

Ortega and Camus: Socratic Gadflies in the Public Space

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Resumen

En los elogios que Albert Camus hace de Ortega y Gasset se puede apreciar una semejanza en sus respectivas concepciones del papel del intelectual en la sociedad. La actividad de éste incluye el cuestionamiento de la vida política. Los dos, además, coinciden en la condena del totalitarismo y la apelación a lo plebeyo que acompaña a éste. Apoyándose fundamentalmente en «Democracia morbosa» y *La rebelión de las masas*, el autor resalta la proximidad de los dos pensamientos a la hora de rescatar la capacidad del individuo de dar sentido a su propia vida.

Palabras clave

Ortega y Gasset, Camus, Libertad, Hombre Masa, Sócrates, Colectivismo

Abstract

Camus' praise of Ortega y Gasset reflects similarities in their understanding of the role of the intellectual in society. This includes political discourse and the resistance to totalitarianism and the mind set that it involves. Drawing fundamentally on *The Revolt of the Masses* and *Morbid Democracy*, the author underlines the life enhancing role of philosophy.

Keywords

Ortega y Gasset, Camus, Liberty, Mass Man, Socrates, Collectivism

It is often observed that our contemporary world is characterized by a decline of belief in the ethical foundations of political life and the growth of relativist values in the public sphere. Thus a basic problem of humanity today is whether or not it is possible to give a rational meaning and a historical value to its existence and to its struggle for freedom and justice. That is, if humankind is the sole creator of values, how can it save itself from the nihilistic temptation of violence and destruction? It is this fundamental question which has been given significant expression in the works of Ortega y Gasset and Albert Camus.

Albert Camus said of Ortega y Gasset that “after Nietzsche, [he] is perhaps the greatest «European» writer, and yet it would be difficult to be more Spanish”. By this, Camus means that though Ortega is a typical Spanish thinker, his writings and his mode of thinking range far beyond the local concerns of the Iberian Peninsula. Camus and Ortega never met, but their philosophies represent an alarming view of the danger of retrogression of European culture

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and the Western civilization in general into a state of barbarism and mass conformity, in sharp contrast with the naïve liberal faith in the idea of progress and perfectibility of Man. For both Camus and Ortega as gadflies, the idea of inevitability of progress ultimately leads to disaster and obscurantism. For both Camus and Ortega, there is no historical necessity for progress toward a better state. Future is only possible through the knowledge of the past. Therefore, the quest for liberty is impossible without a quest for excellence, which is the result of human capacity to mold the institutions of its own choosing. As such, the “truth of destiny” of liberalism depends upon the nobility of spirit of gadflies, not the complacency of the masses.

In considering Ortega’s treatment of this problem it is more convenient to consider separately three dimensions of his general argument on perversion of democracy and rise of plebeianism. First, his characterization of democracy as a “noble idea” under the shadow of which “has sprouted in the public conscience a perverse preference for everything low”¹; secondly, his discussion of what he calls “the lowering of the standards of civility”; and thirdly his Socratic attempt to call his contemporaries to the examined life and to engage them in the activity of philosophizing.

The central question of Ortega is the question of how humankind can give meaning to its life not as a state of being but as a task; where history is realized as self-fabrication. For Ortega this program of life is not a progress towards a definitive aim transcending history that would imply the arresting of the creativeness of human thought. On the contrary, for Ortega thinking has a significant role in the vital process that unites all living things at all times. As such, according to Ortega setting any standards other than life itself could cut the human culture from its vital impulse and lead to extreme rationalism and utopianism. As such, if historical truth and not biological utility constitutes reality, then each effort of self-examination for every individual, nation and especially each generation, becomes a contribution to the whole scheme of life. Therefore, the great task confronting the contemporary world is to overcome the duality of the rational and the vital, so that universal history displays the inexhaustible capacity of human beings in succeeding to create countless things that nature could never produce by itself. As a result, he declared that reason should be interdependent with and subordinate to life. By making

