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ORTEGA'S NEW PHILOLOGY**

FORAYS INTO SAYING AND SILENCING

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Abstract: This article delves into the philological theory of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, which he himself termed "new philology". His proposal for philological reform, seen as a necessary precursor to the resurgence of a new philosophy—one that in his thought would be the philosophy of vital and historical reason,—centers around the problematics of "saying authentically" and silencing. These two components of speech are only clarified and revitalized considering two factors: the biographical intentionality of the speaker and the vital, historical, and circumstantial context. This article aims to reconstruct the "biographical archaeology of saying authentically and silencing" present in Ortega's philosophy.

Keywords: Ortega, New Philology, Speech, Silence, Language.

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Then he climbed a tree. Pure transcendence! Oh, sing Orpheus!

High tree in the ear! And everything fell silent. Yet even in that silence, a new beginning arose, a sign and transformation.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Los sonetos a Orfeo*

Ernst. — Everything I can conceive of, I am capable of expressing in words.

Falk. — Not always, and often, at least, not in such a way that others derive from my words exactly the same concept that I have.

Lessing, *Ernst y Falk. Diálogo para francmasones*

ORTEGA AND LANGUAGE

The philosopher José Ortega y Gasset thought and wrote about almost everything, even turning Spain and Europe into philosophical problems.

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The Spanish philosopher reflected on words, on the limitations of saying, on what remained latent in silence and on the importance of not only what we say, but also how we say things, for the emergence of a “new philosophy.”

The form of the language through which we approach philosophy — its metaphors, the context it refers to, and its etymologies — is significant for restoring and rooting philosophy in life and connecting it to its historicity.¹ This is the effort Ortega undertook with his proposal of a Nueva Filología, conceived as a propaedeutic for the new philosophy of vital and historical reason.²

Ortega's presence and influence in philosophical studies have largely been confined to questions of ethics, politics, or metaphysics; however, his ideas on language have been less acknowledged. Francisco José Martín, in his book *La tradición velada. Ortega y el pensamiento humanista*, and Concha D'Olhaberriague, in *El pensamiento lingüístico de José Ortega y Gasset*, have had the sensitivity to study Ortega's reflections on language.³

In my view, the two major concerns for Ortega, beginning with the existential exile he experienced starting in 1932 and which became more pressing following his geopolitical exile in 1936 due to the Civil War, are: language — or the problem and difficulty of transmitting an idea justly — and the programmatic development of historical reason. The first of these concerns led him to think and write about two fundamental topics related to language: what translation is and how to translate without falsifying the original (see his 1937 book *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción* (Ortega y Gasset, 1937a)); and the new philology, or the question of authentic saying.⁴

¹The reader should recall that this is the philosophical turn that Ortega explicitly announced in 1923 with the publication of *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, when he stated that “la razón pura debía dejar paso a la razón vital,” and, in *Las Atlántidas*, he argued that it is imbued with “sentido histórico,” that is, it is historical reason.

²The nueva filología is the precedent, sometimes direct and other times indirect, of the hermeneutics of Gadamer or Ricoeur, the linguistic turn of Austin and Searle, the Cambridge School of Quentin Skinner, and the conceptual history of the Bielefeld School of Koselleck. A study on the presence of Ortega's ideas in these currents can be found in Balaguer García, 2025.

³There are other studies that delve into Ortega's exploration of language, such as Carriazo & Gaztelumendi, 2005; Cruz Cruz, 1975; Senabre, 1964; Siles, 2018

The latter article is particularly relevant, because Siles demonstrates the early interest that a young Ortega had in philology and his hesitant steps regarding whether to make it his occupation. On this subject, some of his letters can be read in Ortega y Gasset, 1991 (“entre tanto voyme metiendo serenamente por la filología y la lingüística” *ibid.*: 599).

⁴The philosophy and art of translation was also a topic that occupied Walter Benjamin, who held some theses similar to those of Ortega on this subject in his writings *La tarea del*

In the *Prólogo a una edición de sus Obras* from 1932 (Ortega y Gasset, 1932), Ortega already warned that his actions and philosophy were shifting towards a “second navigation” (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν, a term he borrowed from Plato’s *Phaedo*, 99d) so that “my future work would consist primarily of forging books” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. v, 99). Ortega already had in mind that these two books would be *Aurora de la razón histórica*, his philosophical book, and *El hombre y la gente*, his sociological book, which remained unpublished. He announced them on numerous occasions: in a footnote in the *Prólogo para franceses* from May 1937 (Ortega y Gasset, 1937b); he confided in his friend Ernst Robert Curtius, in a letter dated December 3, 1937, that two major books constituting a philosophical system should have been published four years earlier; and in the *Prólogo* to *Ideas y Creencias* from 1940, he stated that for five years he had been “in labor with two substantial books that condense my work from the previous two decades” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. v, 657).

The most relevant mention of the forthcoming publication of these books in relation to our topic — the *nueva filología* — is found in a letter Ortega wrote to his German translator, Helene Weyl, on January 30, 1937. In the letter, he outlined the four chapters that would make up *Aurora de la razón histórica*:

All this gives a first and rough expression to a systematic set of ideas that constitute the second chapter of *Aurora*, which would consist of four chapters, as follows.

- (1) *Aurora de la razón histórica* (The full development of what was anticipated in *Historia como sistema*);
- (2) *Ideas y creencias* (Which includes what was said in the essay by the same title, along with its continuation in *mundos interiores*);
- (3) *Principios de una Nueva Filología*;
- (4) *El método de las generaciones* (Märtens, ed., 2008: 197).

