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## Introduction

In somatic medicine, biological knowledge is the base of the therapeutic actions, and when questions arise, experimental works which are focused on better therapeutic behaviors are used. Psychotherapy, a therapeutic intended activity, lacks an equivalent basis. Being a land belonging to what Dilthey denominates Sciences of Spirit (as opposed to those of nature), the experimental method is of dubious application. While there are a growing number of jobs that deal with the results of psychotherapy, assimilation of the validity of these results to those obtained by experimental methods in biology is problematic. On the one hand, the diagnosis and evolution is often established by scales in which the results require an interpretive step that makes them lack the same value an objective fact has (even though it is pretended that they DO have the same value). Furthermore, if you try to compare treatment groups with “placebo” groups, such is the number of variables exposed to interpretive bias (diagnosis, features of each case, training and personality of the therapist, technique, rapport) that the

results (even though they may statistically favor any technique in relation to others) do not yield, in general, certain conclusions. Another limitation of this type of testing is that the data are retrospective and, as such, do not rule out other intercurrent factors in the course of treatment that influence its evolution. This is not intended to question the various psychotherapeutic methods or the type of research in which the limitations are based on the object of study, but shade their conclusions, and therefore reaffirm the need for a basis for the psychotherapeutic task because it is not found in the scientific field, but in other fields that have always been taking care of reflecting on the human being: the philosophy and philosophical anthropology. It is in this quest that we find the work of José Ortega y Gasset, which we want to share as a basis and resource for therapeutic action.

Regarding implicit philosophical thinking, Ortega says:

Strictly speaking, the truth is that the ground on which man always stands is neither Earth nor anything else, but a philosophy. Man lives *from* and *a* philosophy. This philosophy can be scholarly or popular, from others or from ourselves, old or new, brilliant or stupid; but the fact is that our being always ensures its living plants in one. Most men do not notice because that philosophy that they live is not shown as a result of intellectual effort (therefore, that themselves or others have done) but it seems “The Truth”; i.e. “reality itself.” [1]

The philosophy which we might call “implicit,” as opposed to that which will later be

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proposed as “explicit,” in the case of psychotherapy consists of the conceptual knowledge with which the human being is focused and the manifestations of his conduct. Currently, what will happen more often is that Darwin (and in other cases Pavlov), with their common positivist affinity, will underlie in what “most men do not notice.”

It is necessary, if any clarity is intended in any topic related to humans, to start from an anthropological hypothesis that provides an answer to the inevitable question: What *is* man? So far it has been the positivist thought and biologist who have taken care of that answer, with good results, precisely, in the aspects that depend on biology, but that approach involves a human nature similar to that of our brother mammals, with whom we have much in common, no doubt, but leaves out the most important thing that is to be determined: what is specifically *human in man*.

...Man has no nature. Man is not his body, which is one thing; nor is he his soul, psyche, consciousness, or spirit, which is also a thing. Man is not a thing, but a drama—his life, a pure and universal event that happens to everyone and in which everyone is not, but an event as well [2].

And because of this it is not the pure reason, eleatic and naturalist, who will ever understand man. So far, man has been a stranger. [3]

A workaround for the lack of that foundation is to try to obtain it from “experience.” From a certain amount of experience which is considered favorable, these are generalized and a true anthropology which argues that difficulties in human life originate in this or that conflict that takes universal dimensions is built. Be it (the conflict) Oedipus, the need for power, early objective relationship, projective identification of the primal trauma, predator behavior, filicide, the search for meaning or simply an inadequate conditioning and such occur and proliferate “schools” that populate the auditorium of the specialty.

Again, we insist that no value is removed for any of these buildings or is their effectiveness questioned. With a covering philosophical foundation, each of these approaches may become cosmopolitan and live with each other, because when they each cease being the “ultimate truth”

about the human being they would be illustrative examples of possible conflicts.

The importance of Ortega to the topic at hand is:

Since 1914 (see my *Meditations on Quixote*, in Collected Works, Vol. I) it is the intuition of the phenomenon known as “human life” that is the basis of all my thoughts. [4]

Therefore, it is a philosophy *of* man. Not only *on* humans but, for it, it is located *from* humans.

... Whatever we think about our life and its ingredients is something we do by being in our life; it, then, with all its ingredients, *is* already before we get down to thinking about it and them, respectively. [5]

There is the “fact” previous to all facts, in which all others float and that all emanate from: human life as it is lived by each person [2].

