

## З ІСТОРИЇ ФІЛОСОФСЬКОЇ ДУМКИ УКРАЇНИ ТА СВІТУ

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### ORTEGA Y GASSET AND HIS PROJECT FOR REFORMING HUMANITIES DURING THE POST-WAR PERIOD OF EUROPEAN RECONSTRUCTION\*

“History is a system – the system of human experiences  
that are unique and inexorable chain”  
Ortega y Gasset. *History as a system* (1941)

*This paper studies the philosophical proposal of cultural reconstruction urged by Ortega y Gasset in immediate post war Europe which could not prosper in Spain due to the peculiar circumstances of the Franco Regime. The madrilenian philosopher was convinced that a reform of the Humanities was the intellectual task required by the after-war ruin of Western civilization. So, this article presents Ortegas’ program of an Institute of Humanities (1948-1950), and makes a general approach to his idea of Humanities and its reform, the real core of his proposal for cultural reconstruction. Keywords: cultural reconstruction, H.Ortega y Gasset, the humanities, reform.*

This work deals with the philosophical proposal for cultural reconstruction made by Ortega y Gasset in the period just after the war in Europe, which was not able to prosper in Spain due to the peculiarities of Franco’s Regime. The Madrid-born philosopher was convinced that the reform of humanities was an intellectual task that was required by the ruinous present of western civilization. In my essay, I will present Ortega y Gasset’s project for an Institute of Humanities (1948-1950), and I will make a general approximation to his idea of the humanities and its reform, the core of his proposal for cultural reconstruction.

The most profound cultural initiative undertaken by the Second School of Ortega in Spain after the end of the Second World War, both for the range of actuation and for the philosophical and intellectual content that gave it meaning, was the start of an Institute of Humanities in 1948. Previously, in June 1947, he had intended to publish the first issue of a new magazine, entitled *Studies of Humanities*, which did not get published because among other reasons of the delay in handing in some compromising articles.

#### *. The Ortega project for an Institute of Humanities.*

Ortega openly presented his project for an Institute of Humanities in the first and only issue of the *Bulletin* of that institution. The Institute was not intended to be a university or cultural faculty, with its three modalities of activity, courses, investigations and colloquia; or a professional faculty; but more a scientific faculty dedicated to investigation and interdisciplinary work on the “human sciences”. Its objective was to consolidate a nucleus of investigators, whose results could be opened up to a wider circle of studies through colloquia-discussions.

The Institute aspired to develop privately a reform of humanities, without taking a stance open to the public opinion of the Francoist Regime about national matters. *Humanities* are human realities and their knowledge: the *Human Sciences* of the human being. Their reform is the implementation of the methods and knowledge that are focused on human beings and their actions. Ortega gave the term Humanities this wide meaning that encompasses *mutatis mutandis* the knowledge areas that we today

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classify under two distinct titles, Social Sciences and Humanities, to which we impose the meaning of Humanity itself (*Humanitas*) or excellence and human exemplarity.

“The scientist is a specialist, but science is not”, wrote Ortega, who insisted in the interdisciplinary character of the scientific community, nucleus of the Institute; the only way to overcome the problems derived from the inescapable specialization of its members. The lack of knowledge of concepts of other social sciences, implicit in the speciality itself, usually derives in an irresponsible specialism of the scientist. On the other hand, the vigour of humanities or human sciences supposes the systematization of them in their idiosyncratic unit.

The Institute of Humanities functioned during the courses from 1948 to 1950, but did not fulfil the Ortega’s expectations from the project, nor did it contribute to the development of its programme. It did not bring together the expected scientific community, nor did it receive the necessary economic support. On the contrary, the attacks and negative comments strengthened, the falsifications and manipulations worsened; and in fact the creative tendencies that were solidifying at that time took paths more in tune with the Regime and the technocratic signs of the times. His disciple Xavier Zubiri, with the support of the banker Juan Lladó, had started up his own philosophical project in the Society of Studies and Publications. Within the official scientific institutions unstoppable scientific tendencies were developed opposed to the Ortega programme, such as the *Institute of Political Studies* which gave rise to the Sociology courses of Francisco J. Conde and Enrique Gómez Arboleya in which the positive tendency ended up imposing itself which presided over the constitution of this science in Spain; or such as the section of Philosophy and History of Science, started by Rey Pastor and Laín Entralgo in the Institute of Philosophy of the CSIC, which brought together philosophers and scientists, interested in questions of history and fundamental aspects of sciences, to develop aspects of formal logic, epistemology and the philosophy of nature. The first course of the magazine *Theoria* (1952-1955) took place in this circle, before the reception of analysis that imposed a strong naturalist tendency in the field of logic and the theory of science:

