

Paul Ricœur and José Ortega y Gasset: A Necessary Dialogue Configurations of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

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Abstract

In this work, I would like to show the confluence between the philosophies of Paul Ricœur and José Ortega y Gasset. Their philosophies appear to be distinct, but only at first glance. The goal is to demonstrate the convergence between both thinkers. They share the same “soil,” a similar “subsoil,” and identical “adversaries” (using Ortega’s expressions). The opportunity presented by their philosophies allows their intersection to contribute to what has come to be called “hermeneutic phenomenology.” From their perspectives, from the joint reading of one with the other, and one through the other, we can better understand what this school of thought is and consider it not only as a theory but also as a possibility for the philosophical task of our time. In this paper, I aim to offer some insights derived from previous work, in which many of these points are explored in greater depth. At the same time, I would like to suggest possible lines of research to the philosophical community. It is, therefore, a work that seeks continuity and further development.

Keywords: *Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Vital Reason, Metaphor, Translation.*

Résumé

Dans ce travail, je souhaite montrer la convergence entre les philosophies de Paul Ricœur et de José Ortega y Gasset qui semblent distinctes en apparence, mais dont nous verrons qu’elles partagent le même « sol », un « sous-sol » semblable et des « adversaires » identiques (en utilisant les expressions d’Ortega). À partir de leurs perspectives, par une lecture conjointe de l’un avec l’autre et de l’un à travers l’autre, nous pouvons mieux comprendre ce qu’est l’école de pensée de la « phénoménologie herméneutique » et la considérer non seulement comme une théorie, mais aussi comme une possibilité pour la tâche philosophique de notre temps. Je présenterai quelques réflexions issues de travaux antérieurs, dans lesquels bon nombre de ces points sont approfondis. Parallèlement, je voudrais proposer des pistes de recherche à la communauté philosophique. Il s’agit donc d’un travail qui vise à assurer la continuité et à ouvrir la voie à de nouveaux développements.

Mots-clés : *phénoménologie, herméneutique, raison vitale, métaphore, traduction.*

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Configurations of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

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Hermeneutic phenomenology is not merely a philosophical theory, but an attitude and a way of facing life itself. It can come to shape a working method and, above all, a perspective. It is not something already given and established; rather, it is a project, a living and ongoing tradition. It is therefore not a matter of “remaining,” of “staying put,” or of being “labeled,” but a way of moving within the fabric of life and the world. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a journey, an adventure. This is how I would like to characterize it. It implies movement and action, a way of setting out, projecting and projecting ourselves.

1. The horizon of an encounter

For this tradition of thought, it is essential to begin from one’s own situation, whether we call it “circumstance,” “situation,” or “world.” Once we approach Ricœur’s hermeneutics through the notion of creativity, in the text (metaphor and narrative) and in action, we then proceed to show its depth by means of an anthropological grounding–inquiry, and its scope in the field of practical philosophy. Among other things, I have considered the concept of “deliberation” as a key to this line of thought, understood as a method of practical philosophy.¹

My Ortega-inspired path was marked by my reading of Ricœur. I saw Ortega putting into practice, bringing into effect, what Ricœur formulated.² In this way, I explored Ortega’s writings on metaphor, which give substance to the theory set out in *The Rule of Metaphor*, just as Ortega’s ideas on the novel did for Ricœur’s analyses of time and narrative. Thus, a question that emerged from both of them, in their confluence and convergence, was the understanding of human life as narrative: we are stories in search of a narrator (Ricœur) and novelists of ourselves (Ortega). Once again, I found in Ortega – consider the various biographies he wrote (on Vives, Velázquez, Goethe, etc.) – the practical enactment of Ricœur’s theoretical proposal of narrative identity. I have also observed how, in the practical orientation of Ricœur’s philosophy, many Orteguian motifs continue to resonate, especially those that have to do with the question of responsibility.

Resonances thus began to appear everywhere, and I realized that they were not mere projections, but clear and evident references between them, though never explicit. Careful reading,

¹ See my work “Deliberation, the Art of Being Able Not to Be Right”, *Argumenta Philosophica*, 2 (2023), 59–74.

² I had already presented it in this way in “José Ortega y Gasset in Hermeneutical Phenomenology: The Experience of Translation as a Hermeneutic Paradigm”, in Fernando Llano (ed.), *Meditations on Ortega* (Madrid: Tébar, 2005), 373–410.

along with seminars, meetings, and lectures, has gradually given consistency and validity to this encounter between the two.

The key to this encounter lies in the theme that dominates both approaches, both philosophies. Both seek to elaborate a philosophical anthropology centered on the idea of life, through different detours and perspectives, depending on their stages and moments. They do not speak explicitly very often of “philosophical anthropology,” although this is in fact what they are doing. This is very evident in Ortega, and Ricœur himself comes to acknowledge it and to describe his entire work as “philosophical anthropology.”³

Moreover, this coincidence is reinforced when we observe that they share the same philosophical ground: a phenomenology transformed hermeneutically. In the French thinker, this appears in a programmatic way, guiding his thought; in the Spanish thinker, it is effective and enacted, although not explicitly acknowledged in those terms.

1.1. Tracing hospitality

These are two philosophies destined to encounter one another. Both are concerned with life: Ortega’s comes to be regarded as a “vitalist philosophy,” while in Ricœur the theme becomes explicit as his philosophical program develops. Before entering into detail, however, I would like to point out that the encounter between these two thinkers is possible because their philosophies themselves, in a way, prepare that encounter, that receptivity and reciprocity. It is no minor point that both philosophies are philosophies of the “between,” that is, they are shaped through dialogue with others, with other philosophies and other forms of knowledge, and with the world and culture they inhabited. In a sense, we can say that this is their major shared theme: the elaboration of the conditions of possibility for a common “between.” Not only the thematization of that space, or its exemplification in various topics, but also bringing to light the conditions of encounter. These are philosophies that provide us with keys for thinking a necessary hospitality, both in our discourses and in our lives.