The development of the *Principios de una Nueva Filología* was part of the program of historical reason, the dawn of a new philosophy that grounded reason in its vitality and circumstantiality. This program was not systematically developed, and the chapter on the *nueva filología* is scattered across other texts that Ortega wrote “while moving from one thing to another.” However, Ortega was fully aware of the centrality of philology to

traductor and *Sobre el lenguaje en cuanto tal y sobre el lenguaje del hombre*. The relationship between Ortega and Benjamin regarding translation has been addressed in Balaguer García, 2023: 134–146.

philosophy. Thus, he continues in the letter, stating that a *Nueva Filología* is “required as a technique of history that allows us to think about human reality in its variability and circumstantiality. This technique, ultimately, acquires its most concrete tool in the rigorous method that, properly understood, is represented by the idea of generations” (Märtens, ed., 2008). The *nueva filología* is a method of historical reason because philosophy needs language to express the precise word (Plato had called this the “logographic necessity” in the *Phaedrus*).

John T. Graham, in his book *Theory of History in Ortega y Gasset. The Dawn of Historical Reason*, argues that Ortega’s theory is threefold: it is a philosophy of life, a philosophy of history, and a philosophy of the social, which includes a philosophy of language. It is “unity in plurality,” which would have come to light in his most significant work, *Aurora de la razón histórica* (Graham, 1997: x).

Ortega y Gasset is not a philosopher of language; he does not have a fundamentalist or radical theory of linguistic forms for philosophy. Instead, Ortega has a philosophy of saying and silencing, which he explains through the concept he coined as *nueva filología*. Ortega explores, repairs, and examines the “biography of saying.” I deliberately use this expression to indicate that the linguistic diction of thoughts and ideas housed in the human mind is not merely the sum of words whose union completes a meaning. Rather, this meaning is unveiled in the emergent gaze of a life that acts and speaks in a specific vital, historical, and conceptual context — that of the here and now. *Alétheia* was the name the Greeks gave to philosophy, Truth as unveiling.

In *Del Imperio Romano*, Ortega presents the key idea that allows words to be revitalized since words in the dictionary are mere empty, potential meanings:

The authentic meaning of a word depends, like all things human, on the circumstances. In the act of speaking — that is, of understanding one another verbally — what we call a language is merely an ingredient, the relatively stable ingredient that needs to be completed by the vital scene in which it is used.⁵

Ortega was an avid reader of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics and the linguistics of German Romanticism, as represented by Humboldt. Between 1805 and 1819, Schleiermacher published the three volumes of his *Teoría Hermenéutica*, and in 1836, Humboldt published *Über die Verschiedenheit*

⁵ *Del Imperio Romano*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. VI, 87.

des menschlichen Sprachbaus und seinen Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts (Humboldt, 1836) in a political-historical context of transition towards the construction of state-nation models — the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 and the Second Reich in 1871. The ideas of unification drew from German Romanticism, including Kant, Herder, Fichte, or Hegel,⁶ and were based on the predominance of language as the most decisive historical fact of the human being, an expression of the *Volksgeist*. Fichte, in his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808), had said that language was “the soul of the people.”

Between May and June of 1937, Ortega published a series of six articles on translation in *La Nación* of Buenos Aires, later compiled in the *Obras Completas* under the same title he gave them: *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción*. The third part, *Sobre el hablar y el callar*, is fundamental for reconstructing the *nueva filología*, but we will not dwell on it now and instead continue our navigation toward translation. In the fifth installment, *El esplendor*, Ortega turns to Schleiermacher and his book *Sobre los diferentes modos de traducción* (Schleiermacher, 1813) as a key authority to clarify the true task of translation.

Schleiermacher represents the utopia of translation because his hermeneutics allowed for understanding the social and linguistic context of a communicative act, enabling its comprehension and translation. Translation should not be voluptuous or beautiful, but must bring the reader closer to the author’s environment, recovering the nascent state of their expression. “Only a Platonic translation has been truly fertile,” Ortega says, referring to Schleiermacher’s approach.⁷ This praise is significant: translating from Greek is not easy, as much of the political terminology we use remains uncertain in its meaning, and returning to etymology is the only way to clarify things somewhat. Thus, translation does not require “literary elegance,” Ortega argues, but rather etymological rigor and precision.

Ortega came to Schleiermacher through Dilthey⁸ while studying in Berlin in 1906. At that time, Dilthey was no longer lecturing at the university, but Ortega, eager to absorb the German thinker’s teachings, sought out his works. The first he read was a historical-biographical book, *Biografía de Schleiermacher* (Dilthey, 1870).

⁶See Berlin, Silvina, 2021; Safranski, 2009. To delve into the impact and influence of German Romanticism on Western thought, see Wulf, 2022.

⁷*Miseria y esplendor de la traducción*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. v, 723.

⁸See Ortega’s article, *Guillermo Dilthey y la idea de vida*, *ibid.*: Vol. vi, 227, published in *Revista de Occidente* between 1933–1934.

