

MARÍA NAVAS CARRALERO*

ORTEGA THEN AND NOW**

AN INTRODUCTION TO NAVIGATING
THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIS PHILOSOPHY

PEÑA, C. 2022. *LA ACTUALIDAD DE ORTEGA Y GASSET* [IN SPANISH]. FLASH

DOI: 10.17323/2587-8719-2024-4-218-221.

We can approach Ortega y Gasset's philosophy in many ways: we may start reading it because of the topics he deals with or find ourselves attracted to his writing style... However, the quality of a philosophical work can be measured according to the relevance of the problems it addresses, this is the point of view chosen by Peña González. The author examines the work of the Spanish philosopher, highlighting its relevance in the contemporary world. The book is structured around several thematic axes that illustrate how Ortega's ideas can offer a critical perspective on various current problems.

ORTEGA'S PUBLIC VOCATION

Ortega's work is essentially circumstantial, that is, it is motivated mainly by the events of his time. "Ortega's philosophy is a philosophy exercised in public or, rather, before the public [...] His work is an example of an intellectual work crossed by this dimension of the public" (Peña, Navas, 2022). His connection with this dimension is deliberate and explicit because it is an intellectual and explicit project.

In *Vieja y nueva política* and *La rebellion de las masas*, Ortega advocated for reason and culture as tools to confront the crisis of modernity, a topic that remains relevant today. To his view, the nation is a project that is built thanks to the collaboration of all citizens. Each individual must behave, whether as an elite or a mass, according to the type of human being that characterizes them. That is, there must be an elite that changes the social course and directs the masses through a new, younger and more vitalist

*María Navas Carralero, Student at the Complutense University of Madrid (Madrid, Spain), mnavas12@ucm.es.

**© María Navas Carralero. © Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics.

politics. From a liberal point of view, he vindicates the role of intellectuals in society and calls on the elite of his time to be part of politics.

He distinguishes an official Spain that persists in prolonging a past that no longer exists, from another Spain, the vital Spain, which has not yet managed to enter history due to the insistence of the previous one. The generational task of the new politics is to push this new vital Spain into history. The new politics is a new sensitivity and a new historical attitude. Ortega's work focuses on the importance of the individual within society and Peña highlights how individual responsibility is key to social change. In an environment where individual voices are often drowned out, Ortega's thought invites each person to take an active role in their community.

The idea that politics is not just a matter for the elites, but a responsibility shared by everyone, is another teaching of Ortega that Peña takes up. The former maintains that active participation in public life is essential to strengthen democracy and ensure social harmony.

To highlight the importance of philosophy and its transformative role, the author emphasizes the distinction that Ortega makes between "ideas" and "beliefs." On the one hand, beliefs are the ultimate convictions on which our being in the world is based, the belief system that sustains our life. They are necessary, because without them the human being would not know what to hold on to. Sometimes our beliefs crack and a radical doubt creeps in through the cracks. This is when philosophy comes in, which Ortega describes, like democracy, as a game, something dynamic and almost sporting. Philosophy makes the paradigm shift possible when we have reached the threshold of an era and human beings need to reform their values.

Another prominent theme of the book is the interrelationship between culture and politics. Peña maintains that Ortega understood that culture is fundamental for the construction of an active and committed citizenry. In this sense, education is advocated as something that encourages critical thinking and citizen participation, essential elements to strengthen democracy. All this, as we have already seen, is due to a project of political and social reform.

THE BASIC FEATURES OF ORTEGA'S PHILOSOPHY

Ortega can be spoken of as a "public intellectual." Almost all of his books, even the most complex ones, began as newspaper articles. The Rebellion of the Masses, his most famous work, was written week after week in *El Sol*, a newspaper that he helped found. His status as a philosopher at a time of huge crisis in Spain forced him to be an intellectual *in partibus*

infidelium, that is, in the land of infidels. Spain, at the beginning of the 20th century, was a country on the verge of feudalism, discouraged by the loss of territories, extremely catholic and politically unstable. Despite the intellectual brilliance of the generation of '98 and their incredible artistic and philosophical sensitivity, there was a lack of systematicity in their thinking. Ortega studied in Germany, which is visible in and benefits both the form and content of his work. His main influences were idealism and neo-Kantianism, the latter he calls *his home and his prison*.

Human beings have the need to think, to seek the truth. Despite this being natural, ways of bringing said search about are multiple and determined by history and circumstance. Culture is an interpretation of reality through which humans discover elements of the latter and make them true. For Ortega, the West has forgotten the vital and historical dimension of reason. He criticizes the position of neo-positivism, which defends the fundamental coincidence between reality and the ideas of the subject of knowledge. Consequently, intellectuals and scientists have tried to adapt reality to the criteria of physics and mathematics, forgetting that intelligence is not static, but rather animated and crossed by vital challenges. They have abandoned the task of forming the principles and ways of seeing the world to which human beings can adhere. Ortega stated that history is a context that defines our actions. Peña takes up this idea to argue that understanding our history, both individually and collectively, is essential to building a more conscious and responsible future. At a time when populism and extremism are gaining ground, this reflection will be more relevant than ever.

To explain Ortega's treatment of concepts that are fundamental to his thinking, Carlos Peña turns to philosophers such as Wittgenstein or Putnam. Because of this, he introduces common elements between the philosophers such as *game* in Wittgenstein's case: "Reason is internal to life, which means that it is always situated. If we were to imagine life as a game and wanted to describe it from an external point of view [...] our description would be purely behavioristic [...] Because describing a game means adopting the point of view of those who play it, the only way of giving it a meaning among the many possible ones" (Peña, Navas, 2022).

As for the second, the author of the book equates the Orteguian thesis with H. Putnam's internal realism: "Truth, says this author, is relative to a system of concepts. But the fact that it is relative to a system of concepts does not mean that it is not objective, since within the system it is undoubtedly objective. There are things that are true within one world of life and things that are true within another. It would be absurd to decide

which of these systems is more truthful, because in order to do so one would have to place oneself above all of them” (Peña, Navas, 2022).

These, among other techniques, are ways in which Peña makes his explanations much more didactic and enjoyable. In this way, he makes Ortega’s philosophy more accessible to any reader, thus spreading his message, which was the main objective of the Spanish philosopher.

TO CONCLUDE

In conclusion, *La actualidad de Ortega y Gasset* is a call to recover and apply Ortega’s teachings in the analysis and resolution of contemporary problems. Peña stresses that Ortega’s thought, centered on reason, history and intellectual responsibility, remains a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of today’s world. The book invites the reader to reflect on their role in society and to actively engage in the defense of democracy and coexistence.

Despite its short length, this book is an appropriate introduction to Ortega’s thought, as it explains the foundations of his philosophy in a very simple, clear and accessible way, linking them, moreover, to very relevant questions that are still the subject of intense debate today.

Navas Carralero M. [Навас Карралеро М.] Ortega Then and Now [Ортега тогда и сейчас] : An Introduction to Navigating the Foundations of His Philosophy [введение в изучение основ его философии] // Философия. Журнал Высшей школы экономики. — 2024. — Т. 8, № 4. — Р. 218–221.

МАРИЯ НАВАС КАРРАЛЕРО

СТУДЕНТ,

КОМПЛУТЕНСКИЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ МАДРИДА (МАДРИД)

ОРТЕГА ТОГДА И СЕЙЧАС

ВВЕДЕНИЕ В ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ОСНОВ ЕГО ФИЛОСОФИИ

PEÑA C. LA ACTUALIDAD DE ORTEGA Y GASSET. — FLASH, 2022.

DOI: 10.17323/2587-8719-2024-4-218-221.