However, to inhabit the “between,” to dwell in the space of the “between,” is not a quiet situation; quite the contrary. They are subject to tensions, always in search of difficult equilibria. In giving room to positions that are so diverse and dispersed, the reasons for tension multiply. In them, interdisciplinarity is not a mere “pose,” but rather an effort of sincerity and commitment to philosophy itself.

Their philosophies and their lives can be understood in terms of the two concepts we have already been sketching: “situation” and “between.” For two philosophers who give such priority to these concepts and to the experiences they involve, it is not surprising that they converge. Thus, for example, both are in dialogue with the sciences, with art, and with politics. They give priority to mediation over immediate affirmation. It is not surprising either that Ricœur should opt for the long route (*le détour*) rather than Heidegger’s short path, just as Ortega pursues turns, series, and perspectives around a single issue. Nor is it surprising that both were at some point “accused” of being “positivists” or of being excessively concerned with “methodological questions.” Both received this accusation: Ortega from Heidegger, Ricœur from Gadamer. Two temperaments and talents of mediation, advocates of the long route.

³ Thus, he refers to his entire philosophy as a “philosophical anthropology,” a fundamental philosophical anthropology. Paul Ricœur, *Vivant jusqu’à la mort. Fragments* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 107.

Beyond specific themes, however, I would now like to highlight something more essential in their confluence: their attitude. Their attitude is one of inquietude, always from a certain vital disposition closely linked to vitality, cheerfulness, or a sporting character, to use Ortega's expression; an attitude quite different and opposed to other philosophies that privilege despair, pessimism, or anguish.

My aim is not to determine who anticipated whom, or how they relate to common masters. Nor do I merely intend to point out coincidences, although these certainly exist and are many. That is not what is most important. I seek to carry out a hermeneutic reading, in this case a double one: I seek to read one with the other and to read one through the other. Yet what matters most is that, in this cross-reading, we are in fact reading ourselves. This interplay of perspectives offers powerful insights for interpreting the challenges of our world. It is a hermeneutical space that goes beyond clichés and commonplaces of contemporary thought. From this multiple interweaving there emerges a distinctive family resemblance, different from other forms and tonalities of contemporary philosophy⁴.

1.2. "In the school" of Ortega and Ricœur

We find ourselves "in the school of Ortega and Ricœur." And we know, from Ricœur himself, the deep significance of being "in the school of..."⁵. Before delving into their philosophies, someone, quite reasonably, might ask whether they ever met or read one another.

The first thing to note is that they belong to different generations. Ortega y Gasset was born in 1883 and died in 1955; Ricœur was born in 1913 and died in 2005. The former developed his philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century, the latter throughout the entire century. According to Ricœur's own words, his knowledge of Ortega was limited⁶. He read him as a major figure of European culture, and his main reference was the most widely read of Ortega's books in France, *The Revolt of the Masses*. He understood Ortega more as a sociologist and erudite interpreter of an era than as a major philosopher. We can also reasonably assume that, if Ricœur read little of Ortega, still less did Ortega read Ricœur, since when the Spanish philosopher died (1955) the French thinker had barely published a couple of significant books (basically his thesis on the philosophy of the will). However, consulting Ortega's personal library, we have been able to confirm that he owned Ricœur and Dufrenne's *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence* (Le Seuil, 1947), as well as *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers. Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe* (Le Seuil, 1948). He did not simply possess these books, as they were also underlined/annotated. This may be anecdotal and inconclusive as evidence of a sustained reference but let the anecdote nonetheless serve as an invitation to think and explore deeper encounters. This is what we set out to do here.

I have allowed myself to speak of "hermeneutic phenomenology" in both cases, as I do also in the case of H.-G. Gadamer. In all three, and with all three, hermeneutic phenomenology takes shape in a particular way. Perhaps the expression "hermeneutic phenomenology" should be

⁴ Today Ortega y Gasset's work is available almost in its entirety in the new edition of his complete works: José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas*, 10 vols. (Madrid: Taurus-Fundación Ortega-Marañón, 2004–2010).

⁵ See Paul Ricœur, *À l'école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 2004).

⁶ In conversations with the author of the paper: Ricœur himself told me that he knew only certain references to Ortega's most successful book in France, *The Revolt of the Masses*.

reserved strictly for Heidegger, or at least in a stricter sense, since it is he who, in continuity with the master Husserl, proposes the break and the turn toward hermeneutics with different aims and a different depth. I nonetheless believe that it is with these three thinkers that hermeneutic phenomenology, as such, acquires a clear presence on the contemporary scene and establishes itself as a distinct voice.

Why this encounter? Where and how is this peculiar connection established? Without dwelling on the complex relations each of them entertains with Husserl and also with Heidegger, I would like to point out that the three share a family resemblance; more than that, they belong to the same family. Following a very clear and didactic schema proposed by Ortega for understanding a philosophy, we can fully grasp what I am asserting. According to Ortega, to understand a philosophy we must grasp its “soil,” its “subsoil,” and its “adversaries.” Well, our three philosophers share the same soil, point toward a very similar subsoil, and have common adversaries, common enemies. Who are these adversaries? Their adversaries are the various positivisms and reductionisms that, since the late nineteenth century, have threatened from different directions; the reduction of reality to the realm of “pure” facts, of the measurable and quantifiable, is the great enemy for all three, as it is for phenomenology and hermeneutics in general. They also share a common soil: where do they train, with what intellectual resources? Their philosophical soil is phenomenology, for however much they may surpass it – whether through the influence of Heidegger, the pursuit of a distinctive vitalist philosophy, or the insistence on necessary mediation – they remain within it in a certain way. This way of “going beyond” phenomenology is, I claim, the hermeneutic way. And they also share a common subsoil: they all aim at the recovery or defense of a rich and full Humanism, which each of them discovers in different (in this case more cultural–national) traditions. Soil, subsoil, and adversaries are common; it is therefore not surprising that their philosophies can be read in convergent ways and as belonging to the same family.