¹ José ORTEGA Y GASSET, “Morbid Democracy”, *Modern Age* (Winter 1957), p. 53. Spanish edition: José ORTEGA Y GASSET, “Democracia morbosa”, *El Espectador II* (1916-1934), *Obras completas*, 10 vols. Madrid: Fundación José Ortega y Gasset / Taurus, 2004-2010, tomo II, p. 271. From now on, references to this spanish edition of Ortega’s Works will be cited indicating the title of the work (and year of publication), the volume will be quoted in Roman numerals and the pages in Arabic numerals.

human life his focal point, Ortega emphasizes on the fundamental reality of the inter-individual relations marked by reciprocity and mutual responsibility. This encounter of the individual with the Other is differentiated from what is society, which according to him is idolized by modern thought. As he says in his book *Man and People*:

The collective soul, *Volksgeist* or “national spirit”, social consciousness, has had the loftiest and most marvelous qualities attributed to it, sometimes even divine qualities [...] And here our analysis with no special effort or premeditation, with no formal precedents (at least so far as I am aware) among philosophers, drops into our hand something disquieting and even terrible—namely, the collectivity is indeed something human, but the human without man, the human without spirit, the human without soul, the human dehumanized”².

This dehumanized human is the plebian who denies the dimension of the personal in his life. According to Ortega, this is how the dehumanized human espouses nihilism without choosing among the possibilities that define his / her destiny. This relapse into barbarism of the dehumanized human is the clear expression of Ortega’s distrust of the contemporary form of society. This view of society accounts for Ortega’s echoing of his fears of the rule of average standards through the masses. Beyond this, Ortega’s political perspective concerns a balance between the individual and the community with an estimate of individual worth and creative democracy. Ortega condemnation of the masses, therefore, goes hand in hand with what he calls the “degeneration of the heart” and “the wounding of the very principle which gave rise to democracy”. He affirms:

Democracy as democracy—that is, strictly and exclusively as a standard of political equity—seems an admirable thing. But over-stimulated democracy, exasperated democracy, democracy in religion or art, for instance, democracy in thought and gesture, democracy of the heart and custom, is the most dangerous affliction which a society can contract³.

This whole crisis of democracy, according to Ortega, is related to the exhaustion of humankind’s vital possibilities. It is in the spirit of this idea of crisis that the critical standpoint of Ortega y Gasset finds all its pertinence and relevance. The task that he set for himself as a philosopher was to address the problem of a crisis of European mind in particular and of Western civilization in general.

² José ORTEGA Y GASSET, *Man and People*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963, pp. 174-175. Spanish edition: *El hombre y la gente*, X, 257.

³ José ORTEGA Y GASSET, “Morbid Democracy”, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

The revolt of unreason in contemporary society has also led to the one-dimensionality of thought and this, in turn, has led to the eclipse of an explicit public realm and the abject conformity found among the democratic masses who have become apolitical in their orientation toward the world. Ortega understood well that the rule of unreason coexists with the predominance of the masses and the mass rule “crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select”. That is to say, for Ortega, intellectual excellence and political exemplarity went hand in hand. In his eyes, the life of the mind and the life of society were parallel. Thus, reason and culture were directly related to each other and each required the presence of the other to exist. Therefore, within the contemporary society, which Ortega would contend as a mass ruled society, he found it necessary to address the problem of the culture of the mind and the creation of a genuine morally cultured community for public action. Moreover, according to Ortega, freedom cannot exist without responsibility and the root of the problem of mass rule is the absence of such a principle. Therefore, in a world in which there is an absence of reason in human affairs, there is a misunderstanding and misapplication of the principle of rights. Ortega goes further in noting that the modern masses believe that they have rights but no duties. Such a state of mind will lead them to ignore all obligations while maintaining unlimited rights.