“Ortega –writes Julian Marias, the disciple who was closely involved in the launch of the Institute– se sintió fatigado de los esfuerzos necesarios para poder seguir adelante, de las resistencias que había que vencer, tal vez de la escasez de las ayudas que parecían obligadas. Por otra parte, la demanda que se ejercía sobre él desde otros países, particularmente desde Alemania, le movía a viajar.” (Marias: 1998)

In 1950, the Institute of Humanities got stuck in a dry spell despite the success that accompanied Ortega’s public courses, both when he discoursed *About a new interpretation of universal History...* in 1948-1949, and the one dedicated to *Man and the People* in 1949-1950. The Ortega programme for reform of the humanities did not manage to become rooted in the Spanish cultural and academic circumstances that led into the fifties, neutralized by the traditional national catholic tendency and the scientific and technocratic tendency of the reformists. This project of the Institute of Humanities was not successful in the USA or Germany either, where it was not supported and it did not even start up. But let us see, although it is just a glimpse, what was the meaning in Ortega’s mind of his projected reform of humanities.

## ***II. Ortega and the reform of Humanities.***

The young Ortega very soon distanced himself, after his first trip to Germany, from the traditional mimesis, represented by Menendezpelayism and Jesuitism, which tended to identify Greco-Latin classicism with simple classicism, and to reduce humanities to the more or less creative repetition of Renaissance Humanism, dominated by grammar and classic Philology.

In the period of interest to us, the master of the Madrid School more strongly represented a historical conception of humanities, inscribed in the tradition of German Philosophy that was developed from historicism, reconsidering the question of the sciences of the spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*): Vitalism and German Existentialism (*Existenzphilosophie*), Neo-kantianism, Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Ontology, Historicism, especially Dilthey. According to Ortega, humanities, that is, the human sciences, are historic sciences, and reforming them consists in reconsidering these as a systematic and specific development of historic reason.

In Ortega’s work, reform of humanities is a development of the topic of our times, encapsulated in overcoming modern idealism beyond Positivism, which is substantiated in the post-war circumstances as the topic of the world under reconstruction “whose principles have been broken”. Thus, this Ortega programme for reform is in reality a product of our times, resulting from his affirmation of the precedence of historic reason in response to the dissolution of the western belief in reason, highlighted by the crisis of European Sciences. It is, therefore, a dawning of historic reason that not only postulates new Human Sciences and the reform of all of them in the systematic unit of that reason, but which subjects a wider and more diversified concept of science that suppresses logical-mathematical rationality, and its

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applications to knowledge of the matter, to the human sense (for Ortega there is none other) which they reveal. In *History as a system* (1941) he wrote:

“... [once lost belief in reason] se ve el hombre forzado a hacer pie en lo único que le queda, y que es su desilusionado vivir. He aquí por qué en nuestros días comienza a descubrirse la gran realidad de la vida como tal... nos encontramos, pues, en una disposición que podía denominarse “cartesianismo de la vida”... El hombre enajenado de sí mismo se encuentra consigo mismo como realidad, como historia. Y por vez primera se ve obligado a ocuparse de su pasado, no por curiosidad ni para encontrar ejemplos normativos, sino porque no tiene otra cosa... Por eso es la sazón, esta hora presente, de que la historia se instaure como razón histórica.” (Oc. VI, 80-81).

The radical reality which is individual human life is not being, but contingent happening. However, this historic happening is not irrational, because human life is action with sense (work), it is systematic, composing an argument with a certain rationality. On this primary rationality of life that constitutes historic reason depends the sense of any other rational order invented by the human mind. Well, human sciences are ordered to constitute the organic system of historic reason, especially historic science which is the human science par excellence.

