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# Authenticity and Will: A Critical Approach to Ortega y Gasset's Philosophy of Education

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The author notes that José Ortega y Gasset's philosophy of education revolves around the imperative of authenticity which he extends to cover educational institutions, teachers and first of all students. He censures the main points of Ortega's philosophy of education highlighting its strengths and weaknesses as well as its potential application in school education. He is specifically critical of how Ortega's earlier philosophy sought to achieve authenticity through notions of 'circumstance' and 'decision'. He subsequently analyzes what Ortega regarded as a constitutive tragedy of pedagogy and the mission he assigned to university. As regards Ortega's philosophy in his later years, the author examines his proposal to reach authenticity by listening to one's own voice of call stemming from each individual belief to suggest how to help students in becoming aware of their own beliefs. The author agrees with Ortega that students' happiness largely depends on how much they are in agreement with themselves or their own beliefs.

Keywords: Ortega y Gasset, pedagogy, authenticity, self-knowledge, choice, belief, vocation

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## I. Introduction

The work of the Spanish essayist and philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955) arises against the background of European philosophy from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. His work was much appreciated in Germany, where he was considered as one of the main European intellectuals.[1] Yet his reputation also reached the United States, where he became 'one of the hundred most "famous" names.[2] In this vein, many brilliant people in that country had become devoted followers of Ortega once they read *The Revolt of the Masses.*[3] This book, available in English since 1932, 'was hailed by its admirers as one of the decisive works of this century, as a work as significant for our age as *Das Kapital* was for the nineteenth century and Rousseau's *Contrat social* for the eighteenth'.[4] Ortega was thus a philosopher who also published a number of essays on contemporary social and political problems: some of those problems were specifically educational, but his work as a whole can be considered as a major pedagogical project. It should be noted that in 1910 Spain was a culturally backward nation in which 60 per cent of the population could neither read nor write, a huge percentage that in 1930 had decreased only to 44 percent.[5] In this context, Ortega appeared as a 'cultural crusader' whose goal was to Europeanize Spanish thought, that is, to raise the nation to the cultural level of modern Europe.[6] To achieve this, Ortega assumed, it was not sufficient simply that the illiterate population learned to read and write: Spaniards should even become interested in philosophy. To this end, he published his first essays as brief newspaper articles in language that was elegant but close to his readers, disguising as far as possible the difficulties proper to philosophical reflection. Indeed, Ortega took it for granted

[1] Ernst Robert Curtius, "Spanische Perspektiven," *Die neue Rundschau* 1927, no. 35: 1229–1247.

[2] John T. Graham, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Life in Ortega y Gasset* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 1.

[3] Rex Smith, Microfilm Reel 20 of the Ortega y Gasset archive at the Library of Congress. *Newsweek*, 1940.

[4] Harold Raley, *José Ortega y Gasset: Philosopher of European Unity* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1971), 124.

[5] Miguel Martínez Cuadrado, *La burguesía conservadora (1874-1931)* (Madrid: Alianza, 1983).

[6] Francisco La Rubia, "Configurations of German and Spanish Intellectual History and Aesthetics. Goethe, Novalis, Ortega y Gasset, and Unamuno," in *The Lion and the Eagle. Interdisciplinary Essays on German-Spanish Relations over the Centuries*, ed. by Conrad Kent et. al. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 276.

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that political as well as social change could and should be achieved through education. His conviction that political change should go hand in hand with education led him to found in October 1913 the League for Political Education, a liberal party whose aim was to organize an elitist minority responsible for the political education of the masses by controlling their impulses and cultivating their thoughts. Regarding social change, Ortega[7] held that as soon as the pedagogue enters into educative relation with a student, he does not find an individual but a social tapestry: in his opinion, the modern pedagogue should put into practice Plato's social pedagogy according to which the polis must be educated in order to educate the individual.

In this article, I will carry out a critical approach to Ortega's philosophy of education, which revolves around the imperative of authenticity that he extends to educational institutions, teachers and, above all, to students themselves. Firstly, I will focus on Ortega's earlier philosophy in order to expose his view of the indissoluble union between the individual and her circumstance, after which I will highlight the weak points present in the pervasive role assigned by Ortega to choice, his claim that everybody must aim at full authenticity, and the falsity that, according to him, is characteristic of academic study, from which a mission for the university derives that will also be put into question. Secondly, already within the context of Ortega's later philosophy, I will analyze how his conception of 'belief' is associated with the notion of 'counterwill', and to which extent it can generate a voice of vocation that dictates to each individual how to reach authenticity as well as self-knowledge. Finally, I will suggest how students can be taught to become acquainted with the traits of beliefs in general and their own in particular. Though my approach to Ortega's philosophy of education is highly critical, I hope to show that an important source of inspiration can still be found in the work of this philosopher unknown to many and unfairly forgotten by others.