Another convergence, which I will not develop here but would like at least to mention, concerns the methodological proximity among the three, both in the way they conduct their research and in the way they present their results. Gadamer repeatedly refers to and employs the so-called hermeneutic circle, taken up from classical hermeneutics by way of Heidegger; Ricœur, in the same vein and in contrast to the image of the hermeneutic circle, speaks of a hermeneutic spiral to emphasize how, at each turn around a question, a new perspective is gained, a new point of view. Something similar occurs with Ortega’s proposal of dialectical series or, in a more literary and biblical register, the Jericho method, according to which, just as the Jews besieged Jericho by circling around it, so too does the philosophical method circle around its questions. The convergence is clear, notable, and evident: in each turn, in each rotation, there is a gain in meaning. In other words, circularity is productive and creative.

If these reasons were not enough, I would like to mention a brief anecdote – or small coincidence – that points to the intimate connection among these three philosophies. In 1983, on the occasion of the centenary of Ortega’s birth, Gadamer was invited to give a lecture in his honor in Madrid. His lecture was brilliant and comprehensive. His aim was to show how his own philosophy, and perhaps also Ortega’s, was marked by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and metaphysical aspirations, and he gave it the title “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and

Metaphysics.”⁷ In this lecture, especially at the beginning and at the end, there are explicit references to Ortega. Ten years later, in 1993, he was invited to a tribute to Ricœur in Munich and, surprisingly, he delivered the same lecture. Beyond the academic principle of economy that leads one to reuse a lecture in different venues, it is striking that the lecture which served for Ortega should also serve for Ricœur, with only the names changed. As I say, it is no more than an anecdote, but a very significant and expressive one, indicative of this confluence. The relationship between them and Gadamer is more complex and extended. I will not go into that relationship here, although I will turn to this author to better understand this intersection between Ortega and Ricœur.

One of the great themes of Ortega’s philosophy is the complex relation between history and truth. This is what he called “the theme of our time” (1923). How is it possible to understand truth as something universal and beyond time while at the same time underscoring the historical dimension of everything human? How can we reconcile truth and history? How can we defend a perspectivism that is not relativistic? This is “the theme of our time.” It concerns nothing less than what Gadamer would describe as the discovery of “historical consciousness,” that is, the historically constitutive dimension of all that is human. It is hardly a coincidence, or perhaps not at all, that one of the first volumes in which Ricœur collects his own essays bears the title *History and Truth*. Moreover, it is important to note that Gadamer and Ricœur met at the lectures Gadamer gave in Leuven, entitled “The Problem of Historical Consciousness” (lectures that would become the origin of Truth and Method), in 1958.

Ricœur and Gadamer are usually presented at the intersection of phenomenology and hermeneutics, the one being said to be more hermeneutical than the other, the other more phenomenological than the one, and commentary often focuses on their respective affinities and distances, especially in relation to Heidegger.⁸ But what about Ortega? He is largely unknown, not only outside Spain but also within it. He is often regarded as a fine writer (at times even as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature) and as a great expositor and pedagogue, but rarely as an original philosopher and, occasionally, not even as a philosopher at all. Yet Ortega is a great philosopher⁹. I consider how a correct understanding of his work requires situating it in relation to phenomenology and, I would add, to hermeneutics as well. The comparison and confluence with Ricœur reinforce this thesis.

⁷ Therefore, there are different versions of this lecture (with minor modifications). Here I have used: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Metaphysics”, in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Hermeneutic Turn* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998), 27–37.

⁸ Tomás Domingo Moratalla. “¿Es Paul Ricœur un fenomenólogo? Entre fenomenología y hermenéutica”, *Escritos* nº26, vol.57 (2018), 251–82. <https://doi.org/10.18566/escr.v26n57.a02>.

⁹ My intention is precisely to break with this image, just as other many experts on Ortega have done over the last 30 years. See, for example, the tips I propose in “Reading Ortega at the Height of Our Time”, in a collective book devoted to demonstrating the philosophical power of Ortega: Javier Zamora Bonilla (ed.), *Guía Comares de Ortega* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2013), 331–353.

It is essential to understand Ortega as a philosopher and to comprehend him in the context of phenomenology, even if he takes some distance from it¹⁰. It is also important to recognize his aims and his distinctive style. What the Madrid philosopher seeks is not only philosophical penetration and depth, but above all clarity. He sees himself as an educator, a cultural guide for people in need of culture. For this reason, he turns to the media through which this educational task can be carried out: the public square. If Spain's problem is a lack of culture – as this author thinks – the young Ortega finds the solution in Europe: culture. Hence his first task is to bring this culture to Spain, a task of dissemination and translation. He sought to achieve this through ongoing efforts to promote translations, political engagement, contributions to newspapers, and the creation of academic journals such as *Revista de Occidente*, founded in 1923, still in publication today and in which many of Ricœur's own works have been published.

To fulfill this vocation, already apparent in his early writings and letters, he had to pursue his education in what he regarded as the cradle of European culture: Germany.¹¹ He sought guidance to undertake this task, and during his journey to Germany he immersed himself fully in the Neo-Kantian movement, sharing concerns and friendships with many of its members (Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer, etc.). Yet he also detected problems and inadequacies in their positions that, as for many others of his generation, led him toward Husserl and phenomenology. From his readings, interpreted in a highly original manner, incorporating phenomenology as a distinct way of thinking and anticipating concepts – such as circumstance, project, etc. – that other authors would later use, his first major book, *Meditations on Quixote*, was born.¹² Many of its themes are steeped in phenomenology, especially the analyses of perception by W. Schapp, one of Husserl's disciples. Ortega would later say that for us, for him and his generation, phenomenology was not a philosophy but “a stroke of good fortune.” In 1913, Ortega wrote two brief articles on phenomenology, magnificent texts in which he inquires into what phenomenology is and what its scope might be. One bears the title “The Concept of Sensation” and the other “Sensation, Construction, Intuition,” where he clearly contrasts the sensation of the “ancients” and the construction of the “moderns” (the Kantians) with intuition, a key concept of phenomenology. These texts by Ortega on phenomenology are probably the first written in a language other than German.