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## Radical Reality

This condition of “previous event” to all has led Ortega to regard life as “radical reality”:

To live is the way to be radical: all the ways of being which I find in my life, inside it, as it’s details and referring to it... The most abstruse mathematical equation, the most solemn and abstract concept of philosophy, the universe itself, God himself: these are all things I find in my life, things that I live. [6]

“Radical Reality” implies that it is also a fundamental fact. It is the data that do not require any other concept to be “explained.” This is possible because life is evidential:

All living is to live ourselves, to feel alive, know to exist, where knowing does not involve any intellectual knowledge or special wisdom, but it is that surprising *presence* that life is for everyone; without knowing that, without realizing that *that* toothache would not hurt us. [7]

So all “intellectual knowledge” or “special wisdom” is posterior and secondary to the prior act of living. To develop any knowledge or wisdom about life, it is necessary to *be* alive, living, so life is prior to any explanation of the attempt to determine it. Life is, at once, what requires nothing and can’t be explained, but also the data which

one should take as a starting point if any reflection on what is human is sought. As human beings, our human life is an astonishing and incomprehensible phenomenon. It is legitimate and inevitable to make theories, but these cannot reverse the shocking prior act: the life of everyone. To escape this contact with life itself, to visit the territory of abstractions and intellectualizations was the cause of the modern man to lose touch with himself and to get lost in forms of an increasingly superficial and artificial life, inauthentic.

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## Fundamental Data

Any consideration needs to rise from important data that does not depend on another and that constitutes...

...An order or area of reality that, because of being radical, does not leave any other under him, rather, because of being the basis, all others are forced to appear over it.

This radical reality in strict contemplation on which we need to base and ultimately ensure all our knowledge of anything *is* our life, human life. [8]

To the ancient Greeks, those irreducible or fundamental data were provided by the objective, physical world: “things.” But objects deteriorate and change, we do not know if they exist when we do not see them, so at the middle of the seventeenth century, Rene Descartes proposed *thought* as fundamental and irreducible data. The thought is immediate, what people think, it is what certainly exists and furthermore, certifies the existence of the human being: “*cogito ergo sum.*” Life moves away from itself and moves toward the thought, but:

The basic fact of the universe is not, simply, that either thought exists or I exist—but if there is thought there are, *ipso facto*, I, who thinks and the world in which I think, and they exist with each other, without possible separation...I am for the world and the world is for me. If there are no things to be seen, thought, or imagined, I would not see, think, or imagine. Therefore, I would not *be*. [9]

The basic fact of the universe and as such basic, undeniable, and obvious and that does not

require demonstration, is the fact of everyone’s life. And that, the life of each one, is what every-one *is*.

The being of man is what he calls his life. We are our life. Now, the life of each of us consists on that it is found having to exist in a circumstance, environment, world, or whatever you want to call it. [10]

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## I and Circumstance

Life, then, is a relationship between the “I” who lives and the “circumstances” in which he lives. There is no I if it isn’t in a circumstance or a circumstance that isn’t one for I. It may exist in an infinite set of objects, but these would not be integrated in that particular perspective that organizes them in world or circumstance for who lives between them until an *I* appears to face them.

This circumstance or world in which, like it or not, we have to live, cannot be chosen by ourselves. Without our prior consent, and without knowing how, we were fired at it, dumped toward it, shipwrecked on it, and forced to sustain it, to live. We are left no choice but to always do something, to “go take a swim”. [11]

One of the conditions of human life is to always face a situation and have to do something about it. Because unlike our brothers on the zoological scale, humans lack the instinctive knowledge that provides responses to the environment:

Our life, therefore, is given to us—we have not given it to ourselves—but it is not given to us already made. It is not a thing whose being is fixed once and for all, but it is a task, something that needs to be done, a sum, a drama. [12]

The circumstance will submit favorable and unfavorable aspects to *us*, and the *I (us) must* have a plan to stick to those alternatives and avoid being destroyed by an unfavorable circumstance. Because the circumstance is, in addition to the present, the inscrutable future and that future’s uncertainty is the origin of the anxiety of human existence that at times acquires an epidemic character.