## II. Authenticity and Vital Programme: Ortega's earlier philosophy

According to Ortega, man is constantly and necessarily immersed in something different from him, in his circumstance: each self has its own fate with which

[7] Ortega, José, "La pedagogía social como programa político," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. II (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 86–102.

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it presses the world or circumstance, which in turn resists such pressure to a greater or lesser extent. This relentless conflict between the self and its circumstance constitutes life itself, understood as a task to be done. Regarding circumstances, it could be expected that Ortega refers only to the major events and traditions that seem to condition our life more evidently; nevertheless, he specially draws attention to much closer and – seemingly – more irrelevant circumstances. Starting with them, philosophical analysis may gradually rise towards the most striking circumstances; yet it is a priority to take the former as a point of departure due to the role they play by generating each individual's vital perspective. Meanwhile, the selfpresses its circumstance or surrounding environment because it aims to develop there its own vital programme. Ortega considers man as an actor who must play a very special character: his own self. Since life requires the individual to respond to the challenges deriving from each circumstance, he must decide how best to act, thereby leaning towards one of the possibilities available to him to the detriment of others.[8] At first, it might seem that each subject is entirely free to make a decision, yet Ortega adds a relevant nuance: man must always choose the best option, that is, the objective standard of the good which allows him to develop his true self.[9] For this purpose, he must adopt a very specific way of life, under penalty of falsifying his life. We are thus free to accept, says Ortega, what is necessary. Each individual must progressively create his own persona not randomly or capriciously, but taking inspiration from his vital program. Only whoever does not fail to do so – i.e. the one who remains faithful to his self without allowing himself to be influenced by the environment – is the hero or the original individual par excellence, able to become the origin of his own acts, thereby also being responsible for them.[10]

Let us now examine these remarks made by Ortega on the ongoing need to choose and the imperative of authenticity. To begin with, he often highlighted that life constitutes an exhausting task because we must continually choose what to do; nevertheless, I think that we are daily guided by countless automatisms due to

[8] José Ortega, "Pidiendo un Goethe desde dentro," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. V (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2006), 120–142. See also José Ortega, "Meditaciones del Quijote," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. I (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2012), 747–828.

[9] José Ortega, "El tema de nuestro tiempo," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. III (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2012), 559–654.

[10] José Ortega, "Meditaciones del Quijote," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. I, 747–828.

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which choices are not as prevalent in our everyday lives as Ortega suggested. The following examples may help to illustrate this point. If a perfectionist student is required to write a short story, she may take within a short time a large number of decisions relating to the modifications to the plot as well as to each sentence in order to obtain the desired effect: in all these cases, she might choose among different alternatives guided by diverse reasons. But let us see now a couple of examples provided by Ortega himself. On the one hand, Ortega points out that some of his students might often hesitate between either continuing to listen to him or thinking about the most insignificant things.[11] In my opinion, it is obvious that students might make decisions thereon, yet it is far more likely that they focus successively on a number of things – such as paying attention to Ortega's lecture, among others – hardly being aware of those changes, and, therefore, without reaching any decision about them. On the other hand, Ortega states that when his students go outside, they will have to decide what direction should be followed, for which purpose they will be based upon what they have to do that day – which in turn depends, says Ortega, on the life they have to live in order to be faithful to their own selves.[12] However, I would add, if students are already acquainted with the neighborhood, they will surely not even consider which direction to take. In this case, as in the previous ones, the individual could have done something different, so that she seems to have made a decision; but life is characterized by our spontaneously doing lots of things without us having been aware of alternative courses of action: hence, we could not consider reasons either. Within the existentialist tradition, above all in Sartre, we are compelled to choose; but Taylor already wondered: 'A choice made without regard to anything, without the agent feeling any solicitation to one alternative or the other, or in complete disregard of any such solicitation: is this still choice?'[13] If decision is not guided by reasons, or if the reasons are merely the result of an unfettered choice, then either one will

[11] José Ortega, "Principios de Metafísica según la razón vital," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. VIII (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2008), 555–560.

[12] José Ortega, "Misión del bibliotecario," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. V (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 348–371.

[13] Charles Taylor, "What Is Human Agency," in Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 32.

