also an energetic teaching philosophy capable of orientating mankind, of transforming it according to an ideal, which is nothing other than the Kantian ideal of a cosmopolitan humanity. The Neo-Kantian concept of man as a cultural phenomenon implies that real personal development lies in the shaping of the individual to ideals, in the adjustment of behaviour to standards, to what should be done. These standards have universal validity. Biological and instinctive impulses must be submitted to a superior force, to the ideal. Freedom does not mean spontaneity, it is not appetite, nor caprice, but thought and education, in other words, the active shaping of the individual by universal values.

This philosophy of culture and education which promotes the search for objective, universal, generic truth, seemed to the young Ortega to be a system of thought which could help in solving the problem of Spain. In Spain—in contrast with German culture—the dominant forces were spontaneity, subjectivity, particularism and sectarianism. This resulted in energy being wasted in internal confrontations, isolated gestures and in some carefully undoing what others had carefully put together, in short in the lamentable situation in which Spain found itself. His contact with Europe, especially with German Neo-Kantianism, convinced Ortega that the key to the salvation of Spain, to its historical recovery, lay in cultural reform.

His first statement on education belongs to this stage of his thinking. This lecture, given in Bilbao on 12 March 1910, was entitled *Social pedagogy as a political programme (La pedagogía social como programa político)*<sup>16</sup>.

He began by describing the serious shortcomings that had held Spain back for the past three centuries and prevented it from becoming a real nation. His Neo-Kantian position at that time made him feel that Spain was not a nation because it did not exist as a community, regulated by objective laws with a rational basis, laws which were accepted by everyone and which were the expression of collective duties. Spain was not a nation because its citizens were not dedicated to attaining the objective ideals of science, art and ethics, in which human communities achieve full development.

Spain, rather, was the country of individualism, of subjectivism, of people who made it their aim to do exactly as they wished, without subjecting themselves to any rule other than that of their own free will. The first step towards solving the problem of Spain would be to recognize the absence of culture—meaning, the collective realization of ideals—in Spanish life. To recognize this would not be a sign of pessimism but rather a diagnosis that made clear the difference between what was and what ought to be. Although it would be painful to consciously recognize the reality of the Spanish situation, it would make Spaniards consider what their country should be like and how it could be changed. Ortega's reasoning, although impassioned, was rigorous. Spain had a problem, and that problem was its lack of what was understood in Europe by culture. The task that lay ahead of it was to acquire that culture in the European way, as defined by Neo-Kantianism. As awareness of this problem developed, as the diagnosis became more detailed, it would become possible to perceive the goal that had to be attained and the means of achieving it. The goal was to transform Spain and give it access to the cultural patterns prevailing in the rest of Europe.

Ortega saw education as part of the process of attaining this cultural transformation. He pointed out that the Latin word *educatio* or *educatio* meant drawing one thing out of another, or converting one thing into something better. Although he did not go into terminological details, he provided us with a concept of education which is basically accepted now and which is rooted in *educatio*. He saw it as all the actions undertaken to bring reality closer to an ideal.

After establishing the meaning of the word education, Ortega set out to determine the functions of pedagogy as the science of education. He saw it as having two functions. The first was the objective identification of the ideal to be attained, of the purpose of education and the second, essential, function was the identification of the intellectual, moral and aesthetic means of making this ideal attractive to the student.

Given that education is the process of transforming the individual, there is an important question that needs to be answered concerning the nature of the ideal human being whose attainment is the purpose of education, calling for the application of certain methods. This was the question to which he addressed himself in his lecture.

Firstly he stated that human beings are not merely biological organisms. The biological aspect is simply the pretext for human existence. The distinguishing feature of human beings is their ability to work towards an ideal and in so doing to create mathematics, art, ethics, law. The distinguishing feature of human beings is culture.

Ortega specifies further that the real human being does not live in isolation from the rest. In each individual he distinguishes between the empirical 'I' with its own caprices, loves, hatreds and appetites, and the 'I' which can perceive universal truth, universal goodness and universal beauty. In other words, he distinguishes an empirical 'I' from a generic 'I' which is the one that is capable of creating culture. Science, ethics, art, etc., are specifically human phenomena, and participation in the scientific, moral and artistic life of the community is what makes a person truly human. The ideal human that is the goal of education is a being who can create culture, and create it with others.