Now materialize some elements of Ortega’s thoughts that approach the application to

psychotherapy. When Ortega argues that life is the radical reality and the fundamental fact, he rescues the human being from both the old realism (for which the human being is another object among objects, an animal with some virtue or capacity added, such as being rational), and the modern idealism that considers that *being* is made up of *thinking*. Ortega says that man's *being* IS his life, and that it precedes any attempt of identifying it, or of including it in any theory "about" the human being that limits it and considers it a *thing*, an *object*. With that Ortega rescues man from nature without needing to enroll him in any supernatural context. The human being *is*...his life. And this allows him to...be whatever he wants to be. Nothing is determined. This way of seeing is different from others that preset their needs, ambitions, and goals, which make it difficult in achieving them, the cause of their suffering and "disease."

"The most uneven form of being have passed through man; then, to the despair of intellectuals, man *is* to pass, to pass through thing after thing, to be stoic, to be a Christian, be rational, be positivist, be what he will now be...Man goes through all these ways of being; Pilgrim of *being*, he *is* and then he *is not*, i.e., he *lives* them." [3]

What is the value of this in the therapeutic context? To appreciate this, we must include it in the picture of what can be considered as "bad weather" these days. Consultation motives have changed much since the "five lectures on hysteria" at least in the regions of the world which consider it useful to employ the professional assistance that receives the curious name of psychotherapy. At that time the difficulties appeared to be a result of a repressive and Victorian culture. Freud would have ended up creating much more negative reactions than the ones he had initially intended, and consequences far worse for their author. Actually this aspect of psychoanalysis was an attack against a terminal state of culture. However, today it is not sexual repression or the Victorian culture which can be blamed for the discomfort that increasingly spreads in the "civilized" world, as we shall see,

currently, what is repressed is the contact with oneself, the authenticity, to *be* what everyone one *is*. People live shallowly and, consequently, aimlessly. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) foresees that by 2020 depression will be the second largest public health issue, and that by 2030 it will be ranked first, in addition to the huge growth of anxiety disorders and unspecified forms of unease that haven't found their place in the many diagnosis manual (such as DSM IV, CIE 10). It seems that the undoubted and stunning advances in science are not accompanied by an equivalent improvement in the way people feel in life.

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## Cultural Crisis

...The culture is the interpretation that man makes of his life, the number of solutions, more or less satisfactory, which he invents to obviate his vital problems and needs; being understood under these words is the same as for those of material order or of a spiritual kind. [13]

When these solutions are no longer satisfactory, what is perceived as "critical problems and needs" deepens, and unrest, uncertainty, and anxiety grow. Successful solutions are those in which the human being lives his life and feels acceptably safe either in the "material or spiritual order." Faced with these difficulties, this situation takes a turn towards the medical area, it suffers a detour to the fields of medicine, which is not assumed as cultural failure and, incidentally, medicinal drugs are sold. Therefore, whoever is not happy with the "way things are" is sick.

...In short, what is called "crisis" is but the transition man goes through from living pinned to some *things* and leaning on them to live on and supported by other *things*. [14]

Ortega theorized three crises in the West: the first was caused by the fall of the Roman Empire, after which humanity decided to settle on Christianity. The second was the Renaissance, in which the Christian faith is replaced by faith in science, clarifying that it is not because of being science, but because it is another kind of faith: faith can only be replaced by another faith. And the third, in which we are currently engaged, is that we have lost faith in science as a solution to the problems of human life and we have not yet found a replacement.

As always occurs when a new faith emerges, an amount of time to establish its promise was given to it faith. But as the time passed it was seen that while science was prodigiously solving problems regarding things about man, it kept proving itself less and less able to say anything clear about the deepest of human problems. [15]

The inability of culture to fulfill its role of providing security to those who integrate it leads to a reaction that, in turn, worsens the situation. Insecurity and instability, along with the resulting distrust in the links and institutions increases expectancy and sharpens the need to “find” a way out. However, this is searched for precisely where it cannot be found: in the “outside” because as the situation is a crisis, there is nothing in the social context in which the person can steady him or herself. So, a true vicious circle appears. In it the greater insecurity and instability cause an equally high expectation of something to emerge. This something would calm this insecurity and instability, and causes the individual to turn more and more “outward,” making him lose touch with himself. Personal and social lives become shallower and this causes most of the difficulties that sometimes end in the patient consulting a professional.