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remain paralyzed, or, if he does anything, it will be due to random impulse rather than decision.[14]

What I have just said is closely related to the problem of authenticity. Ortega remarks that man is authentic when he does not know how to act in a certain circumstance and, therefore, he turns inside his inner world to reach the decision that best fits his vital program. Yet this presents an obvious problem characteristic of deontological ethics. As Dobson pointed out, in this case 'decisions appear to have to be judged by the way that they are arrived at rather than by their consequences for their agents or their peers'.[15] Despite its significance, I will set aside this important aspect to focus on the possibility of implementing Ortega's project of individual authenticity. To start with, he defends a monolithic conception of authenticity to which everyone should be adjusted: but as can be seen in the following example, this creates a problem. Let us imagine that a lazy person always tries to do everything possible to avoid any reflection or doubt because they bring him into deepest distress. This man, according to Ortega, might also aspire to reach authenticity by trying to think for himself; yet Ortega does not even question whether such an individual would not really be more authentic – or faithful to his true self, if any – by remaining absorbed in television shows rather than doing something that can be as forced and unnatural to him as dedicating his time to reflection.

An additional problem concerns the possibility of discerning the existence of countless authentic personalities or vital programmes. Ortega held that every man should think about how to act in each circumstance, however insignificant, thereby showing his allegedly unique and only personality.[16] Keeping this in mind, I consider that it would make sense to distinguish between two such unique personalities only if at least some of their differences were significant instead of trivial. From this follows that if each person who has existed, exists and will exist must necessarily have her own personality, it should be possible for us to discern many thousands of millions of personalities markedly different from each other. But it

[14] Karsten Schoellner, "The Life and Logic of Our Beliefs," in: *Rationality Reconsidered. Ortega y Gasset and Wittgenstein on Knowledge, Belief, and Practice*, ed. by Astrid Wagner, José María Ariso (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 141–170.

[15] Andrew Dobson, *An Introduction to the Politics and Philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 123.

[16] José Ortega, "La pedagogía de la contaminación," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. VII (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 685–691.

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does not appear to be feasible at all that our discrimination capacity – or even our own imagination – would allow us to discern so many different personalities. Rigorously speaking, it cannot therefore be understood how each individual might have a unique personality, so that it is out of place that each one of us tries to be faithful to her true self or personality. Admittedly, Ortega seems to have devoted all his attention to the unique and non-transferable traits which allegedly distinguish each of us while leaving our common characteristics in the background, to which it should be added that he takes for granted the absolute stability of our true self or personality without even considering whether it might change in one way or another. As if this were not enough, the need to reflect on each statement to ensure that its truth or falsity becomes genuinely authentic would largely hinder the pace of our everyday life because truisms like '2+2=4' should have to be figured out by oneself, which amounts to 'a reinventing of the world over and over again'.[17] Yet neither kids nor adults reflect on each and every one of the ideas they receive from their environment, above all the most basic ones – which will be called 'beliefs' in the next section – just because, in addition to being countless, they are ungrounded and immune to doubt, so that they almost always go unnoticed by us.[18] As Ortega pointed out, it is grounded only that which is doubtful and likely or not completely believed: since beliefs are so deep and elementary, we do not worry about them, and we are not aware of them in our everyday lives either.[19]

Building on this conception of authenticity, Ortega draws our attention to what he calls the 'constitutive tragedy of pedagogy'. Let us see what this tragedy centres on. According to Ortega, scientific knowledge has been patiently generated by people who really needed it; but this is not the case for the student, as such knowledge is not anything she needs. Instead, it is something she finds already done and with the obligation to learn it. Ortega claims that the student perceives this knowledge as a foreign matter, so that she remains intact and barbarian under

[17] Pedro Blas González, *Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega y Gasset's Philosophy of Subjectivity* (St Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2005), 85.

[18] José María Ariso, "Learning to Believe: Challenges in Children's Acquisition of a World-picture in Wittgenstein's On Certainty," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 34, no. 3 (2015): 311–325. See also José María Ariso, "Can Certainties Be Acquired at Will? Implications for Children's Assimilation of a World-picture," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 50, no. 4 (2016): 573–586.

[19] José Ortega, "La deshumanización del arte," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. III (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2012), 847–878.

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that received – but not really assimilated – culture. Therefore, the constitutive tragedy of pedagogy consists in the fact that the student constitutes a falsification of the individual because the student does not feel the need to learn what she has to study, which results in a growing problem because the volume of knowledge is constantly increasing. Against this background, Ortega recommended an in-depth educative reform in order to teach the necessity of each science instead of teaching those very sciences.[20] From my point of view – and also from the vast majority of teachers' standpoint, I dare say – it would be highly desirable that students feel the necessity of the science they have to study; nevertheless, Ortega does not explain how this necessity should be taught. Furthermore, qualifying the figure of the student as false because she does not feel the necessity of studying what she should learn appears to be excessive. On the one hand, there are many students who feel the need to learn numerous things, so that Ortega provides a too biased picture of the student, as if she were uninterested in everything, or, at the very least, as if she were interested only in a few trivialities. On the other hand, and most importantly, it would be appropriate for the students to acquire a basic body of knowledge – even without feeling its necessity – because they will thus not only develop a greater intellectual maturity which will allow them to know more precisely what they need to learn, but also they will be more able to better assimilate that science which they may later, need.