There is a strong parallel here between Ortega y Gasset and Albert Camus. Both Ortega and Camus believed that society and civilization must operate within a moral principle that takes its bearing from an understanding of the exemplary aspects of human nature. For Ortega, the revolt of unreason can only be corrected by that which is not unreason, commonplace and mass rule. Therefore, in opposition to what he considered as an “egalitarian hyperdemocracy”, he made a distinction between the reign of ignorance and the reign of excellence. In other words, for Ortega, the solution to the problem of our age hinged upon whether philosophy can create and illuminate the distinction between mere opinion (*doxa*) and true knowledge (*episteme*), between how the world is and what it ought to be. Philosophy, for Ortega, had a role of educating democracy. The rise of thoughtless individuals, he suggested, led to the advent of the new barbarian and the eclipse of culture. Hence, Ortega cherished thinking, which included for him questioning life in general. Ortega described civilization in *The Revolt of the Masses*, as “the will to live in common”. Therefore, according to him, “A man is uncivilized, barbarian in the degree in which he does not take others into account”. The process of not thinking and not listening to the other reached its height precisely in the mass-man. Against this state of thoughtlessness and what he called “spiritual barbarism”, Ortega suggested the idea of living and thinking.

Much of Ortega's work can be understood as a response to the rise of masses and the decline of thinking. That is why he described contemporary culture as "the spoiled child of human history" who "does not represent a new civilization struggling with a previous one, but a mere negation"⁴. There are many different ways of understanding what Ortega meant by the decline of thinking, but to my mind his main concern was to get individuals to value philosophy and practice it for themselves. "Thinking is a dialogue with circumstances", wrote Ortega in 1942 in his *Notes on Thinking*⁵. In other words, he sought like Socrates to engage his contemporaries in the activity of philosophizing and questioning and called them to the examined life.

In the same manner, Camus seeks the measure of humankind by turning it to the Socratic question of whether or not life is worth living. Twenty-five hundred years earlier, Socrates argues that "the unexamined life is not worth living". Camus re-formulates Socrates' bold statement through *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus starts his book with the following sentence: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy"⁶. Camus' thinking on this point is clear. He is underlining his view of everyday human resistance against the authority of those who try to have control over our lives. As such, Camus' discussion of the story of Sisyphus is followed with his remarks on the existence of a world conditioned by the absurd. While dismissing any form of escape or self-annihilation in the face of the absurd predicament, Camus suggests the Socratic route of revolt, a means by which he "substitutes pragmatism for abstraction as the touchstone for action"⁷. The "one truly serious philosophical problem" is thus situated in the public space where the struggle for justice happens. As Camus reflects at the end of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart"⁸. The figure of Sisyphus, therefore, provides a key example, according to Camus, of how we can turn the absurd condition of modern mankind into a possibility for thinking and acting rebelliously. It is clear from the above that

⁴ José ORTEGA Y GASSET, *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: W. W. Norton Company, pp. 98, 190. Spanish edition: *La rebelión de las masas*, IV, 498.

⁵ Spanish edition: «Prólogo a la Historia de la Filosofía de Brehier», VI, 147.

⁶ Albert CAMUS, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p. 3.

⁷ Mark ORME, *The Development of Albert Camus' Concern for Social and Political Justice*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007, p. 108.

⁸ Albert CAMUS, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

starting out from the experience of the absurd, individual revolt is an affirmation of perseverance, and thus of enduring the challenge of human existence without appeal to the illusions of eternal values and eternal life. Yet it is also simultaneously a refusal to submit to whatever will crush or destroy one's absurd freedom. Such defiance draws upon and rekindles freedom of action, and in so doing dignifies the human condition⁹.

