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A REFLECTION ON ORTEGA'S LANGUAGE, SILENCE AND THOUGHT**

MAPPING THE PHILOSOPHER'S PROPOSAL

BALAGUER GARCIA, E. 2023. *LOS LÍMITES DEL DECIR. RAZÓN HISTÓRICA Y LENGUAJE EN EL ÚLTIMO ORTEGA* [IN SPANISH]. MADRID: TECNOS

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Ortega himself recognises a turning point in his career when, in 1932, he proclaims in the *Prologue to an Edition of his Works* that he is about to embark on a "second navigation," which is distinguished, among other aspects, by the "silence" that the philosopher maintains throughout this period (or, at least, that he claims to maintain). In this book, Dr. Balaguer aims to trace a path through recurring themes that constantly come to the surface, and to examine the nature of that silence, if indeed it exists, by analysing Ortega's reflections on language. She aspires to show how Ortega demanded a "New Philology" in which he could express the vital and historical reason to which he devoted his entire career. The book under review aims to take up the exposition of this "New Philology," which Ortega never developed in a systematic way, but which is present throughout his writings. In the words of Balaguer:

This work challenges the assertion that Ortega no longer had anything to say after 1932 and embraces the idea that the New Philology allows us to read Ortega's publications during his exile with a liveliness that declares more than it silences, that says more than it keeps shut (Balaguer Garcia, 2023: 62).

The work is formally structured into a prologue and three chapters, which are further subdivided into epigraphs and sub-epigraphs which deal with the different themes that emerge throughout the research. Rather than a linear exposition, the narration goes through different topics relevant

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to the understanding of Ortega's thought. This structure allows the ideas around which the work is structured to appear constantly, and those above-mentioned ideas are thus stressed from different points. The question of whether this is due to the dispersed nature of the object of study (scattered throughout Ortega's texts over the years) or rather to the author's affinity with Ortega's methodology and style, is one that readers are to decide for themselves.

In any case, the prologue — entitled “*Western Man Expects Nothing from Literature*”: *Literature and Logos* — begins by analysing Ortega's reflection on literature, the existence of literary genres, and the capacity of literature to serve as a vehicle of knowledge. Balaguer elucidates how, in an increasingly disenchanted world, Ortega's philosophy breaks new ground with the assertion that fictions and metaphors allow us to expand reality and perceive what is latent in it. Consequently, literature should be understood as a “logos” capable of being a vehicle of knowledge. She states:

Fictions compensate for the finiteness of our existence, as they enable us to unfold our self in order to situate ourselves in other points of view from which to analyse and understand reality. Literature constitutes a wellspring for the broadening of our experience, and only that philosophy which takes this into account will be able to carry out its paidetical task (Balaguer Garcia, 2023: 24).

The first chapter — *Exile as Context* — continues the investigation, showing the ways in which metaphor (and genealogy) can achieve what conceptual history cannot: the revitalisation of language and the revelation of its meaning *in statu nascendi*. The author demonstrates how, despite his reputation as a literary figure, Ortega defends himself as a systematic philosopher, although his system is subterranean, akin to the iceberg in Hemingway's stories, as Balaguer tries to emphasize. Thus an Ortega who is both a philosopher and a sociologist is defended. As a philosopher, his primary concern is the exposition of vital and historical reason; as a sociologist, the tensions that exist between the individual and society. In this manner, we are presented with the fundamental elements of Ortega's system of thought, which were consistent throughout his early works. However, in his second navigation, these are reconfigured around the concept of life as radical reality and historical reason as the method of its study. The issue at hand is that

Ortega's true vocation was philosophy, yet this could not be exercised in isolation. [...] The philosophy to which Ortega was fatally destined was practical, vital, and historical, and was aimed to save that other thing, the very Other by antonomasia, which is given in life (ibid.: 49–50).

Balaguer analyses how, for Ortega, the philosopher is supposed to be in contact with his circumstances, with society. However, his task is seen as the opposite to that of the politician. The philosopher is compared to the prophet, since he tries to reveal a truth (*aletheia*) by questioning the beliefs (*doxa*) of his time. Thus philosophy is in essence *paradoxa*. In an ideal society, an agreement will be reached between the politician and the philosopher/prophet. Yet, in Ortega's time, the societal pact with philosophy had been broken, resulting in the philosopher experiencing an exile that Balaguer argues is existential, rather than political. Nevertheless, despite his withdrawal from political life (the roots of which she maintains predate 1932), the author asserts that Ortega frequently broke his silence and that, in truth, said silence never did occur.