References to Humboldt appear throughout Ortega's works, but perhaps the most significant are those related to language in the *Prólogo para franceses* (1937) and his course *El hombre y la gente* [Course of 1949–1950]. Of Humboldt, Ortega says he is “the man who perhaps had the greatest sensitivity to the reality of ‘language’”.⁹

Likewise, the Spanish philosopher paid attention to the linguistic turn of the 20th century, which philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Benjamin explored. Language was no longer conceived merely as an instrument for communication, but was linked to human experience materialized in its temporality and circumstantiality.¹⁰

In my view, the fundamental coordinate in Ortega's transfusion of philosophy and philology lies in Nietzsche, who, in *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder: Griechentum und Pessimismus*, proposes philology as the propaedeutic to philosophy.¹¹ In *Morgenröte. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile*, Nietzsche demands learning to “read well” (*sie lehrt gut lesen, das heißt langsam, tief, rüch*) with eyes wide open like Minerva's owl, because only then can an attentive reader grasp a text's true content.¹²

Ortega was a master of titling his writings. It is no coincidence that his planned book on historical reason, *Aurora de la razón histórica*, into which he considered including a chapter on *Nueva Filología*, carries Nietzschean echoes in its title. *Aurora* is the dawn and birth of something new.

The correspondence Ortega maintained with the philologist and Romanist Curtius between 1923 and 1954¹³ illustrates Ortega's awareness of the need for philology — that is, paying attention to language, its etymologies, and metaphors — in order to practice philosophy properly. The most relevant letters are those Ortega sent in 1937 and 1938, during his Parisian exile. In them, Ortega told the German scholar that there was continuity between

⁹*El hombre y la gente. [Curso de 1949–1950]*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IX, 735. In the *Prólogo para franceses*, see the reference to Humboldt on *ibid.*: Vol. IV, 362.

¹⁰Andrea Stella has an interesting study on the subject in Stella, 2016.

¹¹On the reception of Nietzsche by the Generation of '98 and '14, see these two suggestive contributions: Martín, 2016; Sobejano, 2009

Additionally, Jesús Conill has dedicated studies to tracing Nietzsche's influence on Ortega: Conill, 2015; 2019.

This relationship has also been studied by Javier Zamora Bonilla in *Pensando con Ortega y Nietzsche*, in Zamora Bonilla, 2023.

¹²Friedrich Nietzsche, *Aurora. Pensamientos acerca de los prejuicios morales*; Nietzsche, Aspiunza et al., 2014: 489.

¹³Part of the correspondence has been published in Ortega y Gasset, 1974. The rest of the unpublished letters can be consulted in the Archive of the Fundación.

the philological and philosophical realms (Ortega y Gasset, 1974: 106–107), manifested through the most radical question a philosopher and philologist must ask to understand the written word of a text: *What does it mean to read a book?* Ortega begins his 1935 piece, *Misión del bibliotecario*, with this same question, concluding that speaking is a *Handlung*, an action we perform when we speak, carrying the intentionality of the speaker. This idea, repeated in his letters to Curtius — that a text reveals its latent true meaning when we understand it as the vital task of the author, who deliberately chose the form and intention of every precise word — is what Ortega understood as *Nueva Filología*.

PRINCIPLES AND LIMITATIONS OF A NEW PHILOLOGY

The origin of the *nueva filología* lies in the discovery of life as a radical reality during the 1930s. For Ortega, life is the sole reality from which all others are uncovered, and whatever life might be, it is undoubtedly something “we must create” in a specific *here and now*. Life is a task that unfolds in the temporality of the present, establishing the foundation for questioning the unique and non-transferable function — like life itself — that the *nueva filología* should hold.

If philosophy was to be rooted in life, as Ortega demanded in *El tema de nuestro tiempo* in 1923, it was imperative to understand life through its historicity and also linguistically. Vital reason is historical reason, and it is also philological reason. The categories of historical reason, which are the natural unfolding of the categories of vital reason, are linked to the *nueva filología*: in the temporality of history, generations express their ideas and beliefs with the available conceptual constellation. In other words, “saying” finds its expression within a specific life and circumstance.

The *nueva filología* emerged in the biographical context of Ortega’s “second navigation” in 1932.¹⁴ With this Platonic metaphor, mentioned in the *Prólogo* to the compilation of his *Obras* for Espasa-Calpe, Ortega took up the oars of his philosophical ship to navigate away from political deadlock and to chart new routes aimed at grounding philosophy in life and connecting it to history. This year marked the beginning of Ortega’s existential exile, as he withdrew from direct politics by leaving the Agrupación al Servicio de

¹⁴Regarding the intellectual biography of Ortega, the most notable is Zamora Bonilla, 2002. He has also published a shorter biography that explores the main ideas of his philosophy in *Ortega y Gasset. La aventura de la verdad* (Zamora Bonilla, 2022). Another more recent biography, though delving less deeply into the philosopher’s thought, is Gracia, 2014.

la República and resigning his position as a deputy—his political silence—and shifted his focus to writing a systematic philosophy in book form.

The second navigation represents an external rupture, distancing himself from his public intellectual role in Spain and maintaining a stance of “silence” on Spanish political affairs. It also marks an internal rupture, as a philosopher who, preoccupied with the backstage of his political circumstance, had neglected the tranquility required for philosophical thought. Notably, the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927 inspired Ortega to write a book that systematically articulated his philosophy. One of these books, *Aurora*, as previously mentioned, contained his theory of a *nueva filología*.

Ortega's existential exile was far from silent.¹⁵ Rather than addressing politics, Ortega turned to the dictum of philosophy, which is question and dialogue. The supposed silence of this exile aligns with Cervantine irony: language itself imposes unavoidable silences.