The crucial question Camus poses here is that of responsible thinking and acting in a meaningless world. Philosophizing for Camus is, thus, not only a question of creating concepts, but a wider Socratic resistance against the loss of meaning of justice and freedom. Camus offers a way of thinking about justice and freedom that renews the Socratic rebellious ethos of the gadfly in the public space. The first feature of this Camusian ethos of rebellion is devoted to a courageous attempt to rescue the individual from the multiple manifestations of injustice in history. In other words, for Camus, "existence is shot through with misery and injustice. Yet beyond these Camus discerns the possibility for justice, the potentiality for a dignified human life that is also manifest in the world though varying in its degree of substantiality, and which in turn animates human aspirations for freedom and equality"¹⁰. As for the second feature, it follows, for Camus, in the universal sense of common dignity and solidarity which creates a value of mutual respect and trust across cultures. Therefore, the activity of thinking for Camus is not a question of reasoning. It is the most transformative form of dissent. To this end, Camus recognizes the Socratic ethics of interrogation as an explicit political imperative exercised in the midst of a situation of uncertainty and ambiguity. In this regard, the Camusian resistance against injustice is the reminder of Socrates' defense speech in Plato's *Apology*. Socrates passionately defends the philosophical life as a supreme moral duty to promote justice. The message of Socrates is immensely stimulating in the context of Camus' dissenting philosophy. "I showed again", proclaims Socrates, "not in words but in action, that, if it were not rather vulgar to say so, death is something I couldn't care less about, but that my whole concern is not to do anything unjust or impious. That government, powerful as it was, did not frighten me into any wrongdoing"¹¹. It is no coincidence that Camus considers himself as a Hellenic creator. Camus' vision of Greece, in the final analysis, is far more Socratic than that of Nietzsche, who does not neces-

⁹ Patrick HAYDEN, *Camus and the Challenge of Political Thought: Between Despair and Hope*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2016, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

¹¹ PLATO, *Apology*, 32d in *Five Dialogues*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002, p. 37.

sarily appreciate Greek rationalism. Faithful to his own role of an artist as a gadfly, Camus does not hesitate to make an analogy with that of Socrates in the Athenian agora: "Socrates was proven wrong by being put to death. This is the most current sort of refutation that is employed by our contemporary political society"¹². The fact of matter is that Camus considers Socrates as a model of twentieth century philosophical dissent since the philosophical protest raised by Socrates twenty five centuries earlier in Athens resonates with a strong poignancy in the world of Camus riddled by injustice. Such ongoing relevance makes Camus' role as a gadfly of his times, but also as that of ours, more complex and certainly more compelling.

Camus' ethical stance led him into politics, both before and after World War II. His Socratic style of questioning reality reflects, both in his journalistic writings and in his novels, a lucid and unambiguous rejection of demagoguery, falsehood and irresponsibility. As Susan Tarrow argues precisely, "It is evident that for Camus, politics was not a separate intellectual activity. It was an integral part of his life and art, and was both limited and enriched by it"¹³. It is therefore clear that Camus' formative experience of sufferings of human beings and his aspirations of justice and empathy rich in compassion and rage develop in him a sense of revolt that goes far beyond the ideological absolutes of political parties. In other words, "Life as a struggle-against illness, injustice, apathy, ideology, death-is at the core of Camus's work. Commitment to this struggle involves discomfort; the desire for comfort and the clarity of absolutes must be constantly resisted. Revolt is a daily task"¹⁴. For Camus, revolt is the untiring cry of every true philosopher. This is where the concept of ideology as a value-giving whole is shattered. This means that dissent, as conceived and practiced by Camus, is never a form of salvation. Camus never confuses liberty and liberation. As he underlines in the journal *Combat* on November 29, 1944, "freedom is never wanted without by the same token demanding justice"¹⁵. It is worth pausing here on Camus' ideal of justice as a form of Socratic ethics of revolt against violence and nihilism. For Camus, the idea of revolt is primarily formulated in response to the moral and political dilemmas provoked by the rise of Nazism and Stalinism in Europe, but more generally it could be considered as a philosophical quest for justice. Camus, in his own Socratic manner, tries to establish a link between an individual act of revolt and the idea of

¹² Albert CAMUS, *op. cit.*, p. 1587.

¹³ Susan TARROW, *Exile from the Kingdom: A Political Rereading of Albert Camus*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1985, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Idem*.