The second chapter — *The New Philology* — seeks to reconstruct Ortega's reflections on language through an analysis of the various texts in which he discusses this topic. Although the philosopher's engagement with the philological sphere commenced during his formative years, it is in his second navigation when the "discovery of life as radical reality" and "historical reason" allowed him to propose the New Philology as an archaeology of speech. As such, his approach to text was based on a study of the author's biography, their social-historical context, and the etymology of words. Balaguer explains how Ortega, following Nietzsche, understands language as a fossilisation of a vital context. Every text is, in origin, a conversation. Therefore, the ability to read properly is not only about knowing what is being said, but also about understanding the text as part of the author's life and revealing its vital context. This is what it means to revitalize language, to show its meaning *in statu nascendi*. This leads to two conclusions. Firstly, that the desideratum of fully understanding the meaning of a text is unattainable, since the "saying" is unable to fully capture the essence it aims to convey, whether due to "deficiency" or "exuberance." Instead, it serves as a tool for attempting to do so (which the New Philology must be aware of and interpret accordingly). The second conclusion is that all acts of speech are accompanied by silence. In addition to the silence that arises from the "ineffable" (that of life which cannot be transmitted), there is also something "ineffated," that is to say, something which is taken for granted and which is not spoken about. These are beliefs, and language itself, in part, is constituted by those beliefs. As such, its customs and clichés can enslave thought. Consequently, the philosopher must seek a method of breaking the chains of usage, which Ortega finds in etymology. This allows us to transcend speech towards an original way of communicating.

As a result of these reflections, the second part of this chapter is devoted to comparing the linguistic proposals of Ortega's "New Philology" with relevant 20th-century authors. Thus, three sections are devoted to establishing Ortega's dialogues with Hans Gadamer (on hermeneutics); with Reinhart Koselleck (on conceptual history); and with Quentin Skinner (on intentionality). This highlights the lesser-known early contributions of the Spanish philosopher to the discipline.

Finally, in the concluding chapter — *Methodus vitae: Application of the Method of the New Philology* — Dr. Balaguer examines how Ortega employs the methodology discussed in the previous chapter in his "second navigation." Indeed, the return to the classics seeks to revitalize them, and such an enterprise can only be achieved if, by means of historical reason, they are understood in their vocation and circumstance. Ortega is able to engage in philosophical discourse with Cicero and Vives because he shares with them a vital tension: the necessity to engage in philosophy at a time when the relationship between the city and the philosopher is called into question. The author elucidates how Ortega is able to perceive himself reflected in them to the extent that they act as alter egos, with whom the philosopher is able to engage in discourse about his own time (in addition to the aforementioned Cicero and Vives, Goethe also proves to be of significant importance in this regard). The "existential exile" that was defended in the first chapter re-enters the scene here, and it is explained how

with all these references to the "History of Rome" Ortega did not want to show that the solution to the crisis of his time, a crisis of beliefs, lay in copying the Roman world. This would have been naïve. Rather, it lay in making transparent, in the light of narrative reason, which is historical, that the *libertas* is felt under the government of institutions capable of adapting and living up to the needs of the social collectivity (Balaguer Garcia, 2023: 209).

That is to say, Ortega perceives a crisis of beliefs in Europe at the time of his writing, which has resulted in the elimination of the Ciceronian "common ground" (of beliefs) that could previously be used to establish an agreement on divergences (of ideas). In his writings, he addresses this crisis and attempts to provide solutions to it. Thus there is not really a silence, Dr. Balaguer defends, in Ortega's "second navigation." Although his reflection departs from public life to rehearse philosophy in the study of the classics, it does not cease to be a vital and historical philosophy. This analysis concludes when Balaguer addresses Ortega's treatment of five fundamental concepts for understanding this issue. First, *concordia* and *libertas*, which are

essential elements in Cicero's society, and central to Ortega's late proposal of liberalism. Thirdly, *humanitas*, the understanding of humanism as an integral study of the human being (which necessarily involves reflection on language, as evidenced by the fact that the humanists called themselves "grammarians") in their circumstances, which lay behind his intentions in the Instituto de Humanidades. Fourthly, "vocation," as opposed to the concept of "careers" and as a fundamental element in understanding the vicissitudes of people's lives. Finally, "scholasticism," as opposed to philosophy, insofar as the former provides inherited answers to problems that are not lived (while the latter aims to be paradoxical, i. e. "tradition of intradition," and to reflect from life experience).

In conclusion, the book is able to trace a coherent route through Ortega's mature work through the concepts of "New Philology" and "historical reason." In addition to the author's knowledge and handling of Ortega's various works, these are continually put in relation to other philosophers (the aforementioned Gadamer, Koselleck and Skinner, but also Foucault, Benjamin, Weber, Strauss, Zweig, etc.) in order to stimulate reflection on current problems and to defend the validity and productivity of the Ortegaian proposal, despite its many silences and incompleteness. It is argued that this proposal is nonetheless a lively and stimulating one.

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