We do not have a programmatic theory of the *nueva filología* compiled in a book akin to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Ortega never completed the exposition of his philosophical reform, leaving only the foundational principles. If a work of art consists of many brushstrokes by the painter, the *nueva filología* is glimpsed through the black ink strokes Ortega left while writing about historical reason, translation, the art of Velázquez and Goya, sociology, or warning against totalitarianism in *La rebelión de las masas*.

To reconstruct the theory of the *nueva filología*, we must read what is latent and patent, “between the lines,” as Leo Strauss would say, in Ortega's books, courses, and lectures after 1932. Francisco José Martín notes that Ortega's early writings on language date to the 1920s and are situated within the development of vital reason (Francisco, 1999: 295). In *Las Atlántidas* (1924) and the text *Sobre la expresión, fenómeno cósmico* (1925),

¹⁵On this topic, see the second section of Chapter I and Chapter III dedicated to Ortega's alter egos in my book (Balaguer García, 2023). The thesis I propose is that the supposed posture of silence on Ortega's part is nonexistent. Ortega left his daily participation in the journalistic tribune to write his “systematic philosophy,” in which the problem of Europe—no longer Spain—remains present.

The issue of Ortega's “silence” has been a topic to which researchers of his thought have devoted various writings. “Levo doce años de silencio,” Ortega stated in 1945, that is, since his departure from Spanish politics in 1933. Some researchers have considered that Ortega maintained an active silence because he had nothing more to say, nor an audience to address. Along these lines, Pedro Cerezo Galán argued in his book (Cerezo Galán, 2000) that Ortega had died as an intellectual. Others have considered that his silence was legitimate and that he would have spoken had his soul not been at risk of corruption. José Lasaga Medina maintains that there was indeed a political silence.

Ortega reflects on words and their sense, linking them to bodily expression: “The word we hear is nothing more than noise; [...] what we understand is the meaning or sense it expresses, that it represents”.¹⁶ In Ortega’s first philosophical approach to the problem of language, he discovers that words do not signify in isolation, but form part of a system of relations tied to an expressive organism, the human being, a concrete life.

In 1935, Ortega delivered the lecture *Misión del bibliotecario*, which began with a fundamental question for philosophy: *What does it mean to read a book?* Here we find the first ideas about saying as a doing, *Handlung*, of the human being. Ortega continued to deepen this idea in the lecture *El hombre y la gente*, which he gave in Rotterdam in 1936.

The *nueva filología* is meaningful because much of the transmission of our *cultura animi* — to use Cicero’s term for philosophy — occurs through the artifact of the book. Is it possible to engage in dialogue with the written word of a book? How can we understand the ideas contained in a book, the lifeless words that have lost the energetic charge granted by the author during the creative, poietic act of saying? These questions are already present in Ortega’s early lectures and form the foundation of a *Teoría del Decir* that underpins the *nueva filología*.

In the Rotterdam lecture, Ortega stated:

Language is, by essence, dialogue, and all other forms of speaking diminish its efficacy. For this reason, the book, in its millenary evolution, tends to increasingly become a hidden dialogue. It is essential for the reader to rediscover their individuality as envisioned by the author and feel as though an ectoplasmic hand emerges from between the lines to touch them — whether to caress them or, very courteously, give them a punch.¹⁷

In 1937, with *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción* and in a 1938 letter to Curtius, Ortega presented a study of language from the perspective of philosophy. However, the first explicit expression of this linguistic reform, termed *nueva filología*, came with the publication of the *Prólogo para franceses* in *La rebelión de las masas* (1937). During his exile in Argentina in 1939, he outlined the principles of a *nueva filología* in *Meditación del pueblo joven*. From this context of exile, his reflections on the *nueva filología* and the relevance of language became increasingly prominent in writings such as *El hombre y la gente. [Curso de 1939-1940]* in Buenos Aires, the

¹⁶*Sobre la expresión, fenómeno cósmico, El espectador VII*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. II, 681.

¹⁷*El hombre y la gente. [Conferencia en Rotterdam]*; *ibid.*: Vol. IX, 204.

prospectus for the *Instituto de Humanidades* (1948), where he called for a more radical linguistic investigation termed *Teoría del Decir*, *Goethe sin Weimar* (1949), which subtly references the foundational principle of the *nueva filología*, Velázquez (1950), and the *Prólogo a la Historia de la filosofía* by Émile Bréhier (1942). These last two works specifically identify the principles that constitute the *nueva filología*.

The three contributions that bring the most clarity to the concept are *Apuntes para un comentario al Banquete de Platón* (1946), the *El hombre y la gente* course [1949–1950], taught at the *Instituto de Humanidades*, which Ortega founded upon returning from exile alongside his disciple Julián Marías, and his 1938 letter to Curtius. Among these, the courses on *El hombre y la gente* are particularly significant for tracing his linguistic theory. Notably, while the concept of *nueva filología* and its central principle do not explicitly appear in these early lectures of the second navigation, they do surface in the 1949 course.

The *nueva filología* introduces two transformative ideas concerning our relationship with books or any discourse, oral or written. These contributions can be summarized as follows:

Saying as Handlung: This refers to intentionality, the origin of choice, and context. It can be encapsulated by the Latin phrase *Eadem sed aliter* (the same things, but differently). Each person's life is bound to a context, which continuously changes, becoming this or that, always distinct and varied. Context, also subject to the contingency of time, appears to show the same things, but always through the halo of new forms. Context is both historical and linguistic. Life, as it unfolds in different contexts, is distinct in each one. The historical nature of context lies in the past from which we project our lives toward a future — like archers — preserving three temporalities in the present, which is our actuality.¹⁸ It may seem that we say the same things; however, they are always different, because the speaker's intentionality and circumstance are distinct at each moment.

