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## Ortega: Secrecy and the World

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# Ortega

## Secrecy and the World

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THE IMAGE OF A JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET THINKING ABOUT SPAIN, FOR THE SAKE OF Spain, and from out of the Spanish language and tradition, or from *Hispania* in a larger sense, continues to convince and orient scholars and readers the world over. Ortega himself created this profile throughout his life and his writings, claiming that he learned what he could outside Spain only to bring it home to nourish his own nation's youth, to make possible the emergence of Spanish culture of the stature of its French, German, or English contemporaries. One of the key texts in this self-presentation is the "Prologue for Germans" (*Prólogo para alemanes*, first published in 1939),<sup>1</sup> where Ortega not only describes his project (starting with studies in Germany and his decision to work primarily in "periodical publication" [1966e, 20–21]) but also declares its success: "Today Spain knows German culture by heart. It walks around in it like Peter walks around his house" (*Hoy España se sabe de memoria la cultura alemana. Anda por ella como Pedro por su casa*) (1966e, 25). The "Prologue" is

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revealing not just for Ortega's depiction of his relationship to Germany but for the intimate relationship that he draws between himself and Spain. We might begin by suspecting that the "Spain" that gives German culture a home in its heart would be limited to a few Spaniards, but especially to Ortega himself, and that, hence, he takes himself for a metonymic representation of Spain in general. In other ways, though, he means to separate the possibilities of understanding Spain, and hence understanding *him*, Ortega, from the Germans, to make both accessible only by way of a translation, from the proper name to the Spanish idiom and from Germany to the Spanish landscape.

Before focusing on Ortega's curious refusal to perform this translation in a "Prologue" for "Germans," let us recall another, simpler appeal to the immediacy of language and culture. Since the "Prologue for Germans" is one of his primary autobiographical texts, Ortega naturally justifies his self-presentation by explaining that, "*including this prologue*," he has always written "*exclusively and ad hoc* for people from Spain and South America" (1966d, 18). These "readers," he insists, will know that they are "present" to him as he writes as he is present to them as they read: "If one puts one's finger on any of my pages, one will feel the beating of my heart" (*si se pone el dedo sobre cualquiera de mis páginas, se siente el latido de mi corazón*), he says (1966d, 17). Moreover, the reader "feels as if an ectoplasmic, but authentic, hand were emerging from the page to feel his person, to caress him, or even, very courteously, to punch him" (*percibe como si de entre las líneas saliese una mano ectoplásmica pero auténtica, que palpa su persona, que quiere acariciarla—o darla, muy cortésmente, un puñetazo*) (1966d, 18). The German readers at whom this text was directed, presumably, needed not fear being felt up or beat up, for they were separated by language and geography from this phantasmatic hand. As we will see, Ortega's first major work, *Meditations on Quixote*, also proposed not just an extreme Spanish particularity, of difficult if not impossible access to Germans and others, but insisted on the existence of a "Spanish secret," a revelation or experience particular to Spain but containing the key to thinking adequately the nature of the world. Ortega is one name for penetrating that secret.

Inevitably, Ortega suggests, his texts will appeal only to Hispanics, and only Hispanics will "get" him. And yet, all texts speak to all who may listen,

Hispanics and Germans alike, and Ortega goes on to expound his “doctrine” as set out in *The Theme of Our Times*, which the “Prologue” was meant to introduce (1966e, 143). The “Prologue” sets out, then, to articulate the relationship between a Spanish secret and a philosophical teaching, between a doctrine that could presumably be expounded in a theoretical, constative mode, and a secret, whose character is undeniably performative. I must leave it to a Hispanic to confirm Ortega’s characterization of his texts; nonetheless, the confidence with which he claims to have touched his readers ought to be viewed alongside his lament elsewhere that the course of two decades of speaking and writing have not yet yielded a single understanding reader (1966a, 404 n. 1). In any case, Ortega repeats the expression of this secret in the “Prologue,” this time encrypting a secret, one meant only for Spanish ears, one supposes, but legible, certainly, to a foreign reader with some modest language ability, and presumably, susceptible of translation. Expressing wonder at “the Germans” who take enough interest in his work that *The Theme of Our Time* should require a new German edition, he supposes that these readers are interested not in his doctrine but in *him*, Ortega. He describes himself as “this little thing that I am, a tiny excrescence sprouted out of the granite folds of one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world—the Sierra de Guadarrama” (*esta pequeña cosa que soy yo, menuda excrescencia brotada en los pliegues graníticos de una de las montañas más viejas del mundo*) (1966e, 16). The modesty of such a characterization is counterbalanced by the suggestion that “this little thing” grows from what is not only a big thing but also an old thing; the prestige of the ancient, the prehistoric world lends to Ortega a familiar authority, one that reassures the philosophical tradition from Plato to Hegel and beyond. We know that Ortega enjoyed worldwide renown at this time, having filled auditoriums in Spain and Latin America, published in the major European languages, and earned the company, if not the praise, of other internationally celebrated writers and philosophers.<sup>2</sup> The image of himself as a kind of protrusion on a protrusion, having grown out of a geographical feature that itself grew out of the ancient earth, may suffice to interpret this passage, since it maintains the analogy, dear to Ortega, between the man and his land. However, a speaker of Spanish might also recognize Ortega’s deappropriation of his proper name, evoking here the *ortiga*, the nettle common

to the Iberian peninsula and especially to the Sierra de Guadarrama. Ortega describes himself as a nettle, an *ortiga*, growing out of the Sierra, reinserting himself into the natural world that ostensibly has dictated *who* is Spanish and *who* is German. Metaphorically, he associates himself with what is indigenous, and also with a plant associated with irritation, puncturing the surface of the skin with imperceptible spines, unexpected for those without familiarity with their surroundings. The nettle or *ortiga* is also capable of providing nourishment, even enjoyment or medicinal value for those with “native” folk knowledge. All of which fits in, as we will see, with Ortega’s ambitions and teachings. In other words, we gather these characteristics from Ortega’s writing, but perhaps not with the satisfaction offered here to the speakers of Spanish. The “Prologue” might be, as its title runs, “for Germans,” but perhaps in this obscure, rhetorical, and ludic form, this text and all that Ortega represents are only for Hispanics.