¹⁰ To understand the presence of phenomenology in Ortega's thought, the works of Javier San Martín are key. From the interpretation of the “new” Husserl, he has led us to new interpretations of Ortega's philosophy. I like to speak, following in his wake, of a “new” Ortega. On his work, his interpretation, and with abundant references, see: Tomás Domingo Moratalla / Noé Expósito (eds.), *Ortega y la fenomenología. Diálogos con Javier San Martín* (Madrid: Dykinson).

¹¹ Ortega always maintained his admiration for Germany, beyond the rise of Nazism and the Second World War. See, for example, the lecture Ortega gave in Berlin in 1949 (*Meditación de Europa y otros ensayos* [Madrid: Alianza, 2015]). I would also recall that we find something similar in Ricœur: in the concentration camp in Poland during the world war, Ricœur was reading (and translating) Husserl and other German authors, in order to indicate that Germany, as a culture and a nation, stood above Nazism (see for example François Dosse, *Paul Ricœur. Le sens d'une vie* [Paris: La Decouverte, 1997]).

¹² See N. Orringer, *Ortega y las fuentes germánicas* (Madrid: Gredos, 1980).

It is also interesting to see Ortega seeking his own way of doing phenomenology, one that connects with some of Husserl's own intentions¹³. Certain themes in his philosophy are central and of profoundly phenomenological lineage. In *Meditations on Quixote*, Ortega formulates his great philosophical maxim: "I am myself and my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I do not save myself." There is no better way to describe Husserlian intentionality, the correlation between consciousness and world, than by highlighting this co-implication. Moreover, he points to a mission of salvation, of responsibility with regard to the circumstances in which we are – that we are. The phenomenological key is present from that moment on, and many of his later works can be read as a debate with phenomenology and even as a surpassing, a shift from it; and I would say, from phenomenology to hermeneutics. This is my interpretation. His vitalism, his philosophy of life, his perspectivism, and so on, deepen this intertwining of traditions (phenomenology and hermeneutics). Some of his major works in this respect are *What Is Philosophy?*, *The Revolt of the Masses*, *Man and People*, and *History as a System*, the latter being the consummation and crystallization of an Orteguian hermeneutic phenomenology. Vital reason (an expression coined by Ortega) becomes historical reason and narrative reason (as the philosopher himself would later call it). Is this "reason," so brilliantly qualified by Ortega, not precisely "hermeneutic reason"? I believe so, and there are sufficient arguments to describe Ortega's philosophy as a "hermeneutic phenomenology" as well.

2. What is hermeneutic phenomenology?

It might be helpful, to assess the suitability of the designation "hermeneutic phenomenology" as applied to both Ricœur and Ortega, to clarify what we mean by it. For this purpose, it is appropriate to turn to Gadamer. In the essay mentioned earlier he honored them both. And he thought of them under this dual tradition of phenomenology and hermeneutics. All three thinkers, in one way or another, correspond with good reason and precision to the characteristics that can be drawn from Gadamer's text. What is hermeneutic phenomenology? Let us briefly review Gadamer's characterization. This characterization serves not so much to help us understand Gadamer – that is not our aim in this paper – but rather to show how Ortega and Ricœur can be understood under the heading of "hermeneutic phenomenology," and in what sense they can be understood in this way.

- 1) First: we start, as the German thinker notes – and this applies to the French and Spanish philosophers as well – from phenomenology, but we do not understand it merely as a theory of knowledge; it is much more, something broader. It implies a new vision, as well as a paradigm shift in the realm of practical reason.

¹³ Much could be said about the relationship between Husserl and Ortega. As a reference and example of this relationship, consider the reference we find in a letter that Husserl wrote to Ingarden after Ortega's visit in 1934: "In the last week we had a very interesting philosophical visit: Ortega y Gasset, who greatly surprised us. He is deeply versed in my writings. There were long conversations with Fink and me; his questions penetrate to the most difficult depths. In fact, he is not only, as a publicist, the educator of the new Spain, but also, as a professor, the leader of a phenomenological school. Now a translation of his own of the *Meditations* will follow, and later the other works (the Spanish edition of the *Logical Investigations* is in everyone's hands). Otherwise, a wonderful man." See Javier San Martín, "José Ortega y Gasset's Visit to Husserl in 1934: Ortega's Objections to Phenomenology," *Revista de Estudios Orteguianos*, no. 45 (2022), 123–155.

- 2) From phenomenology, and on its basis, we develop a philosophy of experience, what in Husserlian terms we would call a philosophy of the “Lebenswelt.”
- 3) Despite the force and presence of phenomenology, it is necessary to move beyond and overcome the idealism still present in Husserl, and the way to do so is through Heidegger, with his help. Here, with respect to Heidegger, there are of course profound differences among them, but they agree on the need to exit idealism (which they somewhat naively attribute to Husserl, though influenced by Heidegger himself).
- 4) With Heidegger, and from Heidegger – often without explicit reference to him – they operate within what he termed the “hermeneutics of facticity.”
- 5) As Gadamer would say, we must take into account the essential linguistic character of experience, that is, “language as the house of being,” or the necessary linguistic mediation.
- 6) But this does not mean remaining enclosed in language; in all three there is a need to go with language beyond it, toward the world, toward life. This is to recognize, in Ricœur’s words, the “ontological vehemence” of language.
- 7) Language points toward dialogue, which occurs in play, in conversation, in the mutual recognition of a shared experience.
- 8) This defense of life, of the word and dialogue, connects with the defense of a humanist culture.
- 9) Moreover, it adds the need to balance a “knowledge for domination” and a “knowledge that seeks the good,” that is, the necessary “moral intention,” critical, pedagogical, or, as Ortega would put it, “salvific.” The ethical dimension is constitutive of hermeneutic phenomenology.

2.1. Resonating themes: episodes

What is most interesting in the relationship between Ricœur and Ortega, with Gadamer in the background, is that within and from this shared space outlined here – hermeneutic phenomenology – major themes resonate, with coincidences not only in topics but also in the ways of addressing them. Let us examine some of them, for it is these that embody hermeneutic phenomenology in its most proper sense.