Silence as the Enabler of Language: Saying requires silence, which gives rise to a *Teoría del Decir* and a *Teoría del Silenciar*. These can be summarized by the phrase *Duo si idem dicunt non est idem* (if two say the same thing, it is no longer the same).

¹⁸Koselleck has called this temporality the *espacio de experiencia* and the *horizonte de expectativa*, which are two historical categories in Koselleck, Smilg, 1993: 334.

The foundational principle of the *nueva filología*, from which two secondary principles derive, is a Latin phrase that first appeared in the *Prólogo para franceses* of 1937:

Too often, we forget that every authentic saying not only says something but is also said by someone to someone. In every saying, there is a speaker and a listener, who are not indifferent to the meaning of the words. This meaning changes as they change. *Duo si idem dicunt non est idem*. Every word is situational. Language is, by essence, dialogue, and all other forms of speaking diminish its efficacy. This is why I believe that a book is good only to the extent that it brings us a latent dialogue, where we feel that the author can concretely imagine their reader and that the reader perceives as if an ectoplasmic hand emerges from the lines to touch them, seeking to caress them.¹⁹

Ortega, well-versed in the Greco-Roman world, adapted the original phrase from Terence's *Adelphoe* (*The Brothers*), introducing a variation: from Terence's *faciunt* to Ortega's *dicunt*. The original phrase reads: *Duo cum faciunt idem non est idem* (when two do the same thing, it is not the same). Ortega's adaptation is: *Duo si idem dicunt non est idem* (if two say the same thing, it is no longer the same).

Let us examine this statement in greater depth. Our knowledge of reality is mediated linguistically; that is, we think with a specific linguistic and conceptual structure that socializes us, as language is a social practice. Human beings are embedded in a linguistic structure from birth, and thus, to grasp the significant charge that language imbues in words and concepts, one must do so from within human and social life itself. Historical reason is inseparable from the linguistic dimension because all thought is expressed through concepts and words imbued with the significance they carry in their historical time. However, not only what we say is relevant, but also what we hide and silence—whether deliberately or unconsciously.

If two people say the same thing, it will by no means signify the same, because each projects this act of saying from their specific perspective, addressing a particular interlocutor and situated in a specific context. In other words, the significance of saying changes depending on the subjective position we occupy as speakers. As Ortega says, every concept is occasional, and its authentic meaning is unveiled when understood as an action *in statu nascendi* in response to a circumstance.

To illustrate this idea, consider Borges's story, *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*. Pierre Menard is a writer who wants to rewrite *Don Quixote*

¹⁹*Prólogo para franceses*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IV, 350.

word for word and event by event: “His admirable ambition was to produce pages that would coincide — word for word and line for line — with those of Miguel de Cervantes.”

Borges explains that the method was straightforward: “To know Spanish well, recover the Catholic faith, fight against the Moors or the Turk, forget the history of Europe between 1602 and 1918, and be Miguel de Cervantes” (Borges, 1944).

Menard soon realizes that this task is impossible because even recovering Cervantes’s historical and biographical context would not enable him to say the same thing. Menard is already another self with his particular perspective.

Ortega understood saying as an action that arises in response to a situation; therefore, ideas and words only have full meaning when they fulfill their mission within the framework of an individual’s existence and activity. In the *Prólogo a la Historia de la filosofía, de Émile Bréhier* (1942), Ortega critiques the *History of Eternal and Universal Ideas*, which represents the “canon” of authors and “classic texts” supposedly containing a “timeless wisdom” that transcends the space and time in which they were produced: “There are no eternal ideas. Ideas are tied to the circumstances in which they occur; the integrity of an idea becomes clear when we see it in action”.²⁰

Ideas, according to Ortega, are actions that are unveiled in their nascent moment and are associated with a context. He continues: “The real situation from which one speaks or writes is the general context of all expression. [...] An idea is always a reaction of a person to a specific situation in their life. [...] Thinking is a dialogue with circumstance”.²¹

The etymology of *eidos* no longer refers to form or vision; Ortega uses the concept to connect to the action and reaction that emerge in the dialogue we establish with circumstance to understand our present. Only by reorienting the saying trapped in the timelessness of memory and writing toward its nascent coordinate — only by recovering it *in statu nascendi* — can we restore its authentic meaning. Every text is a fragment of a context. A text requires the body that speaks and gestures — in other words, life

²⁰ *Prólogo a la Historia de la Filosofía, de Émile Bréhier*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. VI, 147–148.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 147. The understanding of language as an action by the sender toward the receiver is also upheld by Austin and Searle in their *Teoría de los Actos del habla*. This was one of the first pragmatic theories in the philosophy of language, to which Quentin Skinner has devoted significant attention in his contextualist view of the history of concepts.

and the intentionality of the speaker — and it also requires the available conceptual framework.

For Ortega, there are no eternal ideas. If we disregard the circumstance or context that produces an idea, we are left at best with a vague conception of it. A history of ideas is impossible because ideas do not have history; rather, it is the people — those who speak, sustain, and even die for those ideas — who have history.