Beyond the proper name, then, we will have to traverse the question of Ortega’s style of enunciation as well as what he considered his doctrine, “ratio-vitalism” (1966a, 404 n. 1). Together, these have garnered Ortega the highest of praise. For José Luis Abellán, author of a monumental six-volume *Historia crítica del pensamiento español* (Critical History of Spanish Thought), Ortega deserves the distinction of occupying the conclusion of this history of Spanish thought. Also, his ideas are easily discerned in the statements of principles made in Abellán’s prologue.<sup>3</sup> In his *Historia del pensamiento español de Séneca a nuestros días* (History of Spanish Thought from Seneca to Our Time), a one-volume version of the *Critical History*, Abellán gives Ortega the position of an inauguration of Spanish philosophy, designating his work as “the expression, achieved for the first time in the modern age, of a Philosophy (*sic*) thought in Spanish, which creates the authentic possibility of philosophical thought in the Spanish language” (1996, 23). Abellán insists that Ortega not only accomplished the task of completing *a* philosophy, but that this philosophy is a *Spanish* one. With Ortega, Spanish philosophy comes into its own and launches itself into the future. Juan José Lanz takes stock of the contemporary reception of Ortega, concluding that only two approaches remain, “those who study the fusion of literature and philosophy in Ortega and [those who] emphasize the literary essence of his philosophical thought”

(2006, 24). That is to say, literature and philosophy join forces in Ortega; or else, Ortega's philosophy, along with all the rest, is revealed to be essentially literary. Either way, readers of Ortega must contend with a certain interrelatedness of literature and philosophy, of exposition and doctrine, of performance and theory. What we will have to consider is the extent to which this constitutes an *achievement*, especially an achievement of Spain or for the Hispanic world as a whole. As it turns out, the "Prologue" was never published "for Germans." As the editors of the *Obras completas* (Complete Works) explain, Ortega refused to publish the piece in Germany. They quote a letter in which he speaks of "repugnance" at events of Munich in 1934, when Hitler showed his disrespect for democratic processes by murdering "traitors" of the Nazi movement (Ortega 1966e, 13). One German, however, noted, with apparent approval, Ortega's ambition to think "intensely and immediately . . . out of his mother tongue." This was Martin Heidegger, who wrote a kind of tribute to Ortega after the latter's death in 1955 (Heidegger 1956, 1). The two had met at a 1951 conference on "Man and Space," where differences and agreements had been brought into the open. We will have to return to the disagreement, which hinges precisely on language, to make sense of Ortega. We can say, in advance, though, that like Heidegger, Ortega sensed that something in the Western tradition had not yet found the language appropriate to its expression. Clearly he thought—and his Spanish readers have agreed—that he had discovered or invented the language appropriate to this "something," this philosophical vision. By gathering together the motifs of secrecy, style, and circumstance, along with relationship to the world, we might be in a position to better decide whether, as Lanz says, *Ortega* signifies for us an inflection of the philosophical project, one carried out by alliance or even fusion with literature, or whether *Ortega's* philosophy is one of many versions of literature's ambition to speak the world.

#### "THE SPANISH SECRET": SECRECY AND THE WORLD

Ortega never ceased to identify his contribution to philosophy with *Meditations on Quixote's* well-worn formulation, "I am myself plus my circumstance" (yo soy yo y mi circunstancia) (1987, 25; 1961, 45). Certainly, he devoted much

attention to elaborating this phrase, already in the *Meditations*. He insists, for starters, that he does not simply oppose an “external world” to an inner world of insensible thoughts. Instead, “insensible worlds” are also exterior and, indeed, “to an eminent degree” (1987, 57; 1961, 85, translation modified). As Julián Marías points out, connecting these two passages that are over 20 pages apart, our worlds include not only the geographical features dear to Ortega (as we will see shortly) but also books, ideas, stories and histories, fictional characters and rhetorical figures (Ortega 2010, 77 n. 52). The dual value of the “I” gives rise to a confusion that will plague all readers of Ortega. On the one hand, “I” is *exterior* to the world of circumstance and must be brought into relationship to it. This “I” without the world, relating *to* the world, would be singular, purely interior, placed in relation to a shared web of signification. However, the first “I” of Ortega’s formula combines interior and exterior, it forms the place where the singular and general meet. In the first “I” of the formula, the relationship between the second “I” and the world plays out; that is to say, a certain “I” possesses both interior and exterior and is always subject to the vicissitudes of circumstances even as another “I” appears sovereign, isolated, and free. This homonymy poses the constant problem of distinguishing which “I” Ortega means whenever he uses the first person pronoun. Not surprisingly, though, this imprecision or ambiguity serves to bridge conceptual gaps, including the passage from a universal, philosophical Ortega to an idiosyncratic, literary, or poetic one.

Thus, it might seem that a certain “I” is secreted from the world, placed in reserve, separated and sheltered, kept off limits. For the Ortega of the *Meditations*, this secret is of little interest. Speaking of artworks in general in a prelude to discussing *Don Quixote*, Ortega distinguishes between a kind of living substance embodied in the work and the style that engenders our interest in it: “the artist has not limited himself to producing verses, as an almond-tree bursts into bloom in March; he has risen [se ha levantado] above himself, above his vital spontaneity; he has soared [se ha cernido] above his own heart and above his surroundings, circling about like the eagle in majestic flight” (1987, 69; 1961, 100). Here Ortega casts his formula in new terms within the work of art, whose kinship to philosophy we will return to examine more closely. The singularity of the *heart* and the shared worldly existence conjoin

in the work. We could justifiably say, applying Ortega's formula to paraphrase his description of Cervantes, "he is he and his circumstances." For Ortega, it almost goes without saying that viewers and readers attempt to approximate themselves to that first "he," to see how the artist draws above and away from his own intimate encounter with the world and forges a new self, one that simultaneously reveals the world and a soul. However, he goes on to say, some works, such as *Don Quixote*, fail to open a distance between the singular "I" and its surroundings but rather place a viewer or reader within a relationship to "circumstance": "we find ourselves facing them ["Spanish productions"] as we face life itself" (1987, 70; 1961, 100). "We" find ourselves in the place of the singular "he" or singular "I"; we lack distance from our own relating and become immersed in that encounter, where we would be struck dumb, unable to use the world and its generality to reflect on who and where we might be. In this immediacy, we might tear ourselves away to observe, for example, a text's representation of the relation between a singular "I" and the world.