If this ideal is to be pursued, education must address itself not to the empirical 'I', which is the root of individualism, but to the generic 'I' which feels, thinks and desires in terms of ideals. This means education must be the process by which biological or natural impulses are directed towards ideals, and begin to function in accordance with the system of standards derived from these ideals.

In this first stage, Ortega's views on the nature/nurture, or culture/life, binomial with regard to education were influenced by his Neo-Kantian teachers and clearly biased towards nurture. However, he already had a strong intellectual personality and a range of socio-political interests that were not easily reconciled with the formalism of his teachers in Marburg, and so his views present certain distinctive features that it would be useful to examine.

The first is the historical dimension with which he endows human beings and his understanding of what it means to be a social being. When describing the social nature of human beings to make it clear that teachers are dealing with a social fabric rather than individuals, Ortega tells us 'the whole of the past is crystallized in the present; nothing that ever existed has been lost; the veins of those who have died are only empty because their blood is now flowing through our young veins'<sup>17</sup>. In this literary image we can see a vision of man in which distinctive features that have developed over time can be present in specific individuals as opposed to 'generic' humanity. This concept of the gradual shaping of the individual by the concrete events of the course of life was to increase in intensity and become one of the leitmotifs of Ortega's later anthropological thought.

The second distinctive feature of Ortega's views on this subject is the importance he attaches to the production of cultural objects. I think it is true to say that an obsession with praxis permeates the whole of his work. He is especially interested in the process of cultural construction, as the actual, concrete production of objects. For him, culture is labour, the production of things for human beings, activity. 'By greater or lesser culture we mean greater or lesser capacity to produce things, to work. Things, products, are the measure and trade—mark of culture'<sup>18</sup>.

This was the basis for his proposal that education be for work and by work, work which would not be individual but shared. He felt that this would make it possible to overcome the personalism, the fratricidal struggles and lack of co-operation among Spaniards. For one author<sup>19</sup>

his advocacy of education for work and by work makes Ortega a supporter of active education. In the perspective from which we are analysing him, keeping the problem of Spain as the basis of his thought, I think we can see Ortega's fundamental aim as the cultural transformation of his society, and pedagogy as the means to achieve this social and cultural reconstruction. And if this was considered to be 'political', he tells us that 'politics for us has become the education of society and Spain's problem an educational one'<sup>20</sup>.

The views that we have analysed go to make up a philosophy of education focused on the cultural achievement of the individual as a member of the social whole. Political action is reduced—in the final analysis—to cultural action, to the education of society, because human beings, as cultural entities, find their fulfilment in social life, in co-operation and communication. Ortega, in this first period, considered that the solution to the Spanish problem was cultural reform through education.

From this position, and on the basis of his intellectual commitment to the transformation of Spanish society, Ortega's thought was to evolve until he reached the conclusion that Spain's salvation could only be achieved by making use of its own inner energies and possibilities, its idiosyncrasies and historical reality. The Neo-Kantian Ortega advocated man as a producer of culture, a creator of ideal forms, a human individual working towards the construction of a culture that would be valid for all mankind. Ortega gradually discovered that an individual of this kind is an abstraction, and that rationalism—which is a form of idealism—had forgotten the real and concrete man who lives in a real and concrete situation. It was necessary to look round at this man for him to be revealed in his radical reality, and this meant overcoming the narrow-sightedness of rationalism. A new approach had to be adopted to the understanding of man, and Ortega's encounter with phenomenology was to help him on this new intellectual path. His dissatisfaction with the concept of man as a cultural being began to grow in 1911 and this estrangement can be seen clearly in his *Meditations on Quixote*, written in 1914.

## **A vitalistic pedagogy**

When he turned his attention to man himself, to his concrete reality, Ortega saw that man's being is the act of living; life is the radical and indispensable reality which must be taken as the basis for action, which must be made use of. This conviction, which prevented him from considering culture as an autonomous and independent sphere, was gradually to become one of the keys of his philosophy, as he was to remind us in his later years: 'the first thing, then, which philosophy must do is to define this fact, to define what my life, our life, the line of each one of us is. Living is the radical way of being: all other things and ways of being are to be found in my life, within it, as a detail of it or reference to it'<sup>21</sup>. In the tug-of-war between nature and nurture, life and culture, the latter lost the dominance it had gained during the Ortega's idealistic stage and came to be thought of as a manifestation of life. Culture was henceforth felt to consist of living life to the full.