...The origin of the crisis is precisely for the man to feel lost, because he has lost touch with himself. [16]

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### **Withdrawal or Inward-Looking and Alteration**

This trend toward increasingly shallower lifestyles had already been announced by Ortega more than 80 years ago in many of his works, emphasizing that humans should get back in touch with themselves, pouring inward on a process he called “withdrawal” or “inward-looking.” The opposite, to be turned outward, he called “alteration” and manifests as an inexplicable feeling of emptiness, lack of meaning even in the midst of situations apparently favorable. Intimacy in situations of coexistence becomes problematic, because for a deep connection with another person to take place, a deep connection with our inner self is needed by everyone. The marriage

and family life is invaded by the “outside” and this implies the need to always be doing something. Predominance of the action for the action itself: confusion. Failure in relationships because this leads to situations of loneliness, which becomes intolerable because there is no ability to find any possibility of inner calm. Solitude (even though one is physically accompanied) sharpens fears and anxiety and gives way to depression, in which despair manifests.

We do not know what happens to us, and this is precisely what happens to us, not knowing what happens to us... [17]

While Ortega shows us the issue with astonishing precision, he also gives us the resources to find the solution. In all his work, there is a consistent appeal to authenticity, to the inner quest to find what the true desire is, and find in it the source of energy for action.

There is no other effective way of being that is effective other than to look inwards, into ourselves, this being, before doing anything, before giving your opinion on anything, to stop for a moment and instead of doing anything or to think the first thing that comes to mind, to strongly agree with ourselves, this is, enter ourselves, stay alone, and decide what action or opinion among the endless possibilities is truly ours. [18]

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### **Life Project and Vocation**

In critical situations there are no collective solutions. If there were any it would not be considered a crisis. The solution must be sought by everyone inside themselves, in contact with their true desire and to flourish in a life project born of vocation. Ortega argues that in each of us there is a bottom or true self that seeks to manifest in the form of a life project that, as we saw, is the way the “I” likes facing the circumstances. Here we find a clear example of the distorting effect of crisis: the current way of life ignores both the vocation and the authenticity and favors economic performance so that the activity becomes hollow and forced, and for relief, distraction and entertainment are used, which accentuates the remoteness of oneself. Ortega invites us to a life

according to a vocation that exists in each of us, and also a beating life project that is ours alone, untradeable, from whose realization derives the only chance of fulfillment in life.

Almost everyone is altered, and in alteration man loses his most essential attribute; the possibility to meditate, to withdraw within himself, to agree with himself in what he believes in; what he really cares about and what he really hates. Alteration blinds him, numbs him, compels him to act mechanically, in a frantic sleepwalking. [19]

By withdrawing, the individual may “be collected within himself” to go dusting off his real life project, his vocation.

To know how to be alone...and turn inward is one of the most difficult tasks. The passions, appetites, and interests usually shout louder than the vocation and darken his voice. [20]

Let us see, then, in which way Ortega’s intuitions lead to a psychotherapeutic action that corresponds to the real need of the patient in the current situation.

The critical situation, such as cosmic rays, goes through it all. It passes through everything. It does not stop at the office door, it goes with the patient and not only that, it also goes to the therapist. Not taking it into consideration means ignoring a subtended reality that affects the development of treatment and the relationship with the patient. Otherwise a fiction that puts the whole problem in the intricacies of the mental patient on the assumption that the world is waiting with open arms once its atavistic conflicts are solved would be developing.

On the contrary, considering the crisis lets us address the situation in the simultaneity of all difficulties. Be it for reasons of history or because it fails to “get the hang” of your current life or, more often, by combining both instances, the task is the same: to make the patient arrange himself from the “inside” and face life with the knowledge thus acquired, by using introspection. Such is the case for example, of the patient having marital difficulties and has already spent countless hours of “therapy” complaining about her husband, whom she held responsible for all their woes. The solution (for her and her husband) is that she finds within herself any