But then again, no one is interested in life, Ortega says. Paradoxically, all singularity shares this trait: belonging to each of us as our ownmost being, it fails to be of interest to anyone: "As far as life, spontaneity, sorrow and darkness are concerned, I have enough with my own, with those which flow through my veins; I have enough with my own flesh and my own bones and the flameless fire of my conscience above my flesh and bones" (Ortega 1987, 70; 1961, 100). In our singularity, Ortega says, we are ultimately indifferent, both uninterested and indistinguishable one from the other. Here we can read one of the major motifs of deconstruction, the necessity of singularity's relation to generality in order that it might not be passed up altogether. Jacques Derrida treats this motif in terms of secrecy in "Passions: An Oblique Offering." A bit like Ortega's "Prologue for Germans," "Passions" is directed at the audience of a "Critical Reader" devoted to his work (Derrida 1995, 3). Derrida takes the occasion, then, to mark the encounter between the ambition to generality (what does "Jacques Derrida" signify?) and a singular, "novel" intervention within the body of an oeuvre. Among the approaches to the situation is the pronouncement, "let us say that there is a secret here. Let us testify: *There is something secret. [Ily a là du secret]*" (1995, 23–24). The partitive "du" indicates that what is at issue is not "a secret" among others but "some secret," "some



secrecy” or, as David Wood translates, “something secret” (1995, 23–24). There is an uncountable element, “secrecy,” that makes its appearance here, or that appears, as Derrida says, in an apophatic mode, denying its doing what it most emphatically does (1995, 24). But the secret or the secrecy described is at once precise and impossible to pin down. Nonetheless, Ortega shares the apophatic mode in one of the passages we have considered, denying that his secret interiority should be of interest to anyone at the same time that he depicts it, improperly, as his own “life, spontaneity, sorrow and darkness” (1987, 70; 1961, 100).

Ortega attributes secrecy, then, not to the individual human being but to the world, and in the process he attributes to the collective Spanish soul what seems more characteristic of an individual. Ortega goes to great lengths in *Meditations* and *The Theme* to justify the attribution of a national label to individuals, but the argument rests on the original formulation of his principle: because *nation* is part of circumstance, it is part of every individual human being. Following Ortega’s insistence that we are constructions involving our historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage, it would seem worthwhile to imagine whether nation, race, or soul aren’t also imposed rather than natural functions of the way human beings exist in relation to the world. For Ortega, *Don Quixote* is a Spanish book, part of what he calls a “tradición castiza” (1987, 70). The English translation as “genuine tradition” (1961, 101) does not capture the historical character of this idea of a pure Hispanic caste, defined in opposition to American birth or ethnic origins, Jewish or Muslim identity, and, eventually, non-Castilian Spaniards. For Ortega, *Don Quixote* is the first and best example of the “tradition” that places its readers in direct relation to circumstance rather than in the position of seeing the relationship to the world via the mediation of an artist’s or writer’s vision. We have seen something of this description at work in Ortega, who leaves his proper name encrypted in the “Prologue” in an unmistakable way for a reader inclined to step back and reflect. The description of the “genuine tradition” appears to have become a prescription for Ortega, as he proposed to be a Spaniard writing “for Spaniards,” in what he calls, as a kind of apposite for “meditations,” “salvations” (*salvaciones*) (1987, 12; 1961, 31). Ortega’s formula, as it appears in a complete sentence, immediately suggests that this understand-

ing of the relationship of the individual to the world is connected to the salvation of the world: “I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself” (Ortega 1987, 25; 1961, 45).

Despite indications on practically every page that Ortega’s concern is first and foremost the Hispanic world, he cannot help but push this particular tradition toward a claim on universality. Thus, after defining Spanish culture as “the extreme predominance of impressions” (1987, 70; 1961, 101), he designates *Don Quixote* as a master text akin to the status of *Wilhelm Meister* for the Early German Romantics: “the case of *Quixote* is truly representative in this as in all respects [en este como en todo orden]” (1987, 70; 1961, 101). *Quixote* is not just a key to understanding the nature of Spanish artworks but *everything*, “en todo orden”; it represents or exemplifies not just the culture of impressions but every “orden,” every manner in which order is instituted. It is true; *Don Quixote* appears to be untranslatable in its essence because its essence has to do with nothing less than the definition of one particular community. For this reason, he goes on to dismiss the foreign (German) perspectives on *Quixote* as “brief illuminations . . . on the part of foreign spirits” (1987, 71; 1961, 101, translation modified), while claiming that for his community (“for us”) it coincides with “destiny” (1987, 71; 1961, 101). Yet Ortega will almost immediately reaffirm *Quixote*’s status as a universal text: “there is no book more potent in symbolic allusions to the universal meaning of life” (1987, 71; 1961, 102). By all signs, universality *must* inscribe itself in particularity; but it is still more striking that some idioms and cultures contain universality better than others. Spanish letters have, for Ortega, in the monumentality of *Don Quixote*, a privileged place; *Don Quixote* is the key to understanding the privileged place of Spain. Germany has traditionally been given this honor as the people who occupy the center of Europe and have most directly inherited the Greek philosophical tradition.<sup>4</sup> Spain would be, for Ortega, the “spiritual promontory of Europe, this thing we may call the prow of the continental soul” (1987, 72; 1961, 102). Ortega slides here from speaking of universality to speaking of Europe, in accord with the philosophical tradition, and accords to his own “spiritual destiny” the privilege of being the avant-garde, universal humanity’s first contact with the amorphous ocean of the world.<sup>5</sup>

From Spain outward, contact with the world diminishes. Ortega's dismissal of Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenologies rests on the contention that neither one remains true to their commitment to a primordial relationship between the human being and the world. In the case of Husserl, Ortega insists that transcendental consciousness is pure invention, an "idealist" imposition of a limited idea of consciousness onto the human being. In a chapter of *La idea del principio en Leibniz* (The idea of the principle in Leibniz, from 1934) entitled "The Level of Our Radicality," he summarizes his critique: "there is no consciousness as the primary form of relation between the so-called 'subject' and so-called 'objects'; what there *is* is man being toward things and things being toward man [el hombre siendo a las cosas y las cosas al hombre]; that is, human living [vivir humano]" (1966b, 275). Ortega gives Heidegger credit for taking "living human reality" (1966b, 276) as his point of departure, and indeed, the notion of "being toward things" bears the mark of *Being and Time*, both in his use of "being" and a relation to "things" that attempts to rethink the subject-object relationship. Ortega complains, however, that Heidegger was not prepared to elaborate the meaning of being. As in the other confrontation with Heidegger, in a footnote to *Goethe from the Inside* (*Goethe desde adentro*), he offers a perfect example of kettle logic to dismiss his German colleague: Heidegger's doctrine was incomprehensible, for being incomplete and idiosyncratic; Heidegger was wrong to focus on being instead of life; and, finally, Heidegger's ideas had been thought previously, by Ortega, previously to the composition of the *Meditations* (Ortega 1966b, 271–77; 1966a, 403–404 n. 1). Phillip Silver grants Ortega his claims, something that requires the positing and reconstruction of an "invisible moment," before *Meditations*, in which the fundamentals of a "mundane philosophy" were reached, or perhaps revealed, "(unpacking and expanding) in time an event that may have taken no time at all" (1978, 115). For Silver, whose reliance on Ortega's text is that of an exemplary scholar, the decisive matter is the joining of a "transcendental philosophy" to "its source in spontaneous life" (1978, 89). It accomplishes, in terms I have already discussed, the connection of the singular "I" that faces the world to the general "I" that theorizes that relation. Only the homonymy, ambiguity, or ambivalence of these "I's" accomplishes this. But they are not analyzed as such, even though, as we have seen, one "I" differs