The first resonating theme is the attention given to circumstance, to context, both at a theoretical level and at a practical or applied level. At the theoretical level, the Orteguian phrase “I am myself and my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I do not save myself” leaves no room for doubt. Circumstance constitutes me and demands a commitment, a responsibility. Something similar is found in Ricœur, for whom reality, circumstances, the third moment of ethical experience (practical wisdom), is crucial – already in his early writings when he spoke of “risk” in decisions.

Precisely this attention to circumstances is what makes us encounter two engaged philosophers, concerned with politics, education, and the regeneration of a society in crisis. They

are concerned with culture (the work of dissemination and translation),¹⁴ with the university, or with illuminating politics.

Another major theme that resonates in their philosophies is the search for meaningful action; they seek the conditions for an autonomous action, from oneself, and with meaning. But what do “conscious,” “will,” “freedom,” etc., mean? Here a detour is required, one we encounter – in another coincidence – in both: the need to take Freud and psychoanalysis into account. Ricœur’s works on Freud are well known, a great many articles and books, since Ortega himself, several decades earlier, was an enthusiast of Freud; indeed, thanks to him psychoanalysis was translated and gained special prominence in the Hispanic American context. Both agree in criticizing a certain interpretation of psychoanalysis as a biologicist reductionism (and a certain pansexualism), or in the understanding of the human psyche as an equilibrium of energies and self-regulating mechanisms.

They are two philosophers who, albeit in different ways – one more systematic, the other more topical – elaborate an ethics, a practical philosophy. Without characterizing them now, we can say that these are Aristotelian-inspired ethics in which prudent, responsible action is essential, rather than mere compliance with a norm or a formal-rational imperative. Ricœur’s “little ethics” is famously well articulated. In Ortega, we find an ethics of deliberation, of choice, of elegance that affects the world and one’s own life. The motto of Orteguian philosophy and ethics is Aristotle’s phrase from the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “let us in our lives be like archers who have a target.” The importance of the “target,” of hitting the mark in decisions, or of finding that vocation that moves and structures our life, or of finding or creating that ethical intention, defines our ethical life, our full living.

Moreover, specifying what I previously called care for circumstance, there are close and convergent political philosophies in both thinkers. They see the need for philosophical reflection on the social-political; further, they carry out exercises and practices of these political implications, sometimes not without frustration.¹⁵

Another important site of resonance is the importance they attribute to texts and, with them, to philosophical tradition. Dialogue with the world, with circumstance, is enriched and mediated by the texts of tradition. Thus, the history of philosophy acquires capital importance, and we see how both, from different paths, trace similar itineraries: a special interest in Descartes (the beginning of reflexive philosophy for Ricœur, the search for a vital Cartesianism for Ortega) and, later, in Kant, the key to our modernity (also the two). Also, a concern and engagement with what Ricœur called the “masters of suspicion,” and of course with the phenomenological tradition (Husserl, Scheler, etc.) and hermeneutic tradition (Dilthey, Heidegger). I would also like to highlight a philosopher whom both cite, work on, and appreciate (with Gadamer, too): Hegel. I

¹⁴ See this collection of articles: Tomás Domingo Moratalla, *Voluntad de responsabilidad. Cuidar la vida, cuidar la ciudad. 10 textos de Paul Ricœur sobre ética, política y responsabilidad* (Madrid: Dykinson SL, 2020).

¹⁵ On practical-political philosophy, the compilation of Ricœur’s brief and insightful texts available in Spanish is noteworthy: Paul Ricœur: *Voluntad de responsabilidad. Cuidar la vida, cuidar la ciudad. 10 textos de Paul Ricœur sobre ética, política y responsabilidad* (Madrid: Dykinson SL, 2020). These include: “Ethics, Morals, and the Rule”; “Ethics and Politics”; “Doubt and Suspicion”; “Responsibility, Limited or Unlimited?”; “Responsibility and Fragility”; “Risk”; “You Are the Salt of the Earth”; and “Fragile Identity: Respect for the Other and Cultural Identity.”

would venture to say Hegel is one of the philosophical horizons for our authors, but always remaining as a temptation, a renunciation, approached with extreme caution. Following some of their expressions, I would say that their hermeneutic philosophies are failed Hegelian philosophies (without the Absolute), or that Hegelian philosophy is an unrealized hermeneutic philosophy (which closes upon an absolute, the Absolute). Hegelian philosophy, the great philosophy of mediation, pulses in their approaches, but Hegel fails to grasp what Ortega and Ricœur know well: the tragedy of action, the irruption of the tragic, which precludes any closure of history and admits only narration, an open historical reason. The idea of “historical consciousness,” central for them (Ricœur, Ortega, and Gadamer), undeniably has a Hegelian root.

There are also resonances at more concrete levels. One is particularly timely and characteristic: their philosophies of metaphor. Ricœur wrote a major book, *The Rule of Metaphor*, probably one of the great studies on the subject. Perhaps one of the book’s major shortcomings – something I dared to mention to Ricœur himself – is that it never considers Ortega’s texts on metaphor. The coincidence is absolute. The difference is that in Ortega they appear in scattered texts, without formulating a theory as such, and to be sure, more than fifty years earlier. That metaphor is not merely an ornament of language, that it has an ontological vehemence, that it is a means of knowledge, etc., is masterfully expressed by Ortega. The question of the relations between metaphor (literature) and concept (philosophy) constantly pursued the Madrid philosopher. What Ortega states directly and intuitively we see in Ricœur articulated in a magnificent conceptual work like *The Rule of Metaphor* (Ricœur himself was astonished when he learned of these texts)¹⁶.

And alongside metaphor, narration. Following his investigation of metaphor, Ricœur unfolds a meticulous analysis of narrative activity, how it configures time and human life, arriving at the notion of narrative identity. Well, Ortega, who is said to have developed a vital and historical reason, speaks in his mature period of “narrative reason”; the human becomes “something” transparent before this narrative knowledge. Many texts of Ortega point in this direction¹⁷. I would highlight in particular his biographies of Velázquez, Goethe, Goya, Vives, etc., which are exercises of biographical narrative reason. What Ortega carries out here is what Ricœur systematizes in some of his writings, for example, in his short but great text “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator.”¹⁸ They are two great narrative philosophies; they constitute a great narrative hermeneutics.