From Ortega's zeal to foster authenticity through education arose one of his best known works, *Mission of the University*. After being published in English in 1946, it was often mentioned in the debate about the expansion of higher education both in the United Kingdom and in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, above all by authors like Moberly[21], who placed emphasis on retaining values within the changing university system[22]. Indeed, Ortega claims that the most important step in the history of pedagogy was carried out by Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel when promoting that education revolves not around

[20] José Ortega, "Principios de Metafísica según la razón vital," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. VIII (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2008), 555–560.

[21] Walter Moberly, *The Crisis in the University* (London: SCM Press, 1949).

[22] John Wyatt, *Commitment to Higher Education. Seven West European Thinkers on the Essence of the University: Max Horkheimer, Karl Jaspers, F. R. Leavis, J. H. Newman, José Ortega y Gasset, Paul Tillich, Miguel de Unamuno* (Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1990).

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the teacher or the content of the study, but around the learner. If we turn our attention to the average student, we will realize, according to Ortega, that her learning ability is quite limited, so that she cannot assimilate the vast amount of knowledge she is expected to attain. It is on this basis that Ortega announces the educational economy principle, which consists in teaching only what the average student can learn and also needs to know, that is, what best fits the cultural imperatives of the moment. To this end, added Ortega, Spanish universities should devote themselves not only to train for the intellectual professions and the development of scientific investigation: above and beyond that, they should attend to transmit culture – understood as the system of convictions in which their specific generation lives.[23] This would prevent Spanish students from becoming the new barbarians to which Ortega made reference shortly after in *The Revolt of the Masses*, i.e. people who know a great deal in a fragmented way about a specific issue, but are not able to grasp the larger shape and import of the culture whose norms they intended to define and judge. Ortega thus concluded that modern universities should also host a School of Culture in which all members of the new university could interdisciplinarily study the culture of their time.

In my view, there is a contradiction implicit in Ortega's argument. On the one hand, he strongly emphasizes that the individual must reach authenticity by acting according to his own personality or vital program, which entails avoiding external influences. But, on the other hand, he suggests that the individual must also become authentic within the context of the culture in which she lives. The problem, of course, arises when the demands from her personality and her culture differ from each other. Although Ortega does not clarify how to solve this problem, his proposal for the reform of Spanish universities offers some interesting points, such as the establishment of a School of Culture. Ortega suggests that the School of Culture would aim at compensating specialized training with a basic teaching on the mentioned fields from an interdisciplinary standpoint. To this end, it would be necessary that university lecturers in the School of Culture were characterized by their great capacity to synthesize specialized knowledge. In this way, the dispersion of scientific knowledge caused by increasing specialization in

[23] José Ortega, "Misión de la Universidad," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. IV (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 531–570.

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universities would be compensated by the concentration and simplification of knowledge to be carried out in the School of Culture.[24]

In my opinion, it would be interesting that some lecturers were not necessarily researchers, but specialists in synthesizing scientific knowledge and with talent to impart it clearly even to the average student. As regards the School of Culture, its aim would be to teach students the cultural imperatives of the moment, yet it is often difficult to identify such imperatives. This is particularly the case if we try to imagine what such a School of Culture might look like at present, as this school would be expected to address issues like climate change, nationalist trends and the influence of new technologies, to name just a few. All these are key issues in current Western society, yet neither science nor popular opinion have found a consensus on them. In sum, Barnett warns that an adequate philosophy of higher education should not only help us to understand or even to defend the university, but to change it[25]: in this vein, Ortega also aims to change it, but his proposal for a new university – and above all for a School of Culture – seemed to be a reform exclusively focused on the threat of mass society he noticed in his philosophical work. Nonetheless, vertebrating the university around a School of Culture is an interesting idea, particularly at a time when it could already be glimpsed the marked specialization to which students' formation was doomed, disregarding their comprehensive development and even more their authenticity.

## III. Authenticity and Vocation: Ortega's later philosophy

Children's psychological development and socialization process can be followed by tracking down how their system of beliefs is progressively enriching. As the child grows and integrates into his surroundings, he acquires an increasing number of beliefs (*creencias*), which are described by Ortega as anything we take for granted in our current way of acting and speaking without even thinking about it. Thus, the child will soon believe that physical objects cannot be passed through as if they were mere mirages, that he has a body, that he lives in a specific country, or that his name is just the one which many people use daily to call him. Maybe

[24] José Ortega, "Misión de la Universidad", 531–570.