If culture means living life to the full, then life—conceived as elemental life—should be considered to be the basis of culture. As he delved deeper in this direction, Ortega was led to an interpretation of life as creativity. This gear change, from idealism to vitalism, although obviously not unrelated to Ortega's readings in philosophy, which we shall not analyse here, was fundamentally a result of his reflection on the Spanish situation. Ortega, who had once advocated the socio-political reform of Spain, its culturization in the European mode, now realized that to save Spain its own inner energies would have to be tapped. As he looked at the reality of his country, he realized that Spain's distinguishing characteristic was its vigorous affirmation of immediate and elemental life.

At this stage of the development of his thought, Ortega wrote an essay entitled 'Biology and Pedagogy' (*Biología y Pedagogía*)<sup>22</sup>, in which he set forth his ideas on education in the context of the controversy surrounding the law which had made Don Quixote required reading in

elementary schools. Ortega made the following basic assumption: the aim of education is life, and since it is impossible to teach everything, priority areas of education must be defined. His teleological concept of action, which emerged in his idealistic stage and which he was never to abandon, made him wonder what education's purpose should be. If we have established that education must aim at life, then what is that essential life with which education must be concerned? The success of education, he believed, would depend on finding the right answer to this question.

Ortega considered that life, in its most basic sense, is elemental, spontaneous life; what he called *natura naturans* as opposed to *natura naturata*. It is life as a creative force, the biological substratum from which all impulses and energies proceed, which is the spur to action. Thus life must be the primary focus of elementary education; later, the higher grades would give education in civilization and culture, making the adult mind more specialized.

Ortega advanced a variety of arguments to support this thesis. The first of them was that in biological organisms some functions are more vital than others. The more radically vital functions are the unspecialized, unmechanized ones, which are genuinely representative of life. Their lack of specialization enables them to provide answers to a multitude of changing situations; they are able to deal not only with one specific type of situation, but an extremely varied range of them.

The second of his arguments is that this primitive, radical life is the real creator of culture: 'The culture and civilization which fill us with such pride are a creation of savages, not of cultivated, civilized man'<sup>23</sup>. All of history's most creative periods, he said, have been preceded by an explosion of savagery. If we want a culture that is a real and dynamic source of human fulfilment, we must concentrate on the study, analysis and nurturing of this primary vitality, which will explode and create new forms of culture.

And this is where pedagogy comes in, since Ortega's vision of naturalism—as he himself confesses - is a far cry from Rousseau's. Pedagogy's role is to devise artifices that intensify this life, and education is no more than the application of these artifices. Children should not be left to develop according to their own devices, by imitating the processes of nature; educational actions are deliberate, reflexive, aimed at the attainment of a goal: to co-operate technically in the maximization of children's deepest and most vital potential. Education must be aimed not at the acquisition of cultural forms, but rather at the shaping of life itself, at the stimulation of the child's own vital power.

What are these spontaneous functions which must be stimulated? Ortega enumerates them: 'courage and curiosity, love and hate, intellectual agility, the will to enjoy and triumph, confidence in oneself and in the world, imagination, memory'<sup>24</sup>. These functions are like the internal secretions which dynamize the organism as an integral whole: if one of them is lacking, the whole organism is unable to function. They are for the psyche what the hormone is for the body: the basic substance, the catalyst.

What Ortega advocated was that elementary education should be aimed at ensuring vital health, since this is essential to health in the broad sense of the word: 'Elementary teaching should be constantly governed by the final purpose of producing the greatest number of vitally perfect human beings'<sup>25</sup>, individuals in whom spiritual impulses well up in a torrent brimming with an energy which seems unaware of its own limitations, as if saturated with itself; individuals whose actions seem to overflow from their own inner abundance.

Despite appearances, Ortega was not advocating a naturalistic primitivism—as is made clear by his criticisms of Rousseau—nor did he support any sort of anticultural irrationalism. He had simply reassigned the role which he had previously conferred on culture as the basis and purpose of human life. Now he had gone the other way and incarnated culture in life, since—he believed—the purpose of culture was precisely to be a function of life: not life for culture, but culture for life. The life-culture equilibrium was tilted in the direction of life, since life is what gives culture its value. The goal now would be to authenticate and vivify culture, using life as the criterion of authenticity.