¹⁵ Jacqueline LEVI-VALENSI (ed.), *Camus à Combat: éditoriaux et articles d'Albert Camus, 1944-1947*. Paris: Gallimard, 2002, in Mark ORME, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

humanity exemplified by an ethics of human solidarity. Camus affirms the value of human solidarity in relation to the notion of “civic friendship” uncovered by the ancient Greeks. The mutual recognition of shared suffering embodied in the idea of solidarity underscores that the sense of compassion emerges from the relation between self and other. In this way compassion is a component of revolt, “which unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment’s delay refuses injustice”¹⁶. By this Camus seems to mean that the capacity for critical thinking and dissenting judgment, which characterize the ethics of revolt, represent “the move from simple acknowledgment of and sympathy for the suffering of others, to the choice to take a stand against the source of their suffering”¹⁷.

Inasmuch as the suffering of others and the quest for justice drives the public gadfly to revolt, the ethical imperative of sharing solidarity in the face of meaninglessness of social existence is for Camus a key political responsibility. The relevant part of Camus’ thinking on the task of a public gadfly turns around the idea that, “the role of politics is to set our house in order, not to deal with our inner problems”¹⁸. Commitment to justice, therefore, is central to Camus’ approach to politics. But as in the case of Socrates, this justice is not defined, it is lived. For Camus, as for Socrates and the other public gadflies, the choice of being just is an existential choice which is practiced ethically and politically. From Camus’ perspective, justice is not reducible to violence, because violence cannot guide and legitimate a moral commitment or a political action. Camus’ objective is to transcend violence while finding a solution to injustice and misery. Therefore, it is no coincidence that just as Camus’ commitment to justice gathers momentum, his suspicion of ideologies and party politics becomes greater. As such, Camus conception of politics reveals his criticism of the gap which exists in ideological rhetoric between the real needs of the people and the rigidity of the political dogma. Camus explains his position on Communism in some notes written during his political activities in Algiers in mid-1930s. “For me”, he says, “Communism is much more than my comrade in the party cell, worker or storekeeper, than the third volume of Capital [...] I prefer life to doctrine, and life always triumphs over doctrine...”¹⁹. Moreover, there appears to be some parallel between Camus’ condemnation of totalitarianism and Ortega’s critique of plebianism. According to Ortega,

¹⁶ Albert CAMUS, *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage Books, 1956, p. 304.

¹⁷ Patrick HAYDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹⁸ Albert CAMUS, “The Human Crisis”, *Twice a Year* 1, 16-17 (1946-1947), p. 29.

¹⁹ Albert CAMUS, *Fragments d’un Combat, 1958-1940: Alger Républicain*. Paris: Gallimard, 1978, pp. 20-21, quoted in Susan TARROW, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

The doctrinaire democrat who has converted a technique, democracy, into an end, soon finds himself sympathizing with the plebs, precisely because of their plebianism-their customs, manners, intellectual tone. An example of this is the socialist creed (for we are dealing here with a creed, a secular religion), which has for one article of faith the dogma that only a proletarian head is fit for true science and reformed morality [...] [As a result] every so-called “democratic” interpretation of a realm of being outside the domain of public equity becomes fatally plebian²⁰.

Camus, denied constantly allegiance to any political dogma, either liberal or illiberal, which favoured the defense of a dogma or hierarchy over intellectual self-awareness and radical re-evaluation of the social and political frameworks. As Susan Tarrow argues,

with his political activity, Camus was seeking a way to change the established order of the society in which he lived. The dogmatism and abstraction of ideology, which reflected a structure of authority that Camus found unacceptable, contributed to his rejection of party discipline. And the way in which language was used and twisted by politicians offended the poet in Camus; as a creative writer, he felt a responsibility to bear witness, to communicate his vision of the world and its realities, and always to speak the truth²¹.

In an interview given to *La Gazette de Lausanne* in March 1954, Camus formulates his personal feeling on the subject in his conviction that “there is nothing more dignified than refusing reasons of State set up as an absolute”. It is with this act of defiance against all forms of political oppression and servility to the State that Camus hopes to advocate his ethics of dissent which arises from a process of thinking and a state of consciousness. As he says, “It is a way of awaking a sleeping world and of making it vivid to the mind”²².