from the other “I.” Moreover, ambiguity is valorized; Spain’s *edge* in the search for “the universal meaning of life” depends on the obscurity of a secret, one entrusted to Spain and guarded by *Don Quixote*: “Far away, alone on the open Manchegan plain, the lanky figure of Don Quixote bends like a question mark, like a guardian of the Spanish secret, of the ambiguity [ambivalencia] of Spanish culture” (1987, 71; 1961, 101). Ortega’s evocation of *Don Quixote* has a philosophical purpose whose operation centers on the secrecy it maintains, a secret it is capable of containing and of revealing. Insofar as the revelation appears to concern Spain, it also would metonymically disclose the nature of Europe and humanity.

Looking at the frame for *Meditations on Quixote*, we can better see how Ortega associates secrecy with being-in-the-world. The “Preliminary Meditation” is set off by introductory and concluding paragraphs in which Ortega recounts a spring day in the Guadarrama Mountains, in a forest near El Escorial. His *Meditations*, then, are the recollection of a variety of thoughts that, according to Ortega, occurred to him that day. Making up nearly half the 1914 edition of the *Meditations*, they tend to be organized according to sets of oppositions: visible/invisible, silence/noise, Mediterranean/German, sensibility/intellect, surface/depth, and, in the passage on the artist that I’ve discussed, a version of “I plus my circumstance” in the guise of “he and his circumstance.” The oppositions are said to operate in counterintuitive ways, to be dependent on each other, or even to fuse under the pressure of Ortega’s reflections. The “Preliminary Meditation” concludes, in fact, with a kind of identification between Ortega and his surroundings as he hears his heart beat in rhythm with the twinkling of the evening star and feels himself “filled with wonder and tenderness by the marvel of the world” (1987, 76; 1961, 108).

The first example of his thoughts, however, lays out the structure of the secret at work in what we’ve been considering. The forest that literally surrounds him, he says, is “invisible nature” (*una naturaleza invisible*) (1987, 34; 1961, 59). Because the trees nearest to him conceal all the others by blocking them from view, more of the forest is concealed than seen. To know the forest, then, one has to become attuned as much to what is concealed as to what is apparent. This, Ortega says, is why a forest will never cease to be a place of mystery. What we do see, he says, is “a pretext so that the rest might remain

hidden and distant” (un pretexto para que lo demás se halle oculto y distante) (1987, 35; 1961, 60, translation modified). It is found to be in hiding, paradoxically. What surrounds us, the world, will always consist of much more than we can know. Moreover, our problem is not the quantity of world before us as much as the limited capacity to take it all in, being where we are. There can never *not* be occultation and distance. And in fact, what is hidden is always more important than what is shown, which is a mere “pretext.” Let us recall again that we are not only talking about trees and forests but also books, ideas, and so forth, about which we can also only know what is near to us. We can only read what is to hand as an index of the whole. The world is as a secret, or rather, a secrecy.

As radical as this might seem—and certainly, Ortega considered it to be the highest or the deepest level of radicality, as the chapter name from *Leibniz* shows—it is worth contrasting it with the “absolute secret” of Derrida’s “Passions.” Among the notions of secrecy to be contrasted we find “an artistic or technical secret reserved for someone,” like the cryptic inscription of Ortega’s proper name in the “Prologue” (Derrida 1995, 24). Derrida is interested precisely in the “nonphenomenologizable” possibilities, a nonphenomenality “without relation, even negative relation, to phenomenality” (1995, 26). “This” secrecy would not be, then, negated by the possibility of seeing hidden trees or of abstracting from seen trees to a conceptual forest. In fact, it seems to appear only in the mode of betrayal, as a secret gets revealed by being *called* secret. Homonymy, then, is one of the possibilities and impossibilities of the secret (26).<sup>6</sup>

#### EVENTUAL MEANING: KEEPING THE SECRET

*Meditations on Quixote* offers to reveal the Spanish secret and tries to demonstrate, exemplify, and make possible a genuine relationship to the world. It is also, as we will see, a discourse that knows how to *keep* that secret so as to let a reader find out for himself, in order to preserve and confirm the world’s secrecy. As in the “Prologue,” Ortega presents himself in *Meditations* with a strange mix of modesty and swagger. He claims to be writing somewhat arbitrarily, announcing that he will speak of the smallest things, an almost

whimsical parade of “men, books, pictures, landscapes, errors, pangs”; to focus on one thing at a time; and “to take it by the shortest possible path to the fullness of its meaning” (1987, 12; 1961, 31). In this way he will give vent to an “affect” that is his alone and to give voice to ideas “less onerous than science” (1987, 12; 1961, 31). Again, he does not resist the urge to give some lessons that aspire to philosophical universality, even if they are somewhat enigmatic, unconventional, and oblique. He says, for one, that philosophy is “the general science of love” before defining philosophy as a kind of openness to myriad reality (1987, 18; 1961, 38). He implicitly contrasts his own work with Hegel’s, for whom philosophy combines writing and system building: “philosophy’s ultimate ambition must be arriving at a single proposition in which all the truth would be expressed” (1987, 19; 1961, 39). Hegel’s *Logic*, he claims, consists in a lengthy preparation for the moment when Hegel might pronounce, “with all the fullness of its meaning,” the single sentence, “the idea is the absolute” (1987, 19; 1961, 39). By contrast, the *Meditations* aspire not to “all the truth” but to the “fullness of meaning” of those minimal “facts” or “deeds”: men, books, paintings, and so on. This is the modesty and the immeasurable pretension of Ortega: Hegel’s phrase “in reality has a literally infinite meaning” although it is “impoverished in its appearance” (1987, 19; 1961, 39). Meanwhile, Ortega’s claim to remain with the finite, with these few particulars that happen within his field of vision, ironically claims to supersede, even to envelope the Hegelian project. Hegel constructed a system around a single proposition, albeit one that, Ortega notes, is capable of generating “literally infinite meaning,” metaphorically associated with sexual reproduction as an “intellectual discharge” (1987, 19; 1961, 39). While Hegel’s philosophical gesture would seem to manipulate the world’s particulars, bending them to fit that proposition, Ortega proposes letting the world reveal itself. The phrase I have presented as a kind of key to Ortega would not, according to this statement of method, open up the system of his thinking. Instead, “I am I plus my circumstances” gets cast, as we have seen, in concrete terms in a discussion of *Don Quixote* as artwork and a memory of reflection on a forest as mystery, but none of these particularities aspires to reveal more than a partial truth as “full meaning” of the particularity at hand.