In contrast to the view of eternal ideas, Ortega considers ideas in their nascent state, emerging and being executed in their context. In this way, he finds a path to resolve the crisis of Modernity. Ideas are circumstantial, active, and performative, making it possible to speak only of a *History of Concrete Ideas*.

The defense of concrete and contextual ideas establishes the foundation for the *nueva filología*, which the philosopher expressed as follows in the *Prólogo a la Historia de la Filosofía...*:

Here is the first principle of a “new philology”: *an idea is an action* that a person performs in view of a specific circumstance and with a precise purpose. If, in seeking to understand an idea, we disregard the circumstance that provoked it and the intention that inspired it, we are left with only a vague and abstract outline of it. This vague or skeletal framework of the actual idea is precisely what is often called an “idea,” because it is what is understood without further context, what seems to have an omnipresent and “absolute” meaning. But the idea does not possess its authentic content, its proper and precise “meaning,” except by fulfilling the active role or function for which it was conceived, and this role or function is what makes it an action in response to a circumstance.²²

As early as 1935, Ortega wrote *Misión del bibliotecario*, exploring questions such as what it means to read a book and what kind of dialogue can be established with the written word to understand what has been said and captured on paper. This inquiry marked the beginning of the foundation for the *nueva filología*.

Books are written sayings that contain a vital act within their pages, and to return this fixed writing to life, it must be brought back to its nascent state. Reading a book is an act of life, and to understand it, one must return to the birth of its words — to the life in which they germinated.

To read a book, it is not enough to understand what it says; one must also understand why it says so — what the author’s intentionality was in

²²Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010 [the italics are Ortega’s].

that act of writing. Philosophy is only possible if we are willing to maintain a dialogue with the book, restoring its act to its original state.

Ortega believed that linguistics—whether phonetic, grammatical, or lexical—had studied language incorrectly by treating it as an abstraction already formed. For Ortega, however, the study of language held value only if understood as part of a life or, put differently, if one studied saying in its emergent moment, in *enérgēia*, or, in Ortega's words, *in statu nascendi*. Reforming this “cadaverous linguistics” is the mission of the *nueva filología*.

Ortega formulated the two principles of a *nueva filología* derived from the Latin principle in *Apuntes para un comentario al Banquete de Platón* (1946). These principles reappear in 1950, in the context of painting, in *La reviviscencia de los cuadros*, where Ortega also considers painting, like music and poetry, as a form of saying that consists within the act of a human being. However, as early as 1942, in the *Prólogo a la Historia de la Filosofía, de Émile Bréhier*, a less explicit formulation of both principles and the centrality of silence appears:

...Language is inherently ambiguous. No saying simply says what it intends to say. It expresses only a small fraction of what it aims to convey; the rest it merely implies or “takes for granted.” [...] What we articulate relies on countless things we leave unsaid. Language exists thanks to the possibility of reticence, and what we actually express lives off “what is left unsaid but assumed” (Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: 146–147).

For Ortega, language has limits: it is illusory to believe that we can say everything we think. Saying has inherent constraints that increase as the subject matter becomes more human, abstract, or complex, approaching the realm of *pathos*. We say less than we intend and, paradoxically, imply more than we planned. Our saying inhabits two worlds: the patent world and the latent world, the latter composed of silences—what we do not say in order to speak effectively.

The explicit definition of the two principles is as follows:

“Reading” begins by meaning the project of fully understanding a text. However, this is impossible. At best, with great effort, we can extract a more or less significant portion of what the text intended to say, communicate, or declare, but there will always remain an “unreadable” residue. Conversely, it is likely that, in making this effort, we will also read things in the text—understand things the author did not “intend” to say, but nevertheless communicated, revealing them involuntarily or even against their determined will. This dual nature of speech, so strange and antithetical, is formalized in two principles of my *Axiomatics for a New Philology*, which are as follows:

1. All saying is deficient — it says less than it intends;
2. All saying is exuberant — it conveys more than it intends.²³

The two principles of saying in a *nueva filología* simultaneously outline two limitations of saying. How, then, is understanding between speaker and listener possible? Verbal action, Ortega explains in *Origen de la filosofía*, is rooted in a common subsoil from which we think: a shared foundation of ideas and beliefs that allow us to think and express ourselves. This he described in *La idea de principio en Leibniz y la evolución de la teoría deductiva* as a form of “subthinking.”

These principles coexist in apparent contradiction, yet they are not mutually exclusive. Instead, tacit assumptions enable understanding. The principles of the *nueva filología* reform traditional linguistics by emphasizing that every text, idea, concept, or saying is inherently contextual and part of a life. Detached from that life, it cannot be understood — it becomes, in essence, *bio-graphy*. Ortega remarked in his *Notas de Trabajo* on Descartes that understanding a text means “intimating with a great spirit”.²⁴ Molinuevo suggests that Ortega’s philosophy should be studied as a *modus dicendi* — that is, a text is not just accompanied by context; it *is* context and the situation of a life (Molinuevo, 1992: 93).

Ortega understood that:

Verbal saying “responds” to the situation of the speakers, to which they react with established words from their language and with bodily gestures. Language, therefore, is the system of these three elements: situation-language-gesture.²⁵

Understanding a saying that is both deficient and exuberant requires context, a conceptual framework, and the intentionality of living gesture. The author’s intentionality is critical for unveiling the latent meaning between the lines of a text because, as Skinner observed, language has a performative character — it can transform reality and even ideologies. To whom the text is addressed, the type of reader or interlocutor imagined, and the action the text performs in response to a context, are aspects to consider when approaching a text. However, the difficulty of speaking is compounded by

²³*Apuntes para un comentario al Banquete de Platón*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IX, 729.