There is an impressive and paradoxical consonance or resonance (confluence). It is astonishing that many Ortega scholars have not noticed this confluence, or that Ricœur scholars are unaware of this approach. They would spare themselves much headache. In some sense, this article seeks to offer bridges of communication and for future research.

¹⁶ On Ortega, Ricœur, and metaphor, see Tomás Domingo Moratalla, “The Hermeneutics of Metaphor: From Ortega to Ricœur,” *Espéculo: Revista de Estudios Literarios*, no. 24 (2003). Also, “Ortega y Gasset: When Metaphor Gives (Much) Food for Thought. The Metaphorical Warp of Cordial Reason,” *Red de Investigaciones Filosóficas. SCIO*, June 2020, <https://proyectoscio.ucv.es/articulos-filosoficos/ortega-y-gasset-metaphora/.dialnet.unirioja+1>.

¹⁷ I have developed it in “Vida e narração: parcours da razão narrativa. Um encontro possível entre Paul Ricœur e José Ortega y Gasset,” in Claudio Reichert do Nascimento (ed.), *Pensar Ricœur: vida e narração* (Clarinete, 2016), 351–372.

¹⁸ Paul Ricœur, “Life: A Narrative in Search of a Narrator,” in *Écrits et conférences 1. Autour de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 257–276.

On the topic of narrativity in both approaches, I would like to mention a small detail that shows and grounds this confluence. Ortega's first major philosophical book, as I mentioned earlier, is *Meditations on Quixote* (1914), which pulses with phenomenological presuppositions. In fact, it was the reception of Husserl's *Ideas I* – along with Scheler's ethics – in 1913 that prompted Ortega to write it. It draws on phenomenological concepts he had read/heard in Husserl, but above all on elements of a phenomenology of perception that Ortega already knew through one of Husserl's most daring disciples: Wilhelm Schapp who elaborated, even before the master, a phenomenology of perception (*Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, 1910). Schapp influenced Ortega greatly, and he always held him in special affection, to the point that, despite Schapp's abandonment of philosophy for the world of law, Ortega promoted the translation of Schapp's works on the philosophy of law even beyond its phenomenological contexts.

In 1936, a major tribute to Cassirer was organized. Ortega was invited to participate, and he did so with a text of special relevance: *History as a System*. Probably Ortega's most hermeneutic text, it lays the foundations for narrative reason and highlights the substantial narrativity of human life, going beyond Dilthey. This text was published in English, even before German, and thus became one of Ortega's most "international" works¹⁹.

Schapp, after retiring from law toward the end of his life, renewed his interest in philosophy and elaborated a philosophy of history and a narrative-oriented anthropology. It is no surprise that he read the tribute to Cassirer and Ortega's text. His title was *Entangled in Stories* (*In Geschichten verstrickt. Zum Sein von Ding und Mensch*, 1953). In this study, with scarcely any citations or references, Orteguian themes are unmistakably present.

This text by Schapp, deeply marked by Ortega, became one of the inspirations and leitmotifs of Ricœur's approach. He repeatedly states that we are "beings entangled in stories." Ricœur's narrative hermeneutics has, unbeknownst to him, an Orteguian background.

I would also like to add one more resonance–confluence regarding a theme of great importance for our time: the idea of translation.

All authors in the hermeneutic tradition have elaborated a reflection on translation. The experience of translation resonates with the hermeneutic task, regardless of how we understand it. The importance and relevance of translation is evident in our two authors from the moment we recognize the importance they attach to communication and cultural transmission; both, in different ways and with different impact, promoted translations of philosophical and literary works. Many are the texts that have marked Ricœur's intellectual life with respect to translation. Probably the most prominent is "Défi et bonheur de la traduction." I will not go into his theses now. I would only ask the reader to note Ortega's most relevant text, "Misericordia y esplendor de la traducción" ("The Misery and the Splendour of Translation") Same tone and same ambivalence.²⁰

¹⁹ Originally written in English and German in 1935, *History as a System* appeared in 1936 in the collective volume *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) and had already appeared in German as "Die Lage der Wissenschaft und die historische Vernunft," *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, October 1935.

²⁰ P. Ricœur, *Sur la traduction* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), accompanied by two other texts, "Le paradigme de la traduction" and "Un 'passage': traduire l'intraduisible." The title of Ortega's text ("Misericordia y esplendor

Ortega's text is a classic of translation studies. Perhaps, alongside Walter Benjamin's text on translation, it is one of the most significant of the twentieth century. Their coincident theories of translation bring to light essential elements of hermeneutics as they understand it, which I have sought to highlight in several works.²¹

I point to one last theme of encounter. A theme that occupied and concerned Ortega was the question of technology. He is one of the great philosophers of technology. Unfortunately little known beyond the Hispanic world, he offers a reflection on technology of great scope. One of his most famous texts revolves around it: a lecture he gave alongside Heidegger in Darmstadt, before an audience of engineers and architects, at one of the Darmstadt Colloquia. Heidegger's brilliant lecture ("Bauen, Wohnen, Denken") was loudly booed, perhaps because, as Ortega said, it was not understood by the audience. Ortega, chivalrously (in Heidegger's own expression), intervened in Heidegger's favor, though he then argued the opposite.²² It is a philosophy of technology that captures its ambivalence but does not necessarily qualify it as "evil" or as an irreversible disposition. It is a much more positive attitude. Technology is the fruit of human imagination, of creativity; thus, perhaps we can also find in it possibilities of humanization. I believe that in the philosophy of culture traceable in many of Ricœur's texts, this power of imagination and creativity shines through, applicable not only to literature but also to the worlds of culture and technology²³. The confluence of their approaches regarding cultural and technical creations can offer truly novel and original elements for thinking the technological world in which we live, even the world of artificial intelligence²⁴. With them and from them, we could well speak of a digital hermeneutics, critical, but not reactive or nostalgic (as occurs with others inspired by Heidegger or in Jonas's proposal, which, despite differences with Heidegger, coincides here in underscoring the irreversible danger to which technical development leads us).