[25] Ronald Barnett, "Constructing the university: Towards a social philosophy of higher education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 1(2017): 78–88.

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adults have expressly instructed him as to these issues sometime, so that such issues would start by being, according to Ortega, 'ideas' or thoughts which have been consciously built: hence, they constitute contents of our life. Over time, adds Ortega, many of these ideas become part of the very container of our life when turning into beliefs: the child will then believe in that idea because it has become for him the reality itself, which is constituted by all our beliefs.[26] Yet no individual can specify when the conversion from idea to belief takes place. Since beliefs do not appear due to our thinking of them, we only realize *a posteriori* that we believe in them, that is, once we already share them with other people. Indeed, we can only adhere to any given thought if we already intend to think about something. This adhesion requires an act of will, so that it is not reality for us: for Ortega regards reality as counterwill (*contravoluntad*), i.e. whatever we find, but in no case what we make or create.[27] We cannot therefore become aware of our beliefs as such, for as soon as we intend to think about them, they will cease to be reality for us: instead, they will become mere ideas. In view of the above, Raley is wrong to state that a system of beliefs is 'accepted' by people who share it.[28] Any act of acceptance would involve thinking about the system: consequently, whoever claimed to agree to a system of beliefs would at most be deciding to accept a number of ideas instead of the mentioned system of beliefs. Hence, such a decision would not go beyond a mere willingness, as daily evidence shows we can neither acquire nor reject beliefs – in Ortega's sense – at will: this is not something we do, but something that happens to us and that we notice only once it has already taken place.

Ortega, however, seems to admit that the status of each belief within the system of beliefs depends on the extent to which a specific belief was assimilated through either one's own experience or a previous idea.[29] Moreover, Ortega highlights the appropriateness of letting oneself be guided by the most basic beliefs in order to live a more authentic life. In this way, we come back to a problem

[26] José Ortega, "Ideas y creencias," in: José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. V (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 657–686.

[27] Ibid., 666.

[28] Harold Raley, *José Ortega y Gasset: Philosopher of European Unity* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1971), 90.

[29] José María Ariso, "Counterwill and logical priority over ideas: Two constituents of our basic convictions," in *Rationality Reconsidered. Ortega y Gasset and Wittgenstein on Knowledge, Belief, and Practice*, eds. Astrid Wagner, José María Ariso (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 201–214.

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which was pending from the previous section, i.e. how to attain authenticity. To shed light on this point, it is advisable to bring up Ortega's interesting equation between beliefs and self, or between beliefs and personal identity. Indeed, Ortega states that we are our beliefs, which constitute our limit and our prison.[30] Since beliefs make up what reality is for us in an immediate and unreflective way, they also make possible that 'we manifest our spontaneous self to ourselves as well as to others through a vital immediacy that is necessarily prior to pure reason'.[31] Hence, the immediacy provided by our beliefs appears to be the only way to exercise our authenticity. In my view, this is an interesting point. For, as could be seen in the previous section, it was not clear at all how one can be authentic by acting in accordance with one's own vital programme; conversely, the fact that an individual remains faithful to his beliefs does seem to be an interesting manner to reach authenticity by fitting well with himself. Of course, it should be noted that it makes sense to consider whether someone is faithful to his beliefs inasmuch as it is possible for him to remain apart from them. Other philosophers like Wittgenstein do not admit the possibility of not tallying with one's own certainties[32], but Ortega emphasizes that this is the most frequent case because people sometimes either do not know or do not wish to know what they really believe.[33] Bearing in mind that, according to Ortega, we are our beliefs, I think it is an exaggeration to say that most often we do not tally with them. Yet as Ortega remarked, it is very important to be attentive to whether one really believes what he assumes to believe: admittedly, if the ethical ideal consciously accepted by someone matches a belief – which makes up and therefore influences deeply his personality or self – he will fit in well with himself, thereby promoting authenticity to the detriment of hypocrisy.[34]

To illustrate this point, I would like to draw attention to a brilliant comment made by Ortega regarding the formation of children's belief systems. Specifically, Ortega states that the child's world is authentic while the beliefs that make it up

[30] Ortega, "Ideas y creencias," 657–686. See also Ortega, "La deshumanización del arte," 847–878).

[31] Pedro Blas González, *Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega y Gasset's Philosophy of Subjectivity* (St Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2005), 38.