Historic reason of the human realities that operate radically in all human sciences, and fully in history, consists above all in narration of the history that reproduces human past, reconstructing the series of happenings that has brought them to the present in which they are interwoven. Historic reason is constituted in a discursive order of narrative character and in a paradigmatic way in historic science:

“la narración es una forma de la razón en el sentido más superlativo de este nombre... la razón histórica... que no consiste en inducir ni en deducir, sino lisamente en narrar, es la única capaz de entender las realidades humanas porque la contextura de estas es ser históricas, es historicidad... la razón histórica es la base, fundamento y supuesto de la razón física, matemática y lógica que son no más que particularizaciones, especificaciones y abstracciones deficientes de aquella.” (Oc. IX, 1266)

Let us simply report this relation of hermeneutic basis that leads to the dependence on historic reason of all forms of rationality, and let us stop a moment in the reform of historic science that Ortega proposed.

### ***III. Historiology in the basis of human sciences.***

The origin and the historic changes of the collective substrate of beliefs successive generations of human beings have invented and from which they have lived, since the origin of humanity until the present, is the fundamental object of Historiology which appears to be inspired by Dilthey<sup>1</sup>, and is the historic Philosophy corresponding to “Historic Science” postulated by Ortega y Gasset.

This Historic Science has a constructive-comprehensive character, Philosophical History which studies human reality from its origin until the present, on the basis of the documents and data provided by historic methods, applying the theories and methods of interpretation, required for the comprehension of human reality that these documents bring to light, and with full critical consciousness of the ontological and methodological assumptions acquired by its instrumentation. This constructive science starts where positive historiography, which provides documentation and data, ends; and it does so selecting and analyzing under the light of historiology the “crucial” data that are “decisive”, because a whole historic period depends on them, and because they refer to decisions and intentions of a person or a group of people. Historic science, in short, constructs in a comprehensive way, discovering human reality “in acts of comprehension and not simply in mechanical operations” in which methods are applied that supplant and manipulate it (Oc. V, 239).

If Historic Science supposes historic Philosophy or *Historiology*, in turn this universal historic doctrine has to be developed in communion with that and from its implications. Historiology does not wish to be a Philosophy of history that injects categories or dialectic processes into historic reality, nor Logic of history that a priori elaborates forms or methods that make it possible. *Historiology* proceeds in connection with Historic Science itself, through “an immediate analysis of *res gesta*, of historic reality”

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<sup>1</sup> “ «Ein Verfahren dieser Art mit geschichtlichen Tatsachen ist dem geradezu entgegengesetzt, welches den vom Geschichtsschreiber schon künstlerisch gruppierten Stoff irgendeiner Presse unterwirft, um ihm seine Quintessenz zu entlocken, oder ihn mit irgend welchen philosophischen Wahrheiten zusammenzutreten lässt, um ein neues Produkt, Philosophie der Geschichte. Dies ist eine neue Art von Alchemie, von Stein der Weisen... Der Philosoph muß die Operationen des Historikers am Rohstoff der geschichtlichen Überreste selber machen. Er muss zugleich Historiker sein.» (Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, B. V. *Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens*, s. 35-36).

This is something else, something completely different. It deals with history and nothing more than history. But a history that becomes itself, that reaches its peak as a work of knowledge.” (Oc. IX, 2009, 727)

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(Oc. V, 245); and it is Philosophy of genesis and the historic sense of the belief systems in which the invariable ingredients that are the “radical structure” of historic life are discriminated:

“... esta realidad histórica se haya en cada momento constituida por un número de ingredientes variables y un núcleo de ingredientes invariables –relativa o absolutamente constantes. Estas constantes del hecho o realidad históricos son su estructura radical, categórica, *a priori*... la determinación de ese núcleo categórico, de lo esencial histórico, es el tema primario de la historiología.” (Oc. V, 240).

In the Institute of Humanities course, dedicated to revising the *Historiology* that presupposes *A Study of History* by Arnold Toynbee, Ortega seems to understand that the historic entities with a universal destiny are the great civilizations, such as for example western civilization or European civilization –well he sees no further than the European predominance in western civilization, undeniable until the Second World War-, and that an “epoch” or historic field with meaning, complete, is “an epochal articulation of great civilizations”. In the civilizing network that makes up a historic epoch one civilization predominates or the conflict among several civilizations for this domination does. And, as we saw previously, an epoch is characterized by the belief system that controls its historic events, and the crises and historic changes are the result of the fluctuation and the change of belief system.