Ortega not only gave a fascinating description of two basic functions of this primitive, essential life—desire and feelings—but he also tentatively proposed ways of educating it. In order to develop children's vital impulses, they must be surrounded by feelings that are audacious and magnanimous, ambitious and enthusiastic. A key aspect of this approach to education was to provide the child with not facts but myths: myth, according to Ortega, awakens in us the currents induced by the feelings which nourish the vital pulse, which keep afloat our desire to live and increase the resilience of our deepest biological springs.

Another point to which he pays special attention is the need to educate children not as adults but as children; not from the standpoint of an ideal, model adult, but according to a model of childhood. Ortega criticizes us for judging children by our adult standards, for taking it for granted that they are living in the same vital medium as ourselves. The child lives in his own vital medium of non-utilitarian interests, which must be developed precisely since these interests frequently lead to the most vital orientation of his adult life. Thus 'the song of the poet and the word of the sage, the ambition of the politician and the deed of the warrior, are always echoes of an incorrigible child imprisoned within the adult'<sup>26</sup>. The objects which exist vitally for children, which occupy and preoccupy them, which hold their attention and awaken their desires, their passions and their impulses, are not just material objects but objects of desire, whether material or not. They only interest children in so far as they are desirable; that is why they are drawn to stories and legends, in which they can convert reality into an environment moulded to their desires.

Ortega's definitive and mature position was not the one we have just described, but rather the one he began to settle into in 1930, in his search for a balance between life and culture. Outside the framework of institutions, vital spontaneity degenerates into irresponsible primitivism, conversely, and institutions without vitality degenerate into routine and inertia.

## **Pedagogy of maturity**

In his article, 'An aspect of German life' (*Un rasgo de la vida alemana*)<sup>27</sup>, Ortega says that the individual has the potential to be an unlimited number of personalities but that when we look at actual individuals we see that their real possibilities are limited by their concrete cultural and social environment in which they live, and as such the accumulation of what others before them have done. Culture and cultural objects are always born out of the action of individuals, but once converted into objects they became de-individualized and take on their own life. This is why the possibilities really available to an individual are those which are provided by the de-individualized institution, which is both alien to and imposed upon the individual. This imposition has two sides: on one hand, it is a constriction, a limitation; on the other, it is what makes possible the creation of new individuals.

Life, like freedom, is always threatened precisely by that which makes it possible: culture. That is why life must rebel against culture, mistrust it—even if it does so precisely because culture is the basis for its security. It must criticize it and transcend it again and again, not make it more like nature, but to create new cultural configurations.

Consequently Ortega, in the opening lectures of his university courses, insisted that the students had to begin with the culture in which they found themselves; but that, in the same way as the creators of culture, they should analyse it critically, and see if the culture which had been produced up to that point satisfied them or if, on the contrary, they felt the vital need to change it. This, he said, is what true living consists of, living in the culture of one's time<sup>28</sup>. We can only say that we have found a truth when we have found a thought that satisfies a need felt by us. However, if students only feel the need to learn what others have discovered, they will at most feel enthusiasm or pleasure, since their study will have been imposed on them—it is artificial. This need is different from the need felt by those who created the new knowledge, who did so because they needed it to go on living, because it was a vital need. That is why Ortega proposes this interesting concept of

teaching: ‘Teaching is primarily and fundamentally nothing but enabling students to feel the need of a science, and not teaching them a science for which they cannot be made to feel any need’<sup>29</sup>.

The kind of educational institutions which we must promote, therefore, are those which are driven by the constant need to find answers to the vital problems felt by the students, and in which freedom, democracy and modernity are the keywords. These are the educational institutions which Ortega proposes in one of his best-known writings, the *Mission of the University (Misión de la Universidad)*<sup>30</sup>. He begins this work by delivering a diagnosis of the Spanish university as he sees it. What is the university today? His answer is: a centre of higher learning, where the children of the well-off—not the children of the working classes—are trained to take up the intellectual professions, and where the teachers are obsessed with scientific research and with the training of future researchers.

Ortega finds much to criticize in this university: its élitism, since all those who could and should benefit from higher education do not; the lack of discernment of its research work, since it confuses the teaching and the learning of science with the discovery of truth and the demonstration of error; and, above all, its dereliction of duty in failing to teach culture, that is to say to transmit clear, firm ideas about the universe, to make positive statements about the nature of things and the world; in other words, for not being an institution which teaches its students to live by the most advanced ideas of their time.