resource that allows her to take control of her own well being, a life project that frees the husband of being the sole person responsible for his spouse’s well being. To achieve this she must discover a vocation that gives meaning to her own life, an activity that takes the place of the activity of housewife and mother, who once had been a person with a vocation that absorbed her life, but was, with the time and the growth of her children, disposed of. Something similar can happen to the businessman for whom the years of enthusiasm for success that was achieved have passed, and have been replaced by incessant fatigue caused by complications of the situation. He no longer “loves” what he does. Finding the vocation does not mean to “kick the board” but to leave the state of forced labor, because vocational action reconciles with life and provides energy. The same occurs for the young man who does not find any career interesting, or retiree who has lost his place in the world. In most cases there is a frustration because when discomfort is felt, one can only hope for circumstances to change in the right way because of the subject’s claim. Withdrawing allows momentarily abstracting from the circumstance and creates a space for dialogue with himself and by which balance and inner peace that were impossible to experience in the midst of the furious fighting hostile circumstances are restored. Discovering that inner space is in itself a therapeutic experience. The disturbance caused by the crisis leaves no choice, “either I make things as I intend them to be, or I will have no opportunity to feel self-achieved.” However if the patient discovers that without none of the things he thought his well being depended on is needed for him to be well by changing his way of being, and that it depends on him and not on changing the world, a space to relate with ourselves and harmonize opens up. Of what is this harmony made up of? It consists of the ending of inner struggles, as opposed to the outer struggles. Expectations, slogans, self-reproach, ambitions, failures, humiliations, mandates, competition, guilt, happiness, and sadness occupy that space. But life had left no time to order it; everything is there as if it were an abandoned attic. It is only possible to run forward with the hope that something might happen

to bring order to life. But that order is not out there, it is in agreeing with YOU, forgiving mistakes, accepting failures, to stop claiming greater or different things from those achieved. But it is not just payback; there are new things to discover and do that were crushed under the rubble. This process is of such dynamism that it is beyond any attempt to trap it between the lines, but understand that the goal is to achieve the greatest harmony with ourselves, and it marks a direction to the task, both for the patient and the therapist.

By living I have been released to the circumstance, the chaotic swarm of stinging things in which I get lost... I get lost in things because I lose myself. The solution, salvation, is finding ourselves, coincide with us once again, be very clear about what is my sincere attitude to everything... The substantial problem, the original one, and in that one sense, unique, is fitting in myself, agreeing with myself, to find myself. [21]

## Ideas and Beliefs

Ideas and beliefs are an issue of major importance in psychotherapy and also, incidentally, for any activity aimed at humans, besides living. Ortega distinguishes mental contents in “ideas” and “beliefs.” The ideas are the result of the thinking activity of each, they are our own, and are therefore also known as “occurrences.” Because they are ideas that occur to us, they are burdened with a load of doubt that the possibility of error accompanies in any trial. Instead, beliefs are free of that burden because they are not created by each person: they have always been on us and consist of the particular type of ideas that represent “how things are” or reality itself.

The “ideas” persuade us, convince us, are “obvious” or are “proven”; but they are all that because they never cease to be mere ideas that are not our reality itself, unlike what we believe in. [22]

These are the elements we were given to carry out our life, and without them there would only be pure distress. Beliefs are absorbed without noticing it, they are absorbed just by living. The culture itself is a major supplier of beliefs.

From birth we run a constant effort of acting as receptors, a process of absorption: in family life, school, reading and socializing, which decants to us those collective beliefs [23].

Any action taken is taken because of a belief. If a trip is undertaken it is because “it is believed” that it will come to term, if a date is going on, for whatever reason, it is because you expect (believe) the other person will be present. You attend to work because it is assumed and expected (belief) that there will be financial compensation. These are all examples of things that are believed will happen, and therefore generate much discomfort when they do not. Ortega gives a great example: when someone is about to go out, for whatever reason, they think about the temperature, the clothes that they will wear, they will look at the time, but he does not ask himself whether the street will be there or not, which would be crucial, because he goes toward her. He “expects” the street will be there, as well as a huge amount of things and facts which he also expects and has in his life. It is the case for friends to be there, the affection of his family, the loyalty of your spouse, the support of children, the concurrence of the emergency medical service, effectiveness of vaccines, economic stability, legal framework, the daily sunrise, in short: everything that the social and natural environment puts at our service which we use to live and that we incorporated as reality itself, as “the way things are.”