[32] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[33] José Ortega, "En torno a Galileo," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. VI (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 371–508.

[34] José Ortega, "El tema de nuestro tiempo," 559–654.

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stem only and exclusively from his own experience, so that this world progressively loses authenticity as adults inform the child about things which do not fit with those beliefs he had previously acquired through experience.[35] The way I see it, the important thing to retain here is not that children's beliefs start by stemming only from experience, but the fact that in principle there is nothing opposing them. This is the case of the young child who is not yet able to talk, as a result of which he can neither form ideas – which can be defended against other people – nor understand clues from adults contradicting his own beliefs. Since Ortega contemplates, on the one hand, beliefs as the container of our life, and on the other, ideas as the content of life,[36] it could be argued that in this case the young child appears as a container empty of content, as a world in which everything is safe because there is still no room for discrepancy. What Ortega called 'genuine doubt' will arise subsequently, when the individual retreats inside himself to form an idea that covers the hole opened up in his layer of beliefs after having lost one of them.[37] In this case, says Ortega, the loss of a belief does not result in the sudden onset of another one, but in a thinking process that may generate at most an idea, for beliefs cannot arise at will. Nonetheless, Ortega points out that a belief acquired through experience may be contaminated by another belief of the same system. By way of example, Ortega tells that the individual who shares the scientific or dogmatic belief that the Earth rotates around the sun continues to see day after day how the sun sets into the horizon, which would have previously generated a primary belief that, due to its stemming from experience, turns out to be more authentic than the belief of Copernican origin: in spite of everything, adds Ortega, people in this situation often use their dogmatic belief to deny the effects of their authentic belief.[38] Yet in my opinion, and bearing in mind that beliefs cannot be manipulated at will, it is not at all clear how someone might use a belief to cope with another of his beliefs: if we restrict ourselves to Ortega's work, we should conclude that in such a case there will be a genuine doubt even though the concerned individual is not able to recognize it.

[35] José Ortega, "Idea del teatro," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. IX (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2009), 825–855.

[36] Ortega, "Ideas y creencias," 657–686.

[37] Ortega, "Historia como sistema," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. VI (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 45–133.

[38] José Ortega, "La rebelión de las masas," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. IV (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 349–530.

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The question that arises at this point is how to ensure that we share certain beliefs. Ortega provides an answer by saying that we should compare the state of our beliefs to another state or states: to this end, it should be noticed what is taken either for granted or as doubtful in each case.[39] A further solution is suggested by Ortega when recommending to be very attentive to the voice of *vocation*[40] – understood by Ortega as an expression of our beliefs and, by extension, of our very self.[41] As an example, this voice would indicate us that someone cannot be right when saying that we lack a head or that chickens are mammals, among many other things. This is an interesting resource although, according to Ortega, most people try to distract their attention from the voice of vocation because it indicates things we do not like to admit.[42] Strangely enough, however, basic spelling and calculation mistakes often go unnoticed by us without us being warned by the voice of vocation. Yet it should be noted that none of these cases leaves room for doubt: even though we might not have realized that someone miscalculated '2+2=3' within a more complex calculation or that he wrote 'voman' at a given moment, no fluent speaker can doubt that '2+2=4' and that it should have been spelled 'woman' instead of 'voman'. Admittedly, it is not necessary to assess whether we continue to share beliefs as basic as these ones. Instead, I think, verifications should focus on beliefs with which we are likely to disagree. Next I will explain three cases of this type to show how they can be addressed in the classroom and what benefits they may bring to the students.

To start with, claimed that even though beliefs cannot be modified at will, one could at least open up to them by developing a more welcoming attitude towards other people and the environment in general.[43] However, this openness towards others does not offer any guarantee that a specific belief will be modified. Let us suppose that teachers and classmates of a student steadily urged him to believe that she lacks a body, and let us also concede that she finds their arguments compelling: in such a case, she would be willing to believe that she does not have a body. Yet paradoxical as it may sound, the fact that someone shows herself ready

[39] Ortega, "Historia como sistema," 45–133.

[40] Ortega, "En torno a Galileo," 371–508.

[41] José Ortega, "Pidiendo un Goethe desde dentro," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. V (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2006), 120–142.

[42] Ortega, "En torno a Galileo," 371–508.

[43]José Ortega, "La estrangulación de Don Juan," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. VI (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 379–386.