What is the university’s mission in our time? Ortega answers: to transmit culture; to train for professional works; scientific research; and the education of new researchers. In this formulation of the university’s mission Ortega does not seem to be adding much that is new. However, when we ask: What order of priority should be laid down for these functions? the relevance and stringency of his answers strikes us, even today, as remarkable. He defines the purpose of the university and, on that basis he establishes his basic criterion: ‘Instead of teaching what some Utopian longing would have us teach, we should teach only that which *can* be taught, in other words, that which can be learned’<sup>31</sup>. The educational approach of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Fröbel was novel in that they said that priority should be given not to knowledge or to the teacher, but rather to the student, and specifically to the ‘average student’.

The principle that must regulate university education, he tells us, is the ‘principle of economy’. Teaching, and the study of education, would never have become such important occupations, or professions, if it had not been for the eighteenth century’s great strides forward in science, technology and culture. In our times, in order to live with confidence and ease, we need to know an enormous amount of things, even though our individual capacity for learning is extremely limited. Teachers and educational theorists select the essential in the learning process, and make it easier to assimilate.

Everything must be based on the student, on his or her capacity to learn and on what he or she needs to live. In fact it is the *average* student who must be taken as the basis, and taught only that which can strictly and absolutely be required of him or her; in other words, what is required in order to live in, and keep abreast of, one’s times, material which he or she can learn thoroughly and with ease. On this basis, Ortega sets forth the following lemmas: ‘The university consists, first and foremost, of the education which the average person should receive; above all, the average individual must be made into a cultured person, able to meet the challenges of his times ...; the average student should be made into a good professional...; there is no solid reason why the average person should need to be, or should be, a scientist’<sup>32</sup>.

The lemma on which Ortega centres his argument is that the university should teach culture. He defines culture as the system of living ideas belonging to each period: ‘What I call living ideas, or the ideas on which we live, are those that contain our basic convictions regarding the nature of the world and our fellow human beings, the hierarchy of values for things and actions: which ones are worthy of esteem, which ones are less so’<sup>33</sup>. No one can live without reacting to their own environment or world, or drawing some conclusion regarding themselves and the ways in

which they could conduct themselves in that world. It is this set of ideas, or conclusions, about the universe and human beings that the university must teach.

It is true that, in our times, the content of culture comes—for the greater part—from science; culture skims from science that which is vitally necessary to make sense of our existence, but there are whole chunks of science which are not culture, but pure scientific technique. Man needs to live and culture is the interpretation of this life; life, which means human beings, cannot expect the sciences to explain the Universe scientifically; in order to live, we urgently need culture to give us a coherent, all-embracing, clearly-structured system of the Universe; and this culture has to be the culture of our time. Teaching this culture in the university calls for teachers who have the ability to grasp and communicate essentials in a systematic manner.

In Ortega's own words, the primary mission of the university is as follows. 'First, the university *stricto sensu* should be understood to mean an institution in which the average student is taught to be a cultured person and a competent professional; second, the university will not tolerate any kind of farce, in other words, it will not expect of students anything they are practically incapable of achieving; third, this will prevent students from wasting time pretending that they are going to be scientists. Scientific research as such will therefore be eliminated from core university courses; fourth, the disciplines of culture and professional studies will be offered in the way best suited to educational purposes (synthetic, systematic and complete), rather than in the form which science, left to its own devices, preferred in the past: special problems, 'chunks' of science, research efforts; fifth, the decisive factor in the choice of teachers shall not be their ability as researchers but, rather, their ability to grasp and communicate essentials and their gifts as teachers; sixth, after cutting this type of learning down to the minimum in quantity and quality, the university will be inexorable in its demands on the student'<sup>34</sup>.

Ortega was aware (and explicitly made it known) that his opinions about scientific research and the training of researchers would not be well received. What he could not accept was the farce of including scientific research and its supposed teaching in basic university courses. In order to make his position quite clear, he said: 'The university is distinct, but inseparable from science. I would say: the university is science too'<sup>35</sup>. Science is the basis for the existence of the university, without which it cannot live, since science is the soul of the university. But as well as being linked with science, the university needs to be in contact with public life, with historical reality, with the present. The university has to be interested in what is going on and take part in current events as a university, giving its own cultural, professional or scientific view on the major subjects of the day. Only then—concludes Ortega—will it once more become the university it was in its finest hour: a driving force of European history.