²⁴See *Notas de Trabajo* by Ortega preserved in the Archivo Ortega of the Fundación José Ortega y Gasset — Gregorio Marañón in Madrid, in the folder *Discours de la Méthode*, subfolder *Nueva Filología: qué es leer un libro*, reference 19/15.

²⁵*Apuntes para un comentario al Banquete de Platón*; *ibid.*: Vol. IX, 756.

a limitation inherent to language itself: silence, the reticence to not say everything in order to say something. To say anything at all, we must silence everything else.

Ortega writes:

In speaking or writing, we renounce saying many things because language does not allow us to. Ah, but then the effectiveness of speech is not only to say, to manifest, but at the same time, it is inexorably to renounce saying, to remain silent, to silence!²⁶

Only the speaker capable of renouncing and silencing much of what they wish to communicate can speak authentically. For Ortega, language is created in the amputation of speech.

Ortega's *Teoría del Decir*, as proposed through the *nueva filología*, is understood by addressing the questions: what is a book, and what does it mean to read a book? Books are “written sayings” (λογους γεγραμμένους, *Phaedrus* 275c), Ortega writes in *Misión del bibliotecario*, recovering this idea from Plato's dialogue. In *Phaedrus*, Plato recounts the myth of writing as told by Theuth and Thamus: writing requires the fixing of words in a book, but writing ultimately undermines memory, which is non-transferable and intrinsic to the person. A “collective memory” is, in Ortega's view, a contradiction in terms. Speech is fleeting, susceptible to the passage of time; however, humans can retain some of it through memory. Writing, therefore, is the “most enduring act” of retaining spoken information in memory. A book is thus a written saying, created with intent. For Ortega, a book is a vital act, and its words, speech and silences are inseparable from the situation in life in which they arise.

A book or text, as written speech, must be understood in its dual complexity of deficiency and exuberance, as well as in its latent silences. Ortega identifies two types of silence that limit conversation:

1. *Active silence*: A deliberate renunciation by the author, where they select what to express and leave other elements unspoken, trusting the listener to understand these through context (*inefado*—conscious reticence);
2. *Passive silence*: What remains unspoken because language assumes a shared understanding among speakers, a common foundation from which dialogue is possible (*inefabilidad*).

In Ortega's words:

²⁶ *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. v, 716.

We can summarize this first condition of language as follows: language is always limited by a boundary of ineffability. This limitation consists of what absolutely cannot be said in any language.

But on top of this, there is a second limitation: everything that language could say but that each language silences, expecting the listener to infer and add it themselves. This silence is of a different level than the first—it is not absolute but relative; it does not stem from fatal ineffability but from a conscious economy. In contrast to ineffability, I call this conscious reticence of language the *inefado*.²⁷

In 1941, Leo Strauss, after arriving in the United States from exile, published an article in *Social Research* titled *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Strauss, 1941).²⁸ Strauss argued that philosophy must often be read “between the lines,” as this “silenced” type of writing enables the transmission of heterodox ideas. Persecution, Strauss claimed, leads to a “logographic necessity,” as Plato described in the *Phaedrus*, where meaning resides latently “between the lines,” in Ortega’s terms.

Strauss writes:

Persecution thus gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing and, with it, a peculiar type of literature in which the truth about crucial matters is presented exclusively between the lines. This literature is not addressed to all readers but only to the intelligent and trustworthy ones (Strauss, Lastra & Miranda, 2014: 59).

Philosophy can take an exoteric form, accessible to the public—as Ortega attempted through his journalistic endeavors—or be esoteric. The active and passive silences imposed by language to enable speech reside latently “between the lines.”

Ortega also warns of another limitation of saying: the gestural and expressive actions of the speaker in the nascent and effective act of saying. The meaning of what we say is completed “by the modulations of the voice, the gesture of the face, the gesturing of the limbs, and the total somatic attitude of the person”.²⁹ Gesture is the most immediate impression we receive from another human being; the Other appears to us through gestures, such as the hand extended in greeting.

²⁷*Apuntes para un comentario al Banquete de Platón*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IX, 732.

²⁸Regarding this article by Strauss, Antonio Lastra has pointed out that it is a work of displacement or exile because its author resorted to a different language and, perhaps, a different way of writing philosophy. See Lastra, 2001: 217.

²⁹*Apuntes para un comentario al Banquete de Platón*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IX, 735.

Ineffability, *inefado*, and gesture are three limits imposed by language's need for silence. Yet, this silence has a positive character because it enables dialogue. Silence contains meaningful information that complements saying.

How do we read a book? What is this activity? How do we engage in an honest dialogue with the great books of philosophy and the history of humanity? The *nueva filología* answers this question through the *Teoría del Decir*: the expression of written and oral sayings must be interpreted in the light of the action, context, and silences of a life.