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to believe something – in Ortega's sense – does not entail that she is able to believe it: indeed, expressions like 'I would like to believe that…' or 'I want to believe that…' are often used in this sense. Nevertheless, there are beliefs which leave room for doubt, and it is just this kind of beliefs on which I want to focus. A prime example is belief in God. It is likely that some children believe in God, others do not, and a third group is in doubt: as stated above, Ortega held that genuine doubt arises when the individual is shaken between two beliefs – in this case, between believing and not believing in God[44]. I find it interesting that the student gets acquainted with this state in order to be able to recognize it more easily in the future. This may be achieved by searching two opposing beliefs and facilitating that the student experiences the oscillation between them. In my view, if we take as a reference Ortega's conception of authenticity, it can be assumed that someone who were in genuine doubt would be authentic by accepting such state without trying to conceal it, as Ortega stated that genuine doubt had the same status as belief because it equally contributes to make up our reality.[45]

The second case of belief about which disagreement is likely concerns the Earth's shape. Once students are told that the Earth is round, they could be asked if, despite the explanation, they continue to believe in their heart of hearts that the Earth is flat. If they admitted that it is round, the teacher might then ask them not only why we perceive it as flat, but also why people do not feel that they walk along a wall at the Equator, or upside down in the South Pole. As they are expected not to be able to answer such questions, the teacher may add that one day they will believe without any hint of doubt that the Earth is round, so that he understands their currently believing that it is flat: students must be told that they must give themselves sufficient time to assimilate this and other things. It would also be interesting here that they experience the discrepancy between the official – or taught at school – doctrine and their authentic belief: indeed, this case may also be harnessed for students not only to realize how awkward it would be to remain unfaithful to one of their beliefs, but also, and above all, to think whether they somehow resist some of their beliefs.

A third case of belief with which one may disagree has to do with expectations concerning one's own death: of course, this issue is more appropriate for older students, but as I hope to show, it may help them to realize how their view

[44] Ortega, "Ideas y creencias," 657–686.

[45] Ibid.

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of the world varies due to a change of beliefs. Ariso stated that an individual may show throughout her life different beliefs about her death. Although she is expected to take for granted that she will die and that her death may take place at any moment, she also may – depending on her age and circumstance – feel eternal, be certain that she will die imminently, assume that she will die so late that the possibility of dying seems to dissipate into thin air, and oscillate between two of these beliefs.[46] After exposing this range of beliefs, the teacher can prompt his students to express in their own words what they currently believe regarding their death, whether they had previously held different beliefs thereon, and how that difference changed their view of the world. Talking about each student's beliefs on death may help many classmates to develop a more relaxed view of an issue which still remains taboo for many people: indeed, noting that their classmates show doubts and beliefs similar to theirs may encourage them to test more straightforwardly which beliefs they actually hold, and even to accept more easily their genuine doubts, if any.

## IV. Conclusion

From Ortega's work there seems to stem a clearly negative view of man. According to Ortega, human life is a *drama* because everyone must decide at any time what she will do next without certainly knowing the consequence of her decision[47]. But in my opinion, there is an even more negative aspect of the dramatic sense of life: I am referring to the fact that our beliefs are independent of our decisions, to the extent that we can acquire or lose any belief irrespective of our will. As a result of this, our identity, and by extension our reality, is unstable because the beliefs that make it up may vary drastically without us being able to avoid it.

[46] José María Ariso, "Some variations of the certainty of one's own death," *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations* 2015, no. 14: 82–96.

[47] José Ortega, "Pidiendo un Goethe desde dentro," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. V (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2006), 120–142. See also José Ortega, "El hombre y la gente," in José Ortega, *Obras completas*, vol. IX (Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2009), 281–440.

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But Ortega's view of man is also negative and pessimistic because 'man, in general, is weak, immoral, impulsive, undisciplined, must be carefully led, directed, and controlled by a morally-superior elite'[48]. We should not forget, however, that Ortega idealizes and praises the figure of the farmer – just as he did with the baby's – who fits in so well with himself – or with his beliefs – that his life's serenity and authenticity fill us with wonder. According to Ortega, happiness consists just in this fit with oneself which allows us to live in a transparent world in the sense that there is no room for discrepancy with one's own beliefs. Indeed, Ortega adds that whatever one does, feels, thinks and says that does not fit with her beliefs will be merely apparent, which will lead to a *vita minima* or an inauthentic life.[49] To my mind, quality education should not be alien to the relevance of students' beliefs: therefore, such education must attach importance to the fact that the teacher becomes familiarized with his students' belief systems. The teacher should also facilitate that students know other cultures' beliefs – without having to share them, of course – which was, according to Ortega, the most appropriate way to study history. Yet quality education should pay particular attention to promoting the student's self-knowledge by facilitating her becoming aware of her own beliefs in order to avoid, as far as possible, her living a *vita minima.*[50] Keeping this in mind, there are reasons to agree with Ortega that the teacher's influence may be harmful inasmuch as he fosters in the classroom a common and homogeneous model of student instead of promoting each student's individuality: for although a student's happiness is related to a number of factors, it has much to do with her fit with her own beliefs[51]. To shed light on this point, we can take up the three previously cited examples on beliefs in God, the Earth's shape and one's own death in order to think how the student's life might vary if, firstly, she became aware of what she actually believes, or if she no longer tried to conceal it to herself; secondly, if she admitted that she still does not believe something that she is expected to believe even at that time; and last but not least, if she recognized that some of her beliefs have varied and may vary again over time, thus giving rise