In Ortega’s *Historiology*, historic reason understands in a narrative way the executive substrate of life that is not a logical system of ideas, but a historic structure of beliefs. The ideas of the intellectuals are not the governing principles of human action and history, but those of the people. In this way, Ortega makes effective a thought that has to do with the topic of our time –with overcoming modernity-, which appears in his work after *The revolt of the masses* –on becoming conscious of the domination of the masses, and their triumph over the intellectuals-, and which maybe we could formulate as the end of History of ideas and of the historic protagonism of the intellectuals. Historic life and its changes are not governed by ideas, but by beliefs, and by the changes in their collective state:

“De aquí que se precise, en la situación actual de la humanidad, dejar atrás como fauna arcaica los llamados “intelectuales” y orientarse de nuevo hacia los hombres de la razón, de la revelación.

El hombre necesita una nueva revelación.” (Oc. VI, 2010, 78)

The beliefs in which reality is revealed to life, are transmitted from generation to generation. The generations<sup>1</sup> are the protagonists of history in as much as they are responsible for inventing, conserving and changing beliefs. There are conservative generations that continue with the beliefs inherited from tradition, but there are also decisive generations that break with their traditional beliefs, introducing new fundamental beliefs and so causing historic change.

Beliefs are not *habitus* of individuals, or customs of societies, but social uses or, more precisely, the constitutive elements of public opinion of a society that is the use of the social uses that make it up. Ortega conceived the uses as *social validities* that come from the past, that is *retrograde*, that *are imposed* on the individual with the force of social pressure, and, in short, that are *irrational*, that is, they do not contain their reason for being in themselves.

Historiology is a historic philosophy that shows philological-historical genesis of beliefs and thus demonstrates their historic justification. It encompasses from the beliefs of the first humans to the collective state of beliefs, in vogue at present, and consists of a narration that shows the revelation that gave rise to them, as well as their evolution in the language of people:

“La razón histórica es pues *ratio*, *logos*, riguroso concepto... [but] no acepta nada como mero hecho, sino que fluidifica todo hecho en el *fieri* de que proviene: *ve* cómo se hace el hecho. No cree aclarar los fenómenos humanos reduciéndolos a un repertorio de instintos y “facultades” –que serían, en efecto, hechos brutos, como el choque y la atracción-, sino que muestra lo que el hombre hace con esos instintos y facultades, e inclusive nos declara cómo han venido a ser esos “hechos” –

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<sup>1</sup> In publications such as *The theme of our time* (1923), or *About Galileo* (1933), and in manuscripts published posthumously *Theory of the generations* (1933), *The method of the generations* (1933), y *Landscape of the generations* (1943), Ortega thematically develops his theory of the generations, which guided between 1913 and 1914 his first intellectual intervention as an agglutinating personality of the Generation of 14. This important concept of Ortega’s historiology was developed by disciples of his school, such as Julián Marías in *The historic method of the generations* (1949), and by Ortega scholars Francisco Ayala in *Introduction to Social Sciences* (1952), or like Pedro Laín Entralgo in *The generations in History* (1945), or by a member of the so-called Historic School of Ortega like Lafuente Ferrari in *The basis and problems of the history of art* (1952). Ortega’s theory of the generations was the object of Marxist criticism that interpreted it as an attempt at liberal impersonation of the “scientific theory of history”, of Marxist dialectic materialism, for example Jorge Semprún in “Ortega’s method of the generations and the objective laws of historic development” (*Nuestras Ideas. Teoría, política, cultura*, # 1, (1957), pages. 33-45)

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los instintos y las facultades-, que no son, claro está, más que ideas –interpretaciones- que el hombre ha fabricado en una cierta coyuntura de su vivir.” (Oc. VI, 2010, 80-81).