We are accustomed, today, I think, to dismiss the idea of full meaning as anachronistic. It implies the appearance, the presence in the mind of a single, determinate meaning, one that would be definitive, apodictic, self-evident. The critique of the notion of full meaning is often associated with structuralism's contention, based on strict scientific rigor, that meaning is determined in a web of signification that is essentially open. One may speak of relative mastery of the network of meaningful differences but not absolute mastery. In Derrida's "Différance" the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss are key reference points for the elaboration of the very possibility of a differential web of signification. "Différance" would be the spacing that produces differences and maintains the openness of meaning; it is, Derrida writes, the "nonfull, nonsimple structure and differentiating origin of difference" (1982, 12). Samuel Weber describes the discrediting of a notion of full meaning, with Bachelard, as a product of the scientific conceptualization of reality. Uncertainty or ambiguity, he insists, are not a function of the knowing subject but of reality itself (Weber 2001, xii). To be sure, Ortega's impulse to remain open to the world's particularities and accidents seems to run counter to his suggestion that he will find a short, certain path to full meaning, for a path is a method, especially when it promises optimal, assured, and expeditious results.

Ortega's "paths," however, offer a more literal translation of the Greek "meta-hodos" than "method." In the first pages of the *Meditations*, "full meaning" is to be reached by "(placing) objects of all kinds—which life, in its continual ebb and flow, washes up at our feet—in such a position (postura) that the sun should reflect upon them with innumerable reverberations" (1987, 12; 1961, 31–32, translation modified). Ortega, as the meditator, merely arranges things in an advantageous way. More importantly, he then relies on a future encounter so that his work should pay off: "With everything there is an indication of possible fullness. An open and noble soul will feel the ambition to perfect it and help it, so that it should reach its fullness" (1987, 12; 1961, 31). This is the *love* of our "general science of love" (1987, 18; 1961, 38). Ortega presents, places, poses the objects at issue, in such a way that an event of full meaning might occur. In spite of the suggestion that a failure to capture meaning might be a spiritual failing on the part of the reader, meaning is said to rely also on a

kind of taking stock of the immeasurable, an encounter of the singular “I” and a singular object. The arbitrary and accidental nature of the meaningful encounter with objects is most apparent in the celebrated metaphor for what appears to be the principal object of the *Meditations, Don Quixote*:

But the secret of an artistic masterpiece does not yield to intellectual attack in this way. It might be said that it is reluctant to be taken by force, and only yields to whom it chooses (a quien quiere, *querer* and *amar* being, in Spain at least, near synonyms; but *querer* also means “to want”: it gives itself to whom it wants). . . . It does not surrender to arms: it surrenders, *if at all* (*si acaso*), to meditative worship. A work as great as *Don Quixote* has to be taken like Jericho was taken. In wide circles, our thoughts and our emotions must keep on pressing in on it slowly, sounding in the air, as it were, imaginary trumpets. (Ortega 1987, 31–32; 1961, 52, translation modified)

Capturing the full meaning invokes building up intensity, in anticipation of a moment of insight, ignition, or fusion in the nuclear sense: the metaphors in Ortega vary, including not just siege but sports and sex. Although he implies that the spark that jumps the gap from work to reader is inevitable (surely *Don Quixote* loves someone, wants someone to “get it”), or that it depends on the reader’s purity of soul or intellectual preparation, the description, as I’ve quoted it, implies something else. The analogy to the Battle of Jericho suggests that the flash of meaning is inevitable, as inevitable as the victory of the Hebrews in the book of Joshua. In the Bible, the victory is a fulfillment of God’s promise; no such guarantee is forthcoming from Ortega, however. Nonetheless, if we consider that Joshua in Spanish is Josué, we can see another near homonym for the author, José Ortega, another secret inscription of his proper name into his text, precisely in the site where full meaning is promised. Unlike Josué’s historical account of a fulfilled promise, José’s promise must be fulfilled in the future of his texts.

In *Meditations*, Ortega describes the temporality of full meaning only to withdraw its more radical implications. In particular and as every student of *Hispánicas* ought to know about this work, understanding *Don Quixote* is the prerequisite and key to the emergence of a new Spain, and with it, a new



Europe “modeled” on Spain. And yet, if full meaning is figured as the destruction of Jericho or the fragmentation of sunlight into myriad reflections, it is unclear how it might be translated into anything concrete enough to guide an individual or a community. Rather than acknowledge a thinking of the event-character of meaning, Ortega will, for the rest of *Meditaciones* and his oeuvre (through to the end, the *Epilogue to the History of Philosophy*) call it a prelude to genuine work or genuine meaning and thus enact the problem of full meaning by complaining that his message was never received. That is, when one has left understanding up to a future event in which a reader’s spirit will commune with an object and, by extension, with the author (or vice versa), a failure should perhaps come as no surprise. As an index of this failure, we may recall again the note from *Goethe*, from 1932, in which Ortega complains, “sometimes I find myself surprised that not even my closest associates have even the remotest notion of what I have thought and written. Distracted by my images, they have slipped upon my thoughts” (1966a, 404 n. 1). But when so much has been left to the reader, when meaning is eventual, what is perhaps more surprising is Ortega’s surprise itself.