Words are only words when spoken by someone to someone. Only in this way, only functioning as a concrete action, as the living action of one human being upon another, do they have verbal reality. And since the people between whom words are exchanged are human lives, and every life is always situated in a particular circumstance or situation, it is evident that the reality of a "word" is inseparable from the person who speaks it, the person to whom it is spoken, and the situation in which it occurs.³⁰

TOWARD A HERMENEUTICS OF SILENCE

Language is an organism that is made, unmade, and remade from its inception. It is always in the process of becoming and being executed—constantly in gerund—as we use it. In the genesis and development of language, Ortega distinguishes between two ways of using it: *speaking* (*hablar*) and *saying* (*decir*). This linguistic duality reflects the vital reality of human existence, which operates in two spheres: the individual and the collective or social. When we speak, we use a language that is already present and imposed upon us by our social environment. Ortega, a lover of etymologies, delves into them to differentiate between speaking and saying in linguistic acts:

Yes, it is about this: beginning to clarify what happens in the world, to declare it, which is the authentic mission of "saying" (*decir*) and the etymological meaning of this word. The Latins perfectly distinguished between mere *speaking* and formal *saying*. To speak, to prattle, is *loquor*, while *dico* signifies an action with institutional character, one with the solemn and official rank of a function necessary for the community. *Dicere* (*saying*) is a term of religious and legal language, not just any private or journalistic chatter. To say, for instance, is for a magistrate, in the name of the people, to make a promise to the gods or for a citizen to speak before a tribunal. To say, therefore, is to commit oneself to reality, whether

³⁰ *El hombre y la gente [Curso de 1949–1950]*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. v, 299.

divine or natural. It is also for a judge to pronounce a sentence (*ius dicere*) or for the people to designate a man as head of state (*dicere consulem*). Thus, *saying* has a sacramental value, and when other sacraments lost their virtue, “saying” remained to signify the last sacred function without which a community cannot live: to make manifest in words the truth of things, which is always, at first, hidden. Saying, then, is not merely verbalizing but *declaring* the truth, speaking *in form*. Authentic *saying* does not express a private necessity, emotion, or whim but formally conveys a doctrine.³¹

Saying transcends *speaking*. Speaking is the system of verbal uses established by the collective, while the speaker (*diciente*) is the creative individual capable of transcending established usages to express their inner being. Ortega notes that the struggle between personal saying and collective speech is the natural way language exists. Authentic saying has an executive or energetic character; it stands in contrast to inauthentic saying, which merely relies on established linguistic conventions.

Authentic saying, as we have seen, encounters the limitation of silence. To commit to reality and declare or unveil things through saying, we must engage in a voluntary and positive silence. However, language is also utopian—not only because of the hermeneutics inherent in self-imposed silence but also because we cannot be certain that the listener truly understands what we intend to say.

In *Ernst und Falk*, Lessing explores hermeneutics through a dialogue about Freemasonry. When asked what Freemasonry is, Ernst argues that if he knew what it was, he would be able to say it because only what we conceptualize can we express in words. Falk’s reply is simple: “Not always.” Even if one can express it in words, we cannot assume the listener will derive exactly the same concept.

To grasp the authentic meaning of philosophical saying, Ortega emphasizes the need for reform through the *nueva filología*, which ensures proper hermeneutics of a written text. Ortega’s *Teoría del Decir* is, in turn, a *Teoría del Silenciar*, derived from the Latin principle *duo si idem dicunt non est idem*. The *Teoría del Decir* provides a framework for recovering the phenomenon of saying in its nascent state (*status nascens*), as if it were emerging anew at the moment of its genesis, understanding words as the profound actions of a human being in response to their circumstances.

Language, Ortega explains, is the vast system of verbal usages employed in speaking. However, there must also be a science that studies *saying*,

³¹ [Llevo doce años de silencio...]; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IX, 704–705.

grounded in the *Teoría del Decir*, because from its origins, the word holds an almost sacred value as an expression of humanity.³² In both Sanskrit and Greek, the words for “word” or “saying”—*brahman* and *logos*—carry sacred significance. *Brahman* means “expansion” and derives from *Brahma*, the Hindu god of the universe. The *brahman* is the Hindu priest, bearer of the word. *Logos*, which means both “word” and “reason,” was conceptualized in Romance languages as *verbum*, with its Indo-European root likely stemming from *leg*, meaning “to choose.” The *logos* is the selection of the precise word.

The *Teoría del Decir* restores the sacred value of words by understanding saying as an occasional meaning revealed in its nascent state. Philosophy arises when we are willing to return to the birth of words, their etymology, and their use by speakers within their contexts. If we understand the writing of books in this way, the *nueva filología* becomes a propaedeutic for philosophy because philosophy is a system of living actions that can only be clarified in light of the dramatic and tragic dynamism of the author's life.

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³²*La idea de principio en Leibniz y la evolución de la teoría deductiva*; Ortega y Gasset, 2004/2010: Vol. IX, 1026.

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НОВАЯ ФИЛОЛОГИЯ ОРТЕГИ

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ СКАЗАННОГО И НЕСКАЗАННОГО

Получено: 08.10.2024. Рецензировано: 01.12.2024. Принято: 06.12.2024.

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуется филологическая теория испанского философа Хосе Ортеги-и-Гассета, которую он сам называл «новой филологией». Его предложение реформировать филологию, рассматриваемое как необходимая предпосылка для возрождения новой философии — той, которая в его мышлении станет философией жизненного и исторического разума, — сосредоточено вокруг проблематики «подлинного высказывания» и замалчивания. Эти два компонента речи становятся понятными и обновляются только с учетом двух факторов: биографической направленности говорящего и жизненного, исторического и обстоятельного контекста. Цель данной статьи — реконструировать «биографическую археологию подлинного высказывания и замалчивания», присутствующую в философии Ортеги.

Ключевые слова: Ортега, новая филология, высказывание, молчание, язык.

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