As such, Camus, the Socratic gadfly, stands in the same line of thought as Ortega. They each struggle in their own way for the ontological autonomy of the individual against the political evils of their time. This raises an interesting issue regarding their long-standing relationships with the dissenting thought which always situates them somehow in-between the nostalgia of a lost European heritage and the hope of an open vista on the future of human civilization. There are many different ways of understanding what it means to be a “gadfly” in the European intellectual context, and perhaps it is not obvious why Camus

²⁰ Spanish edition: “Democracia Morbosa”, *op. cit.*, 272.

²¹ Susan TARROW, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

²² Albert CAMUS, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

and Ortega should be thought of as gadflies. However, we can say that both Ortega and Camus were gadflies in the same way that Socrates was one. Like Socrates, they sought to engage their contemporaries in the activity of critical thinking, they also called others to the examined life. As in the case of Socrates, their philosophies were their lives, and their lives were their practices.

In chapter 14 of his book, *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega y Gasset mentions Socrates as “the great townsman, quintessence of the spirit of the polis”. By this he means that being “Socratic” is philosophizing openly in the public space. Practically and tangibly connecting philosophy and politics in every regime is a risky matter. Death is the price that Socrates paid in order to make politics accountable to philosophy. For Ortega, the Socratic gadfly, philosophy was his life, his life was his practice of philosophy. For Camus, another Socratic gadfly, Socrates marks a decisive moment in the history of philosophy in his effort to give a new and solid meaning to the concept of justice. Camus’ moral commitment as an outsider, but also as a gadfly in public space appeals to all those who continue to believe in the dissenting task of writing and philosophizing. Camus described his dissentful notion of the writer’s role in a lecture he delivered at the Columbia University in the spring of 1946: “It is because the world is essentially miserable that we are obliged to create for it some happiness, according to this generation; it is because the world is unjust that we must work for justice; it is because it is finally absurd we must give reason to it”²³. Here Camus situates us in a Socratic quest. And then a few lines further he adds,

It is towards this goal I believe we should devote our strength, our thought, and if need be, our lives. The decadence of the Greek world began with the execution of Socrates. And many a Socrates has been murdered in Europe during recent years. This is a sign. It is a sign that only the Socratic spirit of indulgence towards others and rigor towards oneself offers any real threat to civilizations based on murder. A sign, then, that only this spirit can regenerate the world²⁴.

The merest glance at Camus and Ortega’s writings and intellectual engagements reveals that they both remain Socratic intellectuals with an ideal of human excellence as an antidote to violence and nihilism. Man, said Ortega, is a living creature born in a circumstance. At every moment, we need to be aware of our historical roots and our civilizational heritage. But Ortega is warying

²³ Albert CAMUS, “The Human Crisis”, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

of the possibility of civilization simply evaporating as a result of the fact that “the directing of society has been taken over by a type of man who is not interested in the principle of civilization”²⁵. To this Ortega adds: “The world is a civilized one: its inhabitant is not: he does not see the civilization of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force”²⁶. The crucial question Camus poses here is that of responsible thinking and acting in a meaningless world. Philosophizing for Camus is, thus, not only a question of creating concepts, but a wider Socratic resistance against the loss of meaning of justice and freedom. Camus offers a way of thinking about justice and freedom that renews the Socratic rebellious ethos of the gadfly in the public space. The first feature of this Camusian ethos of rebellion is devoted to a courageous attempt to rescue the individual from the multiple manifestations of injustice in history. In other words, for Camus, “existence is shot through with misery and injustice. Yet beyond these Camus discerns the possibility for justice, the potentiality for a dignified human life that is also manifest in the world though varying in its degree of substantiality, and which in turn animates human aspirations for freedom and equality”²⁷. As for the second feature, it follows, for Camus, in the universal sense of common dignity and solidarity which creates a value of mutual respect and trust across cultures. Therefore, the activity of thinking for Camus is not a question of reasoning. It is the most transformative form of dissent. To this end, Camus recognizes the Socratic ethics of interrogation as an explicit political imperative exercised in the midst of a situation of uncertainty and ambiguity.