We do nothing with beliefs themselves, instead, we are just *in them*...you are in the belief, and you have the occurrence (idea) and you hold it. But belief is what has us and sustains us [24]

We live sustained by beliefs, sustained and mobilized. Suppose a scientist, day after day, locks himself in his lab looking for a result. He will have reasonable doubts about whether he *will* do it, but not about whether he *can* do it. Doubt is the idea; the certainty of possibility is the belief. Without that certainty he would not be able to take a single step toward his lab, what would be the point? What drives the human being? To do in the

reality, no matter how redundant it may seem, what he “believes” that reality is. He will not try to pass through a wall or walk through the air without any device or beat the world’s Boxing Champion without the necessary expertise. When something like that happens we find the miracle, either the old one that we can read about in the Scriptures or the current ones that we see in the movies. But in ordinary situations things considered possible are undertaken. On two fronts: the aforementioned reality and what each of us “makes” about himself. No one tries anything they are not sure they can achieve. You cannot be absolutely sure you *will* achieve it, but you cannot be completely sure you will *not* achieve it.

Is the importance of beliefs appreciated in psychotherapy? (And in life!) Both, what we each *believe* “things” to be as what he *believes* about himself, in constant interaction, will determine his action in life. And what each believes about themselves is the introjection of the lived and the way it has been interpreted.

The most effective thing about our behavior lies in the latent implications of our intellectual activity, in everything that we have, and, since we have it and count on it, we do not think about it. [25]

Additionally, much of our beliefs pass unnoticed to us. [22]

Consequently, motivations for action are submerged and hidden in the level of beliefs. If they were not so, they would not be beliefs, they would just be ideas, and ideas do not move us because they lack the strength of evidence that beliefs have. At this point we have proof of the systematic thought of Ortega: different themes are interconnected and it would be ideal to expose everything at once, which, for now, goes beyond the author’s skills. We must return to the life project, because what motivates us is in the plane of beliefs. But beliefs obtain their power from their existence being secret, if they came to the light they would become ideas. This is an important therapeutic resource to neutralize inconvenient beliefs. So the life project is not a plan whose stages are previously known.

The project that I am, I find myself being it even before I wonder what project am I. Furthermore, none have managed to ever think the whole project which they are... Ordinarily, it is the course of life which shows us what project we are, who we are. [26]

The life project is in the same space as beliefs but it is not a belief. Sometimes they are helpful (like when they give security), and sometimes make things difficult (like when you face a vocation you are uncertain about from the economic point of view), generating fears. The life project is born from the need to face the circumstances, with all their uncertainties and risks. Human beings have the permanent need to know what to expect from circumstances. What concerns us, which is a constant problem, is not the past but the future.

Precisely because life is always rooted in disorientation, perplexity, and not knowing what to do, it is always an effort to find direction, to know what things are, and the man between them. Because he has to deal with them, he needs to know where they stand and what to expect from them. [27]

But to have enough energy and face the future, the project must be authentic and must respond to a vocation. Today this vocation is a neglected topic; however, he who finds his vocation and goes ahead with it is in a better condition to carry out his life.

“Belief holds us and sustains us,” Ortega once said. Consequently, it can be assumed that behind a consult with a therapist lays a difficulty or conflict in terms of beliefs that makes us not comply with it, its support function. Beliefs make up a system, but not a logical system. Beliefs support each other and the fall of one of these beliefs drags others down like dominoes placed in a row. Thus, for example, someone is scammed, meaning, he “had” his partner’s honesty, to the economic loss he adds loss in confidence that he can recover from that loss, which he supposes will distance him from his social relationships with which he counted, and had once expected would help him carry on with his activity. If his love life was not consolidated he would fear a breakup. He will also have fears about his health and his ability to receive any treatment, etc. Although the example is somewhat “light” and life can get worse, the object is to illustrate the ripple effect produced by the fall of a belief. Sometimes this is expressed with a fairly accurate phrase: “The world will collapse.” All faiths fell together and the subject lost everything that could provide



security in life, plain and simple. As beliefs come from culture, this collapse of the belief system throws out the culture and exposes him to the primitive terror humans felt when they lacked the resources of civilization. This or similar situations can lead to what is called post-traumatic stress, in which it is hard to reset the belief system that sustains the needed confidence, in both the medium and the subject itself, to resettle in life.