In writings such as *Around Galileo* (1933), *Vives* (1940), *Juan Luis Vives and his world* (1940), etc., Ortega writes essays about historiological approximation to western civilization in its transitional epoch from the Middle Ages, governed by the *fides* or belief in the God of the Bible, to the modern Age, dominated by belief in scientific-technical reason. And, as we have already said, he interprets the turn-of-the-century crisis of sciences as a crisis of the modern belief in reason that preludes a historic change responsible for the coming of the belief in historic reason. The historic concept of belief is a key aim of these historiological approximations.

What is the specific method of historiological knowledge of collective beliefs? The answer to this question requires above all taking into account that Ortega does not explicitly take this method as his central theme, but instead he only makes some observations on it in his writings, of which I will reflect three main ones here. Above all, as he writes in his course *Historic Reason* (1940), for Historiology it is a principle that “we can discover the beliefs of our fellows, present or past, although they do not communicate them.” (Oc. IX, 2009, 503)

In the section “On the volatilization of a faith” (Oc. V, p.614-617) of his *Vives* (*La Nación*, December 1940), he insists that historians, the first thing they need to find out, to understand a person or an epoch, is their belief system. History thus becomes knowledge of depths, the beliefs are not on the surface, nor can they be accessed via the “psychologies and characterologies and morphologies used up to now” (Ibidem), but are “latent” in the depths of historic life. The historian must become a “miner of humanities” (Ibidem, 616) who submerges in the latent substrate of life, to achieve the “blossoming of latent beliefs” (Ibidem).

In *History as a system* (1941) he explicitly asks, “What method to use to establish the state of beliefs in a historic period”, to which he immediately responds that “there is no other method than to compare it with another or others. There higher the number of terms of comparison, the more precise the result...” (Oc. VI, 2006, 49). Historiology may be like archaeology in which the more historic civilizations it has been able to recover and reconstruct, the more reference points and models it has for comparing and reconstructing the new remains that are found in the depths of time; but without ever losing the proximate and interior perspective of the life that requires historic comprehension.

#### ***IV. The reform of sociology in Man and People.***

Human sciences –Linguistics, Ethnology, Sociology, Economics, etc.- become flowing in the historic system of narrative reason, well, their aims receive their meaning of historic narration which reproduces their genesis, showing them in their happening. We’ll see this more slowly in the case of the human science that Ortega dedicated his second and last Institute of Humanities course to, that is, Sociology.

The humanist sociology, which Ortega proposed in *Man and People*, is a historic radicalization of the functionalist sociologies of the social system, more specifically of the Sociology of Émile Durkheim, resulting from its integration into the historic system of narrative reason. During his Parisian exile, the Madrid-born thinker most probably studied *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, among other works of the father of French sociology, and was right to see immediately that he had proceeded in a misleading way when apportioning their own rationality to the social facts about the unsustainable invention of an in-existent *collective conscience*; with this glibness, having come to postulate that social facts are objective, impersonal, coercive things through certain *contraint extérieur*, not managing to think of them as social uses that are essentially irrational and incomprehensible in themselves.

Ortega did not deny that some social facts can be significant, operative from the functional viewpoint, but insists that all of them are uses, whose reason for being necessarily goes back to the historic reason for which they came into being. He does not believe that functionality is a principle of sufficient reason in social ontology matters, nor does he think it too human that it should be so. We understand the sense of a social use when we repeat its genesis from the personal or interpersonal life that gave origin to it; well, personal life, and, from it, also interpersonal life that results from the interaction of an I and a you of two personal lives, are those that act with sense (or without it) and the ultimate source of the rationality of uses.

For this, Ortega commences *Man and People* –which has more programme than system-, taking personal life as his central theme, and, above it, inter-individual life. And only after phenomenologically analyzing the “world” and the apparition of the “other”, does he enter the sociological field itself in the chapter entitled, significantly, “Suddenly the People appear”. Because the people are not a personal life, nor an interpersonal one, nor do they rise up from some type of conjunction or sum of these. People are *homo sociologicus*, a conglomerate of social uses, whose rationality does refer to the intentional action of personal life. Social rationality lies in the historic reason that shows in its *fieri* these mechanized

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behaviours that are the uses, which mix them reproducing in a narrative way their geneses from the personal life that produced them with sense and put them into circulation. Ortega seems to be putting forward a *narrative action theory* for sociology in the forties.