In 1936, the problem of Spain that concerned Ortega blossomed tragically into the Civil War and Ortega set out on his voluntary exile to South America and Europe. The following nineteen years, until his death, are seen by some as a separate biographical period. Whether this is true or not, there can be no denying that his radical political commitment seems to have been shaken by this new set of 'circumstances'. However, his philosophical talent produced such outstanding works as *Ideas y creencias (Ideas and beliefs)* (1940), *La razón histórica (Historical reason) 1st part* (1940), *La razón histórica, 2nd part* (1944), *La idea de principio en Leibnitz (The idea of principle in Leibnitz)* (1947), *El hombre y la gente (The individual and the people)* (1949), etc. During these years he only left us one piece on education, *Apuntes sobre una educación para el futuro (Notes on an education for the future)* (1953), which he wrote as a paper to be read at a meeting held in London which was organized by the Fund for the Progress of Education. It does not, in my opinion, make a very significant contribution to his thinking on education.

Although Ortega's writings on education are one aspect—and I believe a significant one—of his philosophical thought, they do not present a systematic exposition, since this was not in our author's character. Although we have not mentioned all Ortega's works on education, I believe that we have analysed the three most important ones.

## Ortega's dimensions as an educator

Analysis of Ortega's thinking on education clearly points to two underlying motivations. The first, which was the purpose of his entire work, was the transformation of socio-cultural conditions in Spain. The 'Spanish question', as it was called, constantly claimed his attention, spurring him to action in many ways: membership of the *Liga de Educación Política* (*League of political education*), the *Agrupación al Servicio de la República* (*Association for service to the republic*), constant contributions to public affairs in the form of lectures and articles in the press, election to Parliament, etc. The second, which was connected to the first, was that Ortega saw his vocation as that of a reformer, a shaper of the new society and the new Spain. Since he considered himself—in my opinion, rightly—to be a philosopher, he fulfilled his vocation basically by putting forward ideas which would be a spur to this transformation.

His influence as an educator spread out in many directions<sup>36</sup>. In the academic domain of Spanish philosophy he was the most influential personality of his day. The 'School of Madrid', as it was known, formed around him, attracted by his philosophy and personality. Figures as prestigious as Manuel García Morente, Xavier Zubiri and José Gaos all taught philosophy alongside Ortega at the University of Madrid. Any connoisseur of Spanish culture will recognize the importance of these names, and when we add to them the names of Luis Recaséns, María Zambrano, Ioaquín Xirau and Julian Marías—who for one reason or another were all linked to the School of Madrid—it becomes quite clear that Ortega, considered by all as their uncontested master, occupies a very special place in twentieth century Spanish philosophy.

Ortega's influence was not confined to other teachers and students who—during the philosophical golden age of the School of Madrid—looked to him as their master. He also influenced other major figures of Spanish philosophy and culture of the post-Civil War period, such as José Luis Aranguren and Pedro Laín Entralgo, a clear indication that his philosophy belongs squarely to the cultural tradition of our country.

In the domain of education it was his influence on Lorenzo Luzuriaga, whose involvement with Ortega began in 1908, when the latter began teaching at the *Escuela Superior de Magisterio*, that was most marked. From what we know, it would seem that the studies of the education section of the *Universidad Central de Madrid* were created (in 1932) on Ortega's initiative<sup>37</sup>. Another disciple of Ortega's, Ioaquín Xirau, was active in Catalonia in educational reform programmes aimed at developing the study of education as a scientific discipline. Yet another, María de Maeztu, followed the steps of the master to Marburg and studied Social Pedagogy under Natorp. She travelled widely in Europe to see the 'new schools' at first hand, and on that basis she later developed in Spain a project for the reform of teaching methods.

In the extra-university context, Ortega created a large number of what Luzuriaga<sup>38</sup> called 'foundations', clearly attempting to exert an influence—through new ideas—on Spanish society. One of these foundations was the *Revista de Occidente*, which can be considered to be the culmination of a process of constant trial and error. His previous experiences, in cultural and political activities, led him to conceive the *Revista de Occidente* as a launching pad for the cultural transformation of Spain. He seems to have founded this review (and the publishing house of the same name) to create a readership with similar cultural approaches to his own, and, ultimately, to create a cultural atmosphere in which his own writings could be read and discussed.