Many points in common, many resonances. This makes sense if we recall the common soil, subsoil, and adversaries I mentioned earlier. The phenomenological dimension is expressed and manifested in this broad range of coinciding themes. Linking them all, we can say that the great theme both addressed, which defines their philosophies, is the question of human life, the analysis

de la traducción," vol. V, 1937, 705–724), like Ricœur's, refers—although neither makes it explicit—to one of Balzac's most famous novels: *Esplendor y miseria de las cortesanas* (1847). Ironically, they invert the title: first highlighting the misery, the difficulty, near impossibility, the courtly character, before affirming, in a second moment, the majestic, exorbitant, joyful—indeed, noble—nature of the task of translation.

²¹ See my work "Translating Reason. J. Ortega y Gasset and P. Ricœur: Hermeneutic Horizons of Translation," *Critical Hermeneutics*, special 2 (2019), 85–108. Also, "Translation and 'Plot.' Around the Genesis of Hermeneutic Thought: José Ortega y Gasset and Paul Ricœur," in M. Leclerc-Olive (ed.), *Traductions et génétique d'une pensée: de Ricœur à Aristote* (Modena: Stem Mucchi Editore, 2020), 65–116.

²² On what happened in Darmstadt, see what Ortega reports ("En torno al 'COLOQUIO DE DARMSTADT, 1951,'" vol. VI, pp. 797–817). Ortega begins: "Above the sea level of the architectural colloquium, two philosophical eruptions occurred in Darmstadt: one, Heidegger's lecture in the morning of a day; the other, my lecture in the afternoon of the same day. About these two lectures, I would like to say something that does not properly refer to the doctrines enunciated in them, but to certain non-doctrinal aspects. This will be addressed in the next articles" (Vol. VI, p. 800).

²³ See P. Ricœur, "Tasks of the Political Educator," especially the first part of the article.

²⁴ From a Ricœurian perspective, the numerous works of F. Nascimento and A. Romele are very interesting.

of what the human being is. Their philosophies can be read, despite the resistances of many interpreters (and sometimes even of themselves), as “philosophical anthropology.” They are two explicit philosophical anthropologies. In Ricœur, we find the precise and explicit reference to this designation. And Ortega’s philosophy, despite rarely or never speaking of philosophical anthropology, can be understood as an analysis of life as “radical reality.” Given the current urgency to develop a philosophical anthropology, it is very interesting to read one alongside the other, one through the other, also in search of a philosophical anthropology adequate to our time. The categories and concepts do not cease to resonate and, above all, to enrich our debates.

2.2. The plot of hermeneutic phenomenology

This multitude of themes in which our philosophers converge can be articulated in such a way that the articulation itself reveals the profound coherence of their philosophies and of the approach I propose. The guiding thread of their themes, their fabric, will give us the backbone of their (common) hermeneutic phenomenology.

The first key point I would like to highlight concerns the definition of reason they propose. In Ricœur, we find a concept of expanded rationality that incorporates cognitive elements, emotive-sentimental elements, and ethical-practical elements. Reason, Ricœur tells us, must be considered in its complexity, and he comes to speak of a “full reason,” or what some, from his philosophy, have termed “hermeneutic reason,” speaking – and I believe with propriety and rigor – of a hermeneutic age of reason.

I consider that Ortega is probably the one who best understood what this “full reason” or “hermeneutic reason” entails. His entire work, rooted in a more Mediterranean than Central European or Anglo-Saxon mode of thinking, revolves around a new concept of reason that is closer, more everyday, concrete, and proximate to life itself. Hence he did not hesitate to speak of “vital reason,” and from the 1930s onward he frequently spoke of “historical reason” and “narrative reason.” Vital reason, historical reason, or narrative reason are the expressions reason takes in its hermeneutic age. Thus both advance in rethinking rationality otherwise.

The second structuring key of their philosophies (and of hermeneutic phenomenology) is the development of a theory, a philosophy, of responsibility. Whether it is Orteguian salvation of circumstance or the search for the fitting action, these are ways of expressing and articulating this responsibility. Ricœur unpacks his vision of responsibility in numerous texts (from his early writings to his latest). Ortega’s references are also multiple. In the text *Man and People*, Ortega opposes a common, everyday doing, an impersonal “one does,” to an authentic doing, from oneself, autonomous, personal. Responsibility expresses the archer’s effort to hit the target, to do “what must be done.” Their ethics, their philosophies, are ethics of responsibility and contribute, as few do, to grounding an ethical paradigm indispensable for our era.

The third key is also fundamental to their understanding: the idea of recognition. Alongside it, the ideas of reciprocity, dialogue, communication. This capacity to be with others, to be through others, constitutes one of the fundamental ideas of their proposals. We see it clearly in the question of translation (what is translating for both authors if not going out from oneself to return to oneself enriched, been others?). Or, from an ethical-political viewpoint, what is seeking the best action, the timely action, if not putting oneself in the other’s place and coming to think, as their common friend Gadamer would say, that to deliberate or to do hermeneutics is the art of being willing not to be right? Being oneself as another or being in the dialectic of man and people

is to affirm recognition as a key to our phenomenological-hermeneutic configuration.²⁵ We thus find ourselves before theories of recognition with phenomenological roots, both Hegelian and Husserlian, which need to be articulated and mediated in the lifeworld, in culture (hence the necessary hermeneutics). Contemporary theories of recognition, we believe, cannot afford the luxury of dispensing with these brilliant contributions.

3. Conclusion. Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A Philosophy of Life for Life

I would like to clarify what we mean when we speak of hermeneutic phenomenology. It is not something that Ricœur, Gadamer, or Ortega elaborated as such. They configure this space of reflection, this framework, within which we can move or from which we can address the challenges of our world. But it is not something concluded or fixed; rather, for its realization, it must be carried to other places. It is not a general framework already elaborated, to which we need only apply it: it is not so. Application must necessarily be creative. We must take into account the circumstances, our circumstances. Only thus can hermeneutic phenomenology be realized and make sense.

