

---

Ustyantsev, R. A. 2023. "Philosopher in Troubled Times : A Review on a Book by José Luis Villacañas" [in English]. *Filosofiya. Zhurnal Vysshey shkoly ekonomiki [Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics]* 7 (4), 289–293.

---

ROMAN USTYANTSEV\*

## PHILOSOPHER IN TROUBLED TIMES\*\*

A REVIEW ON A BOOK BY JOSÉ LUIS VILLACAÑAS

VILLACAÑAS BERLANGA, J. L. 2023. *ORTEGA Y GASSET: UNA EXPERIENCIA FILOSÓFICA ESPAÑOLA* [IN SPANISH]. MADRID: GUILLERMO ESCOLAR EDITOR

DOI: 10.17323/2587-8719-2023-4-289-293.

A few months ago, a colleague expressed doubt in the reasoning behind studying the heritage of Ortega y Gasset at present. Despite seeming unnecessary at first glance, such questions are worth revisiting in order to affirm the logic behind the research. The critical state of his school and philosophy and whether his thought lacked relevance and would become purely historical interest are queries Ortega himself considered, as José Luis Villacañas Berlanga, a professor at the Complutense University of Madrid, describes in the introduction to his latest work on the Spanish philosopher.

In realizing oneself and falling into the account that we are, and what is in its authentic and primary reality that surrounds us, consists of philosophy (Villacañas Berlanga, 2023 11).<sup>1</sup>

It would not be easy to say if Ortega himself was satisfied with his philosophy and whether he thought he had reached his full potential. Scientific opinions on this issue differ. For instance, José Luis Villacañas states that he “was fully aware that his philosophy was inferior to what he could have been.” (Villacañas Berlanga, 2023: 11) However, this does not mean that his thought is insignificant, Professor José Luis Villacañas emphasises. The first thing a potential reader of Ortega will encounter upon conducting a brief search is his volume *Ortega y Gasset. Una experiencia filosófica española*, almost twelve hundred pages of text. This alone suggests that there is still much to be said and discovered about Ortega and his legacy.

\*Roman Ustyantsev, PhD Student at the Complutense University of Madrid (Madrid, Spain), romanust@ucm.es, ORCID: 0009-0008-4737-8373.

\*\*© Roman Ustyantsev. © Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics.

<sup>1</sup>Here and below, the translation is mine.

The study itself, which will be considered separately, along with the footnotes and bibliographical indexes, is of considerable value. Given the volume and thoroughness of the book, it may be considered one of the most significant revisions of early and mid-20th century philosophy through the lens of Ortega's approach. The author not only portrayed Ortega's thought and his development, but, no less importantly, situated it in a pan-European philosophical context. Thus, in addition to using this text as a basis for future research in the field of Ortegian thought, which continues to be relevant for the entire Spanish-speaking world, one might also refer to it as a guide to deciphering the intellectual environment of the early and mid-20th century, as seen from the perspective of the Iberian Peninsula.

At the same time, this aforementioned study cannot be classified as another biography. Many of those have been released throughout the decades as well as in recent years. Some are more focused on the revelation of Ortega's personality, presenting his philosophy as a direct outcome of his life path. Among such works, we can mention *Ortega y Gasset: La aventura de la verdad* by Javier Zamora Bonilla (Zamora Bonilla & Garrigues Walker, 2022), *José Ortega y Gasset* by Jordi Gracia (Gracia, 2014), or *El maestro en el erial* by Gregorio Morán (Morán, 2002), in which the author talks about the period in the philosopher's life in which he returns from exile to Franco's Spain. One could also recall the texts that focus, to a greater extent, on disseminating Ortega's philosophy. These were published by his closest students, especially Julián Marías (Marías, 1948),<sup>2</sup> and by more contemporary researchers.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, these are far from all the works dedicated to the study of the thought of the Madrid philosopher, but even among them, José Luis Villacañas's work deserves separate mention. Divided into twenty-one chapters, the study comprises both a biographical examination of Ortega's philosophical trajectory and an analysis of his philosophical system. The former unites him with some of his previous works, whereas the latter, as previously pointed out, sets him against the backdrop of European philosophy.

In other words, the scope of research extends beyond Ortega and the School of Madrid to include his relationships with students like José Gaos, María Zambrano, and Julián Marías, as mentioned earlier, together with those whose thoughts he repelled, with whom he argued, and whose point

<sup>2</sup>One can also remember many other works dedicated to the thought of Jose Ortega-y-Gasset and written by Julián Marías.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Perez Borbujo, 2010.

of view he shared. Among them, of course, the German thinkers stand out significantly. Attentive readers of Ortega may immediately think of the comparison and polemic with Martin Heidegger, and they will not be mistaken. However, in addition to Heidegger, much attention is paid in this work to considering the philosophy of Kant, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Nietzsche, and especially Husserl, a passion for whose ideas by Ortega is noticeable even in the first pages of this study (Villacañas Berlanga, 2023: 34). Nevertheless, it would be unwise to deny the importance of the comparison of Ortega and Heidegger's philosophies; therefore, this is the first key point to analyse. They have been measured against one another before; what's more, Ortega usually writes in his works that he states some things before Heidegger even expresses them. However, within the framework of this study, it is possible to trace how two such different thinkers began to present similar ideas within their philosophical systems.

In addition, it is important to draw attention to the structure of this work. The text is divided into four parts, and, as mentioned above, contains twenty-one chapters. Each part summarizes a stage of Ortega's life: "The European Workshop," "Ten Years of Idealism," "Deployment of the Vital Reason and the Announcement of a Storm," and "Under the Pressure of Forging the System." The following is a brief review of each part.