Lastly, I would like to mention the educational influence which Ortega had on the countries of the Southern Cone of South America (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay), where he found a community of shared values and feelings, and where his influence was to intensify when several other members of the School of Madrid went into exile there during the Spanish Civil War. However, his influence was greatest in Puerto Rico, where the university applied several of the theories developed in the work. *The Mission of the University*, and where many of Ortega's writings were used as textbooks.

## Notes

1. Juan Escàmez Sànchez (Spain). Ph.D. Professor of the philosophy of education at the University of Valencia and director of the Department of Educational Theory. Formerly an assistant professor at the University of Seville and professor at the University of Murcia. Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Psychology and Sciences of Education at the University of Murcia. Twelve Master's dissertations and fifteen doctoral theses have been presented under his direction. He is the author of five books and twenty-eight articles. In recent years he has been working on attitudes, values and moral education.
2. José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial-Revista de Occidente, 1983. 12 volumes. All quotations from the writings of Ortega y Gasset were taken from this edition. The reference notes give the title of the quoted work, and the volume and page number of the quotation.
3. *A una edición de sus obras*, vol. 6, p. 351.
4. P. Cerezo, *La voluntad de aventura*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1984, p. 15–87.
5. *Juan Vives y su mundo*, vol. 9, p. 509–15.
6. More detailed information can be found in two important works by his brilliant disciple Julian Marías: *Ortega: circunstancias y vocación*, Revista de Oriente, 1973, and *Ortega: las trayectorias*, Madrid, Alianza Universidad, 1984. His daughter, María Ortega, has provided a valuable contribution with her work, *Ortega y Gasset, mi padre*, Barcelona, Planeta.
7. An overall view of these influences is presented in S. Rábade, *Ortega y Gasset, filósofo. Hombre, conocimiento y razón*, Madrid, Humanitas, 1983, p. 37–49. The work of Pedro Cerezo, mentioned above, offers a more detailed study; chapters IV and VI are especially interesting.
8. *Al margen del libro 'A.M.D.G.'*, vol. 1, p. 532–534.
9. *Una fiesta de paz*, vol. 1, p. 125.
10. *Vieja y nueva política*, vol. 1, p. 268.
11. Charles Cascalés, *L'humanisme d'Ortega y Gasset*, Paris, P.U.F., 1957, p. 3.
12. *Una primera vista sobre Baroja*, vol. 2, p. 118.
13. *Prólogo para alemanes*, vol. 8, p. 26.
14. *A una edición de sus obras*, vol. 6, p. 347.
15. José Ferrater Mora distinguishes three stages: objectivism (1902–1914); perspectivism (1914–1923); and raciovitalism (1924–1955). José Gaos, his main disciple before the Spanish Civil War, identifies four periods: youth (1902–1914); first stage of maturity (1914–1923); second stage of maturity (1924–1936); and expatriation (1936–1955). Similar classifications have been proposed by Morón Arroyo and Pedro Cerezo, among others.
16. *La pedagogía social como programa político*, vol. 1, p. 503–521.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 514.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 516.
19. J. Mantovani, *Filósofos y educadores*, Buenos Aires, El Ateneo, 1962, p. 61.
20. *La pedagogía social como programa político*, work quoted p. 515.
21. *¿Qué es filosofía?*, vol. 7, p. 405.
22. *Ensayos filosóficos. Biología y pedagogía*, vol. 2, p. 271–305.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
27. *Un rasgo de la vida alemana*, vol. 5, p. 199–203.
28. *Sobre las carreras*, vol. 5, p. 179.
29. *Sobre el estudiar y el estudiante*, vol. 4, p. 554.
30. *Misión de la Universidad*, vol. 4, p. 311–353.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 351.
36. J.L. Abellan, *Historia crítica del pensamiento español*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1991, vol. V (III), p. 212–81.
37. I. Zuloaga, 'La pedagogía universitaria según Ortega y Gasset', in: *Homenaje a José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1983)*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense, 1986, p. 23–42.
38. L. Luzuriaga, 'Las Fundaciones de Ortega y Gasset', in *Homenaje a Ortega y Gasset*, Madrid, Edime, 1958, p. 33–50.

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