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THE MAIN NARRATIVES OF A SEARCH FOR TRUTH**

A GREAT THINKER'S POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

ZAMORA BONILLA, J. 2022. *ORTEGA Y GASSET: LA AVENTURA DE LA VERDAD* [IN SPANISH].
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In this book written by Javier Zamora Bonilla we are presented with an overview of the life and works of Ortega y Gasset. Through a biographical approach, Bonilla manages to show Ortega's context, which was mainly political, and how deeply it influenced all his writings.

Ortega was born into a wealthy family which owned an ideologically liberal newspaper. From a young age he seemed interested in searching for truth, an academic type of person. After some intellectual traveling in search of knowledge and, in a way, finding his own path, he leaned towards being a philosopher.

For the sake of a better explanation of Ortega's philosophy, Bonilla classifies Ortega's thinking into four main aspects: the pursuit of understanding the human being (the "I" and its circumstance), the analysis of the historical crisis (which involves the context), the motif concerning Europe (in earlier years he wanted Spain to be more like Europe, but afterwards he notices the european crisis and talks about it), and the quest he worked at in making an impact on other intellectuals (his main pursuit after noticing the crisis in Europe and Spain was to shape influential figures into the type of people that could solve the problem).

After establishing that division, Bonilla narrates Ortega's life. As mentioned before, the latter traveled a lot in his search for knowledge. Having studied in Germany from the most relevant philosophers, after attaining

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a strong academic foundation he came back to Spain and began publishing in the newspaper (mainly political articles) and even speaking at important conferences. In 1914, he published one of his most famous books, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, which at first glance may seem merely about novels and esthetics, but actually has an ideological background.

In the *Meditación Primera* (the first part of the book), Ortega emphasizes the relevance of the novel and also the cervantism over the Quijotism (which other authors like Unamuno write about). For Ortega, *El Quijote* sets an example of a novel capable of making an atemporal present, from which we can help ourselves to understand life and the human being. From Ortega's point of view, Cervantes' style, cervantism, was able to represent the surface and, at the same time, the depth.

At that point Bonilla introduces one of the most relevant topics in Ortega's thinking, "I am I and my circumstance, and if I don't save it, I don't save myself". Bonilla explains how the real hero for Ortega is the human being that is trying to accomplish his own "I" inside its own circumstance (like Quijote is doing). Ortega's understanding of the human being is inseparable from its circumstances, an "I" without circumstance does not make any sense, because no one can exist without any circumstance.

We have to keep in mind that Ortega's work is very consistent, so, in some way, all his books are concordant. Bonilla is able to connect Ortega's life with his work, and he also establishes some connections between those of his books that were published in different years. So, after talking about *Meditaciones del Quijote* and more narration of Ortega's life, the author talks about *España Invertebrada*, keeping in mind that "I am I and my circumstance" and cervantism are both concepts that will be key to Ortega for solving the spanish political situation.

Ortega attempts to conduct an analysis of Spain to understand the crisis it is going through. In this endeavor he goes back to Spain's (and also Europe's) past. Ortega highlights how important the history, the circumstance of the country are to understanding a nation, and also that the most worrying problems for Spain are common tendencies in Europe. At this point Ortega decides that Spain can no longer be Europe's mirror.

Since Europe ceases to be a reference for Spain in moving forward, Ortega takes a rationalist and vitalist standpoint (both were really important for Ortega, to him it was key to look at Spain from a vitalist perspective, but without leaving out rationalism) to look for a solution to the spanish crisis. While following this point of view, Ortega decides to highlight the concept of culture, generation and sensitivity.

Culture for Ortega is understood as the answer that different civilizations have been giving at different times to their own periodical issues. Ortega's point is that it is important to keep in mind the relevance of the history of human beings not only as individuals, but also as a community.

Generation, understood as a social body made out of a mass and a minority, with a determined trajectory, is key for understanding historical development.

Ortega notices how each generation lived in a determined point of their own culture, this fact is what makes each generation develop a different *sensitivity*. Ortega explains how every new generation is formed by what they have received from the past, but also, new ideas they develop by themselves. The *sensitivity* each generation has is different from the previous ones, which means their perception is completely new.

The key to understanding quick generational changes is not only history as a temporal line of important events, but also history as the development of culture. Ortega looks for a better understanding of generations so we are able to predict, at least to some extent, how the human mindset is going to evolve.

When Ortega was in the process of understanding the human being in mass society so he could better get to know the new *sensitivity* that was formed (he writes and talks a lot about it and even focuses on avant-garde art), Spain was going through a dictatorship which eventually forced him to leave the country.

The Civil War in Spain made Ortega notice he was in danger no matter which side he took, so he decided to leave the country and go to France. Ortega's mindset did not fully correspond with neither of the conflicted ideologies, as he was against fascism but he did not completely agree with the anti fascists.

Even outside the country, Ortega kept track of the situation in Spain, he even wrote about Unamuno when he was informed about his death. Despite the differences he used to have with Unamuno, Ortega praised him as an intellectual and took the chance to write about the figure of the intellectual as the type of person that needs to keep up on the important questions not because of egoism, but out of love.

Those times were really unstable and difficult for Ortega, aside from having to be in exile, he even fell ill and had to see how his two sons went to war as they decided to fight for Franco. The situation in Spain did not seem to get any better and he and his family (his wife and daughter) were

worried that the war would propagate to France, so they left and went even further, this time to Argentina.

Even in Argentina Ortega was really worried about what was happening in Spain and in Europe and thought that the intellectuals were being muted by the guns, which was a huge problem. Ortega kept at his political tasks of speaking at conferences and writing.

In 1942 Ortega went to Lisboa with his wife, since it would be possible for them to see their sons there from time to time. In Portugal he kept writing and imparting classes as he also used to do in Buenos Aires. He kept persevering on the idea of how the intellectuals remained mostly unheard. Ortega was very concerned with the international situation.

After three years Ortega finally came back to Spain, where he continued being a political figure. He was very determined to talk about communism and fascism, and, of course, about what had been happening to Spain. It was really important to Ortega to teach and shape the young intellectuals into better figures that would help the country, and so he did until he got cancer and died in 1955.

To sum up, this book narrates Ortega's persistent and political life while explaining his philosophy, even though Bonilla does not really delve deep into philosophical questions (the book is mostly historical and political rather than purely philosophical). He also provides a list of Ortega's most important works with their date of publishing, abstracts, and even a chronology which is helpful in keeping track of not only the main events in Ortega's life, but also of the important happenings that affected him (from historical episodes to writings that were related to him).

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