Ortega's reform of humanities proposed something similar with the *homo oeconomicus* of Neoclassic Economics, in Ethnology, in Linguistics, and in the other human sciences, which wished to integrate into the organic system of narrative reason.

### V. *Conclusive Reflection.*

In the present configuration of knowledge and education, corresponding to the present evolution of global capitalism and of the technical base supporting it, Philosophy, along with History, philology and Arts are catalogued as humanistic knowledge typical of amusement, creativity and personal enrichment. The institutions that officially administer knowledge distinguish among scientific and humanistic knowledge and establish a performance-related tendency that awards the primordial role to exact and natural sciences, leaving humanities with the role of the black sheep of knowledge. The Lyotard of "*Les problèmes du savoir dans les sociétés industrielles les plus développées*", who considers "incredulity in metanarratives" to be "postmodern", wrote:

"C'est également la perte de cette croyance [in metanarratives, both in the speculative of absolute knowledge and the moral of emancipation of mankind] que l'ideologie du "systeme" vient a la fois combler par sa pretention totalisante et exprimer par le cynisme de son critère de performativité» (Lyotard: 1979, 92)

If the destiny of philosophy is linked in the present configuration of knowledge to the future of humanities, this seems to pass through some philological or philosophical reform of them. When one speaks of humanities in the Spanish cultural tradition, it seems that one is referring to the productions and values of Greco-Latin humanism, dominated by classical philology. Reformation of humanities, in this sense, consists of some type of repetition of this Greco-Latin humanism that renews classical philology and its products. Ortega who did not renounce taking advantage of the values of renaissance humanism, set himself beyond these humanities of classical philology, in the scientific dimension given to them by the Greco-Germanic tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften*. As we have previously suggested, humanities or human sciences are historic sciences, so their reform has to be reconsidered as a systematic and concrete development of historic reason.

This humanities reform programme of Ortega, however, could not take root in the Spanish cultural and academic circumstances that headed into the decade of the fifties, neutralized by the tendency toward renaissance humanism of the traditional and the scientific and technocratic tendency of the reformists. Nor did it have any place in the times of the autism of the philosophical areas and the postmodern antihumanist hangover.

Can the Ortega proposal for historicistic reform of humanities be recovered in this context?

In recent years we can find some developments of Ortega's approach in relation to the question of humanities, but none of them in the line that he took. I refer to the proposal of Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, in his book *Humanities in the technological era* (1998), that developed the humanism of Ortega connecting his work with our best literary tradition, or to the reflection of José Luis Molinuevo in his essay, *Humanism and new technologies* (2004), where he echoes the humanist proposal of Ortega enclosed in his Conception of technology.

Open criticism has been forthcoming of the type of proposal, like the one I have made, for example Felix Duque's in his essay *Against Humanism* (2003), where he criticises auto-referential and elitist humanism that appeals to a "superior authority". In his opinion, the "vitalist subjectivization" has brought us to "an even more extreme and irrational anthropocentrism", like the *Geisteswissenschaften*, "daughters of philanthropism, grown up and well equipped with reliable techniques", have ended up carving up what is human and hiding its sense, the being for death.

Among the methodologists of social sciences, on the other hand, we do not find echoes of Ortega's historicist orientation, when there is no lack of naturalist tendencies that attempt to found functionalist sociologies of holistic character in the conception of human nature that corresponds to the contemporaneous developments of the synthetic theory of evolution, of the cognitive sciences and neurosciences. The action of the human individuals in society has to be correlated with their nature, that is, with their genetic constitution, with the cognitive and neuronal processes that condition their perception of things, their opinions, their choices, and their decisions.

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The responsibility for reconsidering Ortega's historicist humanities reform programme here and in this way is in reality my choice, and, needless to say, I lack the perspicacity of the Master Ortega. However, it is true that a reform of humanities is necessary, and it seems to me that it is not philology – even less classical philology –, but philosophy, the discipline that can put these humanistic and social knowledge areas in order; or in other words, what's needed is a philosophical reform of humanities that converts them into rigorous knowledge with a public projection. And in this task which in my opinion requires the circumstance, the dialogue with Ortega and in general with tradition itself is obligatory if we are to provide correct fecund answers for our society and our institutions.

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