We should recall another description of the production of meaning in *Meditaciones*. This is an oblique comment on philosophy. Ortega says that the *Meditations* “are motivated by philosophical desires” but asks that readers not demand too much of him: “they are simply essays. And the essay is science minus the explicit proof. For a writer there is a question of intellectual honor in not writing anything that can be proven without first possessing the proof” (1987, 20; 1961, 40). He goes on to say that one *can*, in fact, “erase the proof” as a means of preserving and conveying the “intimate heat” generated by the thoughts. He therefore admits that this is not a philosophical book: “the doctrines make no demand that the reader should accept them as truths” (1987, 20; 1961, 40). He implies, however, that such a philosophical book is fully possible and, in fact, susceptible of being written. I’m interested in this promise that gets extended across Ortega’s career, from this 1914 book to shortly before his death in 1955, that a philosophical treatise lies hidden inside him. It is not clear, exactly, and we’ll see this further on, whether he is referring to something past and completed—the proofs have been erased from this composition—or something potential but not yet realized. As we have seen, Silver assumes

that a moment of philosophical insight might have happened without producing a text, and he attempts to reconstruct that virtual text in *Ortega as Phenomenologist*. In the essays he did write, Ortega “invites” readers to “try out their ideas”; playing explicitly with the synonyms “ensayar” and “probar,” he says, “by virtue of his intimate and faithful experience, [the reader] will try out their truth or error/ rehearse it/ prove it/ put it to the test [en virtud de su íntima y leal experiencia, probará su verdad o su error]” (1987, 20; 1961, 40). But it is worth mentioning, too, that although he suggests the “proofs” that would make the essay’s “doctrines” into “truth” already exist (they have been merely subtracted or erased), even that is a promise, a projection into the future when truth might be established, when, Ortega gives his word as a professor of philosophy, they will receive once and for all the stamp or imprint of truth.<sup>7</sup>

By placing fullness of meaning—apodicticity, the demonstration of truth—elsewhere than in his texts, somewhere before or beyond—Ortega limits himself, for the sake of “intimate warmth,” to a series of fragments. Each of the latter, given the right conditions, might accede to full meaning, realize itself, or actualize itself. This is the promise and limit of the *Meditations*. It is striking, then, that in his later work the *Meditations* will take on the status of a masterpiece; it inaugurates or states for the first time (or maybe just makes “public”) principles on which the rest of his work can be grounded. As is well known, it was not completed, consisting of a prefatory address to the reader (called “To the Reader”), a “Preliminary Meditation,” and a “First Meditation.” For this reason, it seems proper to say that even its final form suggests that its meaning is eventual, that it owes or will have owed its meaning to future readers who might know how to *hear* José Ortega.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF “GENERAL BIOLOGY”

From the *Meditations* forward, Ortega presents his most sweeping, most general “philosophical” point of view, ironically, by quoting himself and in thematic contexts that do not lead one to expect such ambition. *Goethe from the Inside*, for example, might appear to be a case of literary studies, except that Ortega responds to an invitation (like the “Prologue for Germans,” this is a “Letter to a German” [1966a, 395]) by affirming the untranslatability of Ger-

man and Spanish experience while affirming the philosophical grounds for his position. Ortega explains at the beginning that he has been asked for a piece on Goethe and that he will fail to deliver (1966a, 395). Addressing the reader directly, he says, “the operation to which I would have to submit Goethe is too serious and radical [grave y de raíz] to be attempted by someone who is not German” (1966a, 398). Ortega knows, however, no Germans capable of really going to the roots, to present Goethe “from the inside,” and the explanation of Ortega’s philosophy is intended to show what a German would have to do to be equal to the task. It is, in brief, something one of Ortega’s Spaniards would do by nature. To write a “biography” of Goethe, one would have to understand “the structure of human life” (1966a, 401). This, as we have seen, comes down to two “I’s” and a circumstance, and Ortega insists that the important *Goethe*, the Goethe that is truly of interest, is the singular “I” facing his world:

It is not a matter of seeing life *as* Goethe saw it, with his *subjective* vision, but rather entering as a biographer into the magic circle of his existence to witness [asistir a] the tremendous, objective event [acontecimiento] that that life *was* and of which Goethe was merely one ingredient. (1966a, 401)

Ortega calls for regarding Goethe as the second “I” in the formula “I am I plus my circumstance,” which is therefore an ingredient *alongside* his circumstance. The other “I,” the synthesis or the subject, is the inessential Goethe.

Ironically, Goethe stands at the beginning of Ortega’s own chapter in the history of philosophy’s accomplishment. Goethe is “the man in whom, for the first time, the consciousness appears [alborea] that human life is man’s struggle with his own unique and individual destiny” (1966a, 403). In spite of his insistence on keeping one “I” from the other, Ortega lets them come together in this characterization of “human life” and “man”; man’s “destiny” is the circumstance he is born to and his life is the drama of confronting his circumstance. It is after this self-characterization by way of Goethe that Ortega inserts a footnote on Heidegger. We can take this as an affirmation—tucked discretely or secreted in this out-of-the-way place—of his struggle with the most formidable philosophical figure of his time. It is true, as Francisco José Martín confesses, that Ortega looks “ridiculous” in the encounters with

Heidegger, whose figure in Ortega's work assumes the stature of Don Quixote's windmills (Martin 1999, 47). Martín also recognizes that Ortega's own language appears to echo important passages of *Being and Time*. In particular, Ortega says that "life is concern with itself" (1966a, 402 n. 1). For his part, Heidegger defines *Dasein* as the being that inquires regarding Being (1962, 27), and the preliminary analytic of *Dasein* characterizes this being as "care" or "concern" (Sorge) (1962, 65). The human being is Being *there*, Being in the concrete, factual situation that is being-in-the-world, a "state" that has the character of concern. Ortega is not inaccurate in his gloss of Heidegger, though his proposition appears to aim at a definition of *life* rather than to inquire, as *Being and Time* does, about the relationship of Being to the human as Being-there.<sup>8</sup> That Heidegger illegitimately or surreptitiously substitutes Being for *life* was the upshot of Ortega's other dismissal of Heidegger, in *Leibniz* (Ortega 1966b, 271). What remains clear is Ortega's aspiration to philosophical generality in his description of life and human life, as a sort of rival to Heideggerian fundamental ontology. He concludes the note on Heidegger with the claim that *The Theme* (rather than *Meditations*) gives his doctrine definitive form as "ratio-vitalism" (racio-vitalismo) (1966a, 404 n. 1).