[48] Francis Joseph McVeigh, *Comparative Analysis of Ortega y Gasset's and Herbert Marcuse's Theories of Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970), 308.

[49] Ortega, "En torno a Galileo," 422.

[50] Ortega, "Misión del bibliotecario," 348–371.

[51] José Ortega, "La pedagogía de la contaminación," in José Ortega, *Obras Completas*, vol. VII (Barcelona and Madrid: Taurus and Fundación Ortega y Gasset, 2017), 685–691.

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to a new view of the world which maybe she would otherwise not even have detected although, paradoxically, it could have been determining for a long time who she is as well as the world in which she lives.

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Streszczenie

## Autentyczność i wola: krytyczna analiza José Ortegi y Gasseta filozofii edukacji

W artykule wskazuję, że filozofia edukacji José Ortegi y Gasseta powiązana jest z imperatywem autentyczności, który rozciąga on na instytucje edukacyjne, nauczycieli, a przede wszystkim na samych uczniów. Poza przedstawieniem głównych złożeń filozofii edukacji Ortegi, poddają ją krytycznej analizie, która pozwala zrozumieć jej mocne i słabe strony, a także wskazać jej możliwe praktyczne wykorzystanie w nauczaniu. W szczególności, krytykuję sposób, w jaki wczesna filozofia Ortegi proponuje osiąganie autentyczności przez kategorie „okoliczności" i „decyzji", co wytwarza mi optymalną pozycję, aby przeanalizować to, co Ortega uważał za konstytutywną tragedię pedagogiki oraz misję, jaką wyznaczył on uniwersytetowi. Gdy idzie o późniejszą filozofię Ortegi, badam jego propozycję, by osiągać autentyczność poprzez słuchanie głosu swego powołania – wywodliwego z każdego indywidulanego przekonania – by później wyjaśnić, w jaki sposób pomagać uczniom w uświadomieniu sobie ich własnych przekonań. Na koniec wyjaśniam, dlaczego zgadzam się z Ortegą, że szczęście uczniów związane jest w dużej mierze z tym, w jakim stopniu są oni zgodni z samymi sobą lub z własnymi przekonaniami.

Słowa kluczowe: Ortega y Gasset, pedagogika, autentyczność, samoświadomość, wybór, przekonanie, powołanie

Zusammenfassung

## Authentizität und Wille: eine kritische Analyse der Bildungsphilosophie von José Ortega y Gasset

Im Artikel weise ich nach, dass die Bildungsphilosophie von José Ortega y Gasset mit dem Imperativ der Authentizität verbunden ist, der sich auf Bildungseinrichtungen, Lehrer und vor allem Schüler erstreckt. Ausser der Darstellung von Hauptvoraussetzungen der Bildungsphilosophie von Ortega unterziehe ich sie einer kritischen Analyse, die ihre starken und schwachen Seiten zu verstehen und ihre praktische Anwendung in der Bildung aufzuzeigen hilft. Ich übe

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insbesondere Kritik an der Art, wie die frühe Philosophie von Ortega das Erreichen von Authentizität durch die Kategorien der "Umstände" und "Entscheidungen" vorschlägt, was mir eine optimale Lage verschafft, das zu analysieren, was Ortega für die konstitutive Tragödie der Pädagogik und für eine Botschaft für die Universität hielt. Was die spätere Philosophie von Ortega betrifft, so untersuche ich seinen Vorschlag, die Authentizität durch das Hören auf die Stimme der eigenen Berufung (die aus jeder individuellen Überzeugung resultiert) zu erreichen, um später zu erklären, wie man den Schülern beim Bewusstwerden ihrer eigenen Überzeugungen helfen kann. Zum Schluss erläutere ich, warum ich mit Ortega übereinstimme, dass das Glück der Schüler im grossen Teil damit verbunden ist, wie weit sie mit sich selbst oder mit ihren Überzeugungen übereinstimmen.

Schlüsselworte: Ortega y Gasset, Pädagogik, Authentizität, Selbstbewusstsein, Wahl, Überzeugung, Berufung

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