For Camus, there were no certainties in politics and he did not believe in pre-guaranteed final outcomes in history. As a result, Camus did not believe in the dialectics of history. From Camus’ point of view there were only rights and wrongs and what claimed his attention in historical events were victims and executioners. In other words, Camus’ method turns on the assumption that “The destruction of man once more affirms man. Terror and concentration camps are the drastic means used by man to escape solitude. The thirst for unity must be assuaged, even in the common grave. If men kill one another, it is because they reject mortality and desire immortality for all men”²⁸. In order to overcome this madness, Camus suggests a life of moderation and measure as elements of the Mediterranean culture. As for Ortega, as a Mediterranean, he had lived with “the harsh fierceness of the actual”, one of his own expressions

²⁵ Spanish edition: José ORTEGA Y GASSET, IV, 423.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 424.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 473.

²⁸ Albert CAMUS, *The Rebel*, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

and he had refused as a philosopher to confine his thoughts within the rigid framework of a system. As such, Ortega's "metaphysics of life" remains a philosophy of dialogue and diversity. His horror of the conventional shallow Spanish traditionalism made him to substitute his thoughtful Europeanism for hispanicism but also to stand out as public gadfly in sharp contrast to traditional academic philosophy. What Ortega preached constantly in his philosophical career and consistently carried on by him against wind and tide was the affirmation of philosophy as self-affirmation. Therefore, according to Ortega, "To live is to be outside oneself, to realize oneself". For Ortega, life is the foundation which needs to be made, to be realized and to be lived. Self-realization is the ultimate goal. Thus, Ortega's philosophy is designed to treat culture as a path to self-realization. Moreover, in Ortega's eyes, culture is an "exegesis of life". Culture is the moment of clarity and security in the midst of chaos. In the same way philosophy and art are for Ortega forms of self-creation and self-relection. In Ortega's opinion, open-mindedness suits the cultivated spirit and encourages creativity. Ortega, therefore, rejects a narrow-minded view which is convinced that there is only "one way of seeing" reality. Here lies Ortega's continuous effort not to take philosophy for granted but as a task and as something we must account for unceasingly.

Let me conclude with a few remarks on Camus's and Ortega's idea of philosophy. The centerpiece of Albert Camus's philosophy has always been an inquiry into the moral and political imperatives of freedom. In a lecture given at Saint- Etienne on May 10 1953, Camus affirms: "If freedom is regressing today throughout such a large part of the world, this is probably because the devices for enslavement have never been so cynically chosen or so effective, but also because her real defenders, through fatigue, through despair have turned away from her". In other words, thinking for Camus should be in the service of justice and freedom. Like Ortega, Camus insisted that thinking must not be confused with logical thinking, especially because "logical thinking" had lost all of its traditional meaning. Moreover, Camus believed that thinking begins in solitude but progresses into an act of revolt and solidarity in the name of human nature. In the same way as Camus and long before it was fashionable to do so, Ortega came not to rest in some type of "existential philosophy", but to get engaged in a dialogical thought concerned with understanding all things in terms of a subject in dialogue with the world. In his "Commentary on Plato's Banquet" of 1946, he wrote: "The world is toward us and we are towards the world...". Here "the mutual and reciprocal existing of man and the world" is brought into view by Ortega's dialogical philosophy as "a permanent and constitutive state of mind". Camus would sure agree with Ortega that "Man genuinely has no recourse but to «continue thinking», for he always discovers that

he has not thought anything out completely, but must integrate it with what has already been thought, or else recognize that he might just as well not have thought at all, and consequently feel lost". And, like Ortega, or Socrates for that matter, he would insist that that's the first principle of a philosophy is the justification of itself. A task that neither Ortega nor Camus forgot in their dissenting visions as public gadflies that heightened and glorified everyday struggle of philosophers for truth. ●

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