Before looking more closely at the elaboration of that philosophical doctrine, I'd like to note again Ortega's remarking of the discursive status of the text. It is not, in short, his text. By most appearances—with the glaring exception of a title and task that refer explicitly to a temporal moment, "our time"—*The Theme* is the central work in the Ortega canon. Though *Meditations* is often cited to establish the early, definitive manifestation of his doctrines, *The Theme* receives a place of honor and, as I've just noted, seems to have given Ortega's thought its most concise articulation. However, the 1923 publication opens with a "Warning" by Ortega, explaining that this was a university course pronounced in 1921–22 and that this volume offers a text based on the notes of a friendly student, not the original manuscript (1966e, 143). Ortega appeals, therefore, to the authority of spontaneous speech, whose perfection can be but imperfectly captured by the intermediaries of audience and written text. A 1933 footnote that appeared in the third edition reiterates the idea that the *thoughts* are adequate to the matter at hand, while the text is flawed: the word "crisis" has come into vogue since 1922, and he wants to remind the reader that

he used it in 1921, before it was fashionable (1966e, 186 n. 1). He then adds that the thoughts in which the word was used were “thought even earlier” (1966e, 186). Practically every major text by Ortega contains in one way or another a claim of this type: debasing the text, the only means we have to get at his thought, while evoking an imperfectly accessible original thought. Sometimes the text is simply unfinished, and Ortega mentions future chapters and sections that never appear (*Meditaciones*); sometimes external forces are evoked, a cause for hurried publication (*¿Qué es filosofía?*) or distraction by a more urgent project. What remains indisputable for Ortega is his very existence. Thought is tied to a kind of interior speech in the *Meditations*, where the contemplation of the forest and other things is presented as a kind of report, after the fact. And for *The Theme*, it is the spontaneous delivery of a university course that confers authority on the doctrine pronounced, whose shortcomings as a written text are no longer Ortega’s responsibility. Doubtless, this is a kind of defensive tactic, but it also places Ortega squarely in a certain history of metaphysics, from Socrates, the philosopher who didn’t write, to a certain Heidegger.

*The Theme* announces a fairly modest task: to define the present moment and its challenges for Ortega and his contemporaries. In accordance with a structure that might be getting familiar, this modesty quickly changes polarity; not only is “today” the moment of a change in historical direction but understanding it requires nothing less than reenvisioning the very structure of the cosmos. The preliminary to talking about “our time” is to talk about “all times”; to speak of “us” requires that we characterize the existence of humanity, individual and collective, in historical terms. Everything human, Ortega proposes, is an expression of life:

Ideology, taste, morality, they are nothing more than consequences or specifications of a radical sensation when confronted by life, of how existence is felt in its undifferentiated integrity. What we will call “vital sensibility” is the primary phenomenon of history. (1966e, 146–47)

Life is a whole and must be approached as “undifferentiated.” It is in introducing differences that knowledge begins to impose itself on the *bios* by introduc-

ing “specifications” that limit it and drawing “consequences” that distance us from it. In a note to this discussion, Ortega calls the study of this “reality” a “science of life” whose most proper name would be “biology” (1966e, 148 n. 1).

Later Ortega will prefer a “general biology” of which contemporary biology—the biology that goes by this name—would be “just one chapter” (1966e, 189). Ortega italicizes this pronouncement, which is a prediction and a prescription:

Good fortune [bienaventuranza] has a biological character, as does *the day*, perhaps less distant than the reader suspects, in which a general biology is elaborated, from which the current one will only be a single chapter, celestial fauna and physiology will be defined and studied biologically, as one of many “possible” forms of life. (1966e, 189)

“General biology” might come about not as an effect of hard work or insight but good fortune, a blessing that echoes the Messianic promise of the Biblical Beattitudes (“las bienaventuranzas” being plain Spanish for the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew). But the locution “biology” also suggests that access to the “radical reality” of life requires *living* in its immediacy, neither thinking nor speaking. Hence Ortega will say (with a nod to Fichte), “philosophizing is, properly speaking, not living” (1966e, 188). General biology both is and is not philosophy. Naturally, Ortega is speaking of changing the terms of discussion altogether, perhaps the very language concerned with life or being. He calls for “a radical reform of philosophy and, what is more important, of our sensation of the cosmos [sensación cósmica]” (1966e, 200). It even appears that the reform he is advocating is replacing transcendental philosophy with the notion of a “sensation of the cosmos” or “cosmic sensation,” *sensación* corresponding semantically to the idea of “the way in which existence is felt” (cómo se sienta la existencia) (1966e, 146).

*Sensation*, then, always already orients us and should, therefore, guide us in our thinking. It should be no surprise, therefore, that Ortega figures human history as an organ, the intermediary that permits a connection between unchanging truth and historical existence. Having defined truth as “one and invariable” (1966e, 157), he accounts for the variety of human history as the

evolving perception of the truth. “Every individual—person, people or era—is an irreplaceable organ for the conquest of truth [un órgano insustituible para la conquista de la verdad]” (1966e, 200). Immediately he evokes again the static imperturbability of the truth: “this is how truth, which in itself is free of historical variation, acquires a vital dimension” (1966e, 200). This is a bit confusing, because in a way both life and truth are beyond us, only revealed in historically determinate ways; truth is temporalized by life, which then throws it into a Babel of different perspectives, which, like in the story of the tower of Babel, are not totally idiosyncratic but organized according to nations, and within them, generations.

Although Ortega claims in *The Theme* to be on the trail of his own “generation,” it turns out that his is where the very generation of generations comes to consciousness, where we learn how generations are generated. Previous generations, he says, evoking Nietzsche, labored under an “error,” the philosophical error that rather than receiving their historical character from life, they were determining their own character and, moreover, defining life for themselves. He describes this as the “Cartesian paradox”: the replacement of the real-world by an imaginary, rational world. This paradox consists in the “amputation of the organ of truth” (1966e, 163), and Ortega dreams of a discipline that might grow us a new ear or a new eye. But the new organ would be a substitute, correcting the previous organ with a new one: “*Pure reason*,” he writes, “*has to be replaced by vital reason, where the former [pure reason] might position itself and acquire the mobility and force for transformation [donde aquella se localice y adquiera movilidad y fuerza de transformación]*” (1966e, 201; emphasis in original). Such a new organ would, on the one hand, like an ear or eye, perceive the truth and fulfill the philosophical project of describing “what things are” as they are and the power to work toward change. At the same time, it retains the place and function of the tradition, in this case, Kantian theoretical reason.<sup>9</sup>