Therefore, in what we call – following Ortega, Gadamer, and Ricœur – “hermeneutic phenomenology,” a particular point of view, a specific and applied perspective, is required. Our perspective (that of each one, of each individual) is needed. The particular point of view, the concrete – and therefore unique – perspective, is necessary for this philosophical project. Circumstantial contribution is not a mere complement but an essential contribution to its realization. Only by adding perspectives do we achieve the most complete vision.

These three masters of hermeneutics have taught us to read and interpret texts and philosophies. We cannot think that their philosophies simply exist there, waiting to be transported from one place to another. It is not so. They constitute and configure themselves to the extent – and only to the extent – that they are read, always in a context, in an appropriation, in a fusion of horizons. Every reading of a text (a work), following Ortega, is deficient, for it does not say everything the author would wish, but at the same time exuberant, for it is open to new interpretations and readings. This interplay of the deficiency of expression and its exuberance is the heart of hermeneutic phenomenology, the soul of interpretation. Reading Ricœur, for example, from a particular key, with a specific gaze, does not apply him; it constitutes him. Every text, insofar as it is read and interpreted, is alive. And that is the key of hermeneutics.

With this reflection, we touch upon that around which these philosophies revolve; more explicit in one, more implicit in the other. I refer to the question of life. I have already said that Ortega’s great proposal revolves around the discovery of a new starting point for philosophy: life as radical reality. In a sense, it is a vitalist philosophy in a phenomenological key. A vitalist philosophy from the idea of vital reason, uniting reason and life (in their complexity). In Ricœur, too, we find this concern for life. At different stages and moments of his work, especially toward the end, in his reflections on death, it appears explicitly: what is life? How are we to understand it? They are philosophies of life; and they are “vivacious,” living philosophies. To speak of vitality (“until death”) is to speak of enthusiasm, admiration, energy, project, dynamism, wakefulness; to

²⁵ The fundamental texts would be those cited by Gadamer (“Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Metaphysics”), Ortega (“History as a System,” vol. VI, 45–81), and Ricœur, “Phénoménologie et herméneutique: en venant de Husserl” (1975), in *Du texte à l’action*.

know and savor life, and to acquire that experiential knowledge in the fabric of lived experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy of the knowledge of lived experiences, of the experience of life, which seeks to enrich life itself from within.

To conclude, and to continue weaving this encounter between Ortega and Ricœur, I would like briefly to refer to the concept of "*vivencia*" (lived experience). This is a Spanish word that has entered other languages (Portuguese, French); both "*vivencia*" and living-with-others, "*convivencia*." It is a very peculiar word that appears even in one of Ricœur's last texts, speaking of life and death. Ricœur reads it in Jorge Semprún, makes it his own, and employs it, noting that he uses it in the sense it has in Spanish, which is not the same as "*vécu*" or "*Erlebnis*." Ricœur... using a Spanish word! (and pointing to it as untranslatable).²⁶ Let the reader know that this word ("*vivencia*") is of recent appearance in Spanish, and was in fact the fruit of an invention, a creation, by... Ortega y Gasset himself! It was Ortega who coined this word in an article dedicated to Husserl and phenomenology, explaining that, lacking a way to translate *Erlebnis* or "*vécu*," he would invent a word, not knowing the fortune it would have, and risks speaking of "*vivencia*." The word is invented/created in 1913 and soon appears incorporated in the *Dictionary of the Spanish Academy*. Once again, by chance, Ricœur encounters (without knowing it) Ortega.

The philosophies of our thinkers remain to be read, to be co-read, read together. And they are philosophies that give much to think about and much to do. This is what we seek with this joint reading, with this interpretation: to discover and rediscover possible readings. And it is not a matter of repeating or applying a label. It is not something done, closed, or concluded. Ricœur spoke of hermeneutic phenomenology as a project. That is, something we ourselves must do, and on this I insist. We must get to work. It is also, here, a question of creativity and imagination; hermeneutic phenomenology, if it is anything and if it is worthwhile, is because it is something living that illuminates our circumstance and allows us to rise to the height of our time. Let us not remain at the expression, sometimes difficult, sometimes controversial, and go to the things themselves, to experience, to *vivencia*.²⁷

These dark times we live in – perhaps all times have been so – require clarity, a special clarity. This philosophy, these philosophers so close to us, offer tools to sustain illusion, enthusiasm, effort, inquietude, vitality, joy, and elegance in life. I think we could well read Ricœur's philosophy, as he himself did, from Rembrandt's symbolic painting that he so liked. And I believe Ricœur's philosophy could also be understood from Ortega's symbolic image of the archer, who, by tensing the bow, aims his arrow and hits the target, from tension, force, prudence.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, thus outlined, is this effort to hit the mark, whether in life or in actions, from the archer's tension in the chiaroscuro of life in which the philosopher, gaze extended toward the horizon, does not cease to rest his hand on this world. I invite consideration of the hermeneutic gesture, the gesture of hermeneutic phenomenology, in the interweaving of

²⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Vivant jusqu'à la mort. Fragments*, (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 64-65.

²⁷ Ortega states: "After turning it over for years, hoping to stumble upon some existing word in our language sufficiently apt to transcribe it, I have had to give up and seek a new one. It concerns the following: in phrases like 'to live life,' 'to live things,' the verb 'to live' acquires a curious sense. Without losing its deponent value, it takes a transitive form, signifying that kind of immediate relation into which the subject enters or can enter with certain objectivities. Well then, how to call each actualization of this relation? I find no other word than 'vivencia.' Everything that reaches my self with such immediacy that it becomes part of it is a *vivencia*" (*Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 634).

these two representative images of human life and philosophy itself: the Orteguian archer and Rembrandt's philosopher²⁸. Perhaps they are two images in which we can see ourselves, the human being, each of us, as the unique theme of philosophy.

²⁸ I recommend contemplating the two images: *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (Rembrandt) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437394>. *The Archer* (Orteguian symbol) https://ortegaygasset.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/el_arqueroV1-jpg.webp.

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