The first, "El taller europeo" ("The European Workshop"), deals with the very early stage of Ortega's life, his first trips to Germany, to Leipzig and Berlin, then to Marburg, where he learned about the work of Cohen and Natorp. At the same time, what is thought to be his first encounter with Husserl's phenomenology took place; even so, as José Luis Villacañas points out,

if Ortega read Husserl around 1911 after the publication of *Ideas*, however, I believe that little was noticed in his philosophical studies.<sup>4</sup>

This is a fundamental thesis in the study of Ortega's thought because it shows that his convergence with phenomenology did not occur suddenly, but instead through a chain of successive changes.

In the second, "Diez años de idealismo" ("Ten Years of Idealism") the author examines one of the critical periods in Ortega's life, which marked his formation as an independent thinker. It begins with "Meditations on Quixote," published in 1914, moves on to describe his first trip to Argentina,

<sup>4</sup>Villacañas Berlanga, 2023: 156: "si Ortega leyó a Husserl hacia 1911 tras la publicación de *Ideas*, sin embargo creo que se notó poco en su producción filosófica".

where he achieved incredible success and first philosophical fame through publications in his father's newspaper, the famous Spanish *El Espectador*, and concludes in two texts of utmost importance, *España invertebrada* (1921) and *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923). These are imperative to understanding the third part of the book, especially where the author considers the republican period of Ortega's life. Once more, a connection is established between the texts of the philosopher which can be referred to the field of political theory and those that focus more on ontology.

In the third part, "Despliegue de la razón vital y el anuncio de tormenta" ("Deployment of Vital Reason and the Announcement of a Storm") José Luis Villacañas draws a parallel between the development of Ortegian thought and the impact of the new political reality on its author. It is worth noting here that Ortega's republican stage is divided by the researcher into two partially overlapping parts: 1927–1931 and 1929–1935. This division is interesting mainly because it is, among other things, an essential statement in which Ortega's theory of rational-vitalism is not entirely isolated from the political context of the time, but intersects with it and derives directly from it.

The last part, "Bajo la presión de forjar el sistema" ("Under the Pressure of Forging the System"), is dedicated to a prolonged period of thirty-three years. During this time, Ortega tried to shape a philosophical system from everything that constituted his thought. It should be noted that, although he began to publish quite early, with first notes appearing in the newspaper *Faro de Vigo* as early as 1902, he lacked what might be termed a "system of thought". In addition, even though he returns repeatedly to concepts that he has considered before, such as the theory of "Ideas and Beliefs", and even revisits some of his earlier statements, he never manages to create a philosophical system as such. However, he perseveres with his attempts to combine his texts in later works, referencing earlier writings and altering the direction of his research, moving, to a greater extent, to the field of sociology.

To summarise, it is almost impossible to compress the material of such a detailed study into a few pages. The work of Professor José Luis Villacañas, *Ortega y Gasset. Una experiencia filosófica española*, examines both Ortega's philosophy and the context in which he found himself in great detail. Although it is a comprehensive study and should be read cover to cover, as the author intended, each of its parts may easily be presented as separate, in-depth, and detailed studies of various stages in the thinker's life and philosophy. In addition, the text not only allows to evaluate Ortega's legacy and his influence on modern thought, but also lets researchers, those who are just getting acquainted with his work as well as his most attentive readers,

to take a new perspective. José Luis Villacañas's findings urge to reconsider previously-encountered problems and to propose new interpretations. This fact alone means that Ortega's philosophy is still alive, engaging, and relevant.

## REFERENCES

- Gracia, J. 2014. *José Ortega y Gasset* [in Spanish]. Madrid: Taurus.
- Marías, J. 1948. *Ortega y Gasset y la idea de razón vital* [in Spanish]. Santander: Antonio Zuñiga.
- Morán, G. 2002. *El maestro en el erial* [in Spanish]. Madrid: Maxi-Tusquets.
- Perez Borbujo, F. 2010. *Tres miradas sobre el Quijote: Unamuno, Ortega, Zambrano* [in Spanish]. Barcelona: Herder Editorial.
- Villacañas Berlanga, J. L. 2023. *Ortega y Gasset: una experiencia filosófica española* [in Spanish]. Madrid: Guillermo Escolar Editor.
- Zamora Bonilla, J., and A. Garrigues Walker. 2022. *Ortega y Gasset: La aventura de la verdad* [in Spanish]. Barcelona: Shackleton Books.

---

*Ustyantsev R. A. [Устьянцев Р. А.] Philosopher in Troubled Times [Философ в трудные времена] : A Review on a Book by José Luis Villacañas [рецензия на книгу Х. Л. Вильяканьяса] // Философия. Журнал Высшей школы экономики. — 2023. — Т. 7, № 4. — P. 289–293.*

---

РОМАН УСТЬЯНЦЕВ

PHD СТУДЕНТ

УНИВЕРСИТЕТ КОМПЛУТЕНСЕ (МАДРИД, ИСПАНИЯ); ORCID: 0009-0008-4737-8373

ФИЛОСОФ В ТРУДНЫЕ ВРЕМЕНА

РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА КНИГУ Х. Л. ВИЛЬЯКАНЬЯСА

VILLACAÑAS BERLANGA J. L. ORTEGA Y GASSET : UNA EXPERIENCIA FILOSÓFICA ESPAÑOLA. — MADRID : GUILLERMO ESCOLAR EDITOR, 2023.

DOI: 10.17323/2587-8719-2023-4-289-293.