In any case, Ortega insists here and elsewhere that he merely announces a project, *the* project that will set the world back on its feet, with clear hearing and clear eyesight. Like in *Meditations*, he calls his accomplishment a doctrine of perspective, but “general biology” seems here to contain it as a necessary project, a project to come, he says, suggesting even mid-career that this task

has not been his, nor that of his generation. Perhaps the problem is not, as Ortega implies, the inadequacy of his listeners but the impossible protocol he creates for realizing the task he sets. As we saw in *Goethe from the Inside*, the task of the “biographer” was to “witness” (asistir a) life (1966a, 401). The “Prologue for Germans” gives a better idea of how a general biology *textbook* might look after describing the “theme of our time” and the necessity of remedying life’s submission or subordination to culture. Ortega sees Husserlian phenomenology as the last gasp of idealism. For himself he claims the achievement of a point of view that sees the world as it is, a “strange and radical reality” that would bear witness to life’s “pure happening” (1966e, 52). A doctrine that would let being be (life), he notes, would require a new language and hence a new dictionary: “Since language is in its entirety constituted by an ecstatic inspiration, it is necessary to retranslate it in its totality to the fluid significations of pure happening [puro acontecer] and to convert the whole dictionary into a tensorial calculus [cálculo tensorial]” (1966e, 52). This is not merely a translation from one language to another. As “retranslation” Ortega calls, in fact, for a translation back to a primordial language in which words actually signify in a different manner than (what he takes for) the current one. Surprisingly, he is not looking for a language that essentially allows for mastery but a language of interlacing reference and tension, in which meaning is an event, like the world itself. To convert the current dictionary into a “tensorial calculus,” this project, too, involves a certain translation and homonymy, calling for a new biology and a new calculus, beyond or behind what those disciplines traditionally mean. Rather than a natural science and a pure science, they appear to belong to a poetics, a prescription for a mode of speech that would correspond to life in its strangeness and spontaneity. Ortega’s call for a poetics to come is also a call for a certain kind of philosophy, the work of that poetics, the manifestation of its vocabulary and grammar that would, presumably, be something akin to the ontology he claims Heidegger should have completed instead of replacing *bios* with *ontos*.

It is not clear whether we should speak already of a fusion of literature and philosophy in Ortega, in the first place, because he was so insistent that this project had not yet been undertaken. Because of the problem of homonymy and the protocol of combining life and philosophy, it would seem more accu-



rate to say that Ortega manifests the impossibility of such a project. Its realization, written in the words of our current dictionary but with transformed definitions, might in fact be indistinguishable from its failure or absence. Nonetheless, Ortega has composed texts capable of producing the sensation that something radical and mysterious is afoot in the world. To feel this and even perhaps to act on it is perhaps the privilege of certain readers, those possessing the particular experience that would guarantee them access to a secret and would confer, therefore, on them a sense of the world's secrecy.

We should wonder, too, whether the extremely idiomatic if not untranslatable language called for by Ortega would have any right to claim the universality to which it *also* aspires. Or, to say the same thing, whether universality would have any right to declare itself Spanish, to direct itself first and foremost at a particular community, to claim its necessary emergence or excrescence *from* that community and provide curative properties for that community. These questions of *right* cannot be answered by Ortega but must be addressed in another tribunal, one that would also be in the world and subject to the demands and limits of language. Ortega does declare and to some degree embrace in and with his name that a certain failure at philosophy finds a home in literature. His texts bear witness to the passage from one to the other.



#### NOTES

1. Translations of Spanish texts are my own, except in the case of Ortega's *Meditations on Quixote*, for which several editions, including Rugg and Marín's translation, are listed in my references and referred to by year. The original Spanish text is quoted when considered necessary or helpful. Because some prominent commentators on Ortega place great emphasis on the chronology of his texts, I have included original years of publication in the references and in the first mention of the individual texts.
2. See, for one account, Ignacio Götz's "Introduction. Ortega y Gasset: A Tribute," which describes the packed theaters and notes the praise from Hermann Hesse and Albert Camus, in particular (1987).
3. The prologue of Abellán's *Historia crítica* begins with a quote by Ortega, but more importantly, the conception of philosophy as "máxima conciencia intelectual de un pueblo, de

una nación o de un hombre” (Abellán 1988, 13) refers almost literally to affirmations of Ortega’s that we will have occasion to cite in this essay.

4. This characterization is alluded to by Rodolphe Gasché when he discusses the privilege granted Germany by Heidegger, for whom, in any case, it is not a question of an actual people with a determinate homeland but a project actual Germans had so far failed to live up to (2009, 114–16).
5. The English translation of *Meditations of Quijote* includes an interesting continuation of the previous quote that expands this image: “the prow of the continental soul in the broad expanse of the globe, in the midst of innumerable races, lost in a limitless yesterday and an endless tomorrow, below the immense and cosmic cold of the twinkling stars” (Ortega 1961, 102). This text is, without explanation, included in the version of *Meditaciones* in the *Obras completas* (1966c, 360), though it is not the Alianza or Cátedra editions.
6. A fruitful comparison could be made to the hiddenness of truth in Heidegger’s “On the Essence of Truth,” where concealment is the companion of truth as unconcealment. Concealment there is mysterious or secret (*geheim*) but is also integral to conceiving the world as home (*heim*). See especially the chapter “Untruth as Concealing” (Heidegger 1993, 130–35).
7. The first sentence of the *Meditations* refers to the author in the third person: “Under the title of *Meditations* this first volume announces several essays on various subjects of no very great consequence to be published by a professor of Philosophy in *paribus infidelium*” (Ortega 1987, 11; 1961, 31).
8. One might also argue that it is, in fact, inaccurate to say that Being is “concerned with itself.” By being *Dasein*, that being that is concerned with its own Being, Being takes an interest, as it were, in Being-oneself (Selbstsein) but also in Being-with (Mitsein). In his early, pre-*Being and Time* essay on Dilthey, Heidegger attributes something like this problem to Dilthey: “life is primarily always already life with others, a knowledge of one’s fellow human being” (2002, 158). From this perspective, life’s concern is both for itself and for others.
9. An examination of Ortega’s implicit understanding of Kant would be revealing, far beyond the standard account, encouraged by him, of his early allegiance to neo-Kantianism (explained in the “Prologue,” 1966d, 27–30). Of especial importance would be the primacy he gives to theoretical reason (cognizing the world with “pure reason”) over practical reason (acting in the world) in his outline of a “philosophical doctrine.” Such a primacy was not the final word in Kant, at least, for whom one ought at least point out that action (practical reason) does not rely entirely on correct cognition of the world but also on consideration of purely formal laws of practical reason and the joining of these general laws to the particularities of the world via the judgment.

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