But beyond these extreme situations, evolving in life is to go changing the belief system. Life itself is responsible for forcing us to that process. Within the limits of any generalization, we can say that every crisis in life is determined by the fall of a belief, something that we had “counted on.” Be this belief that loved ones will live forever, that the groom or bride will hold their oath of eternal love, that “my son will never lie to me,” that “my parents will never divorce,” that “the company needs me,” that “I am as healthy as my mother,” that “when I finish school I will find work.” Sometimes beliefs crumble because of social facts, such as in 2001 in Argentina, in which people, until that time, *believed* that their money was safe in banks. It could be the case also for insecurity for criminal acts, or a change that requires adaptation, it being of the marital kind or of economic “status,” neighborhood, country, or taking a parent to intern in a nursing home. Examples are necessary but are always rough and rudimentary to the boundless range of human possibilities. The language has, in this regard, a confirmatory value. Faced with a disturbing event, it is often said, “I *knew* (thought) that this could happen but I never *thought* (belief) that it could happen to me.” It is the final language of facts that modifies beliefs.

The plan of action for therapy is, therefore, that of beliefs. Conflict means conflict between beliefs. The action rises from beliefs. Disorientation shows the lack of strong beliefs. Culture is the provider of beliefs. When not in crisis, these beliefs are shared, reinforcing the coexistence and are genuine and mobilizing in the whole society. These are the highlights of humanity: civilizations are born, countries are born, and collective enthusiasm is displayed by faith appearing art, science, politics, democracy.

Confidence grows in all and between all, and also in humanity itself. In a culture in crisis no beliefs are shared. What is worse, those received as a result of “constant effort of reception, absorption” are contradictory and chaotic: Should I follow my vocation or continue the profitable family business? Should I get married and have children or should I follow a career that makes me an independent woman? Should I divorce and live my life, which is one, or should I dedicate my life to my family? Should I take this opportunity and solve my life’s problems, or should I stay in this painful mediocrity? (Some time ago a bank accountant fled with several million dollars and caused admiration: “How well he did it!” was what everyone said). It should be repeated that the examples provided are always rudimentary. To present others that are more subtle you would have to rely, perhaps, on clinical cases, which would lengthen this work improperly.

Beliefs turn the gears of action. If they are conflicting the action gets stuck, locks. Resolving this conflict is the goal of therapy (and beyond). To resolve it, reverie is used to find a coincidence with ourselves, meaning to find an overlap between beliefs. Therefore, the inner world is rearranged and the subject can return to action. The therapist (the friend, the priest, the confidante) provides that inner dialogue which consists of confrontation between contradictory beliefs in pursuit of a new harmony. However, conflicts are not resolved in the plane in which they occur. If they were already settled there would not be such a conflict. The solution requires the intervention of another level operating as mediator in order for it to absorb the contradictions of the conflict and to generate a conciliatory synthesis. “The only way to escape a maze is to move upwards, not forward” This higher level is the spiritual level.

If we compare hunger or sexual pleasure with the thought in which Einstein formulated his abstract theory or the heroic decision a man makes when he succumbs to duty, we will find such distance and difference, that we seem forced to divide our intimacy in different worlds or orbs. [28]

Ortega discusses these orbes or worlds in his essay: “Vitality, Soul and Spirit” (El Espectador V, OC, T II).

## Vitality, Soul, and Spirit

What is most evident when we look at a human being is that it has a physical body. But this body may be at rest or in activity, and the activity may manifest differently. We can see someone walking lightly, as if the body does not gravitate, while another seems to find their body heavy and drags it wearily. There are some who feel that they are overflowing with energy and some who seem to live only with the necessary amount of energy, and this not only something that is different in each person, but also something that changes from one moment to another in the same subject. Ortega called this phenomenon “Vitality.”

There is, indeed, a part of us that is infused or rooted in the body and it is like a physical soul... this physical soul acts as the seat or foundation to the rest of us. [28]

The most immediate thing we could think about this phenomenon, given the inevitable “scientific” propensity that still dominates our way of thinking, is that it depends on biological (health/disease, vitamins, antidepressants), genetic (born well) or momentary (lack of sleep or fatigue) aspects. But it then happens that our oppressed subject inserts his hand into his pocket and takes out a curious rectangular object, about ten inches by five, and inexplicably it to his ear and begins to talk without having any partner in sight. And to our surprise, after a few minutes we find that his status has changed. He reintroduces the small pocket device into his pocket and resumes his march faster and stronger, his face lit up with a smile. How much would we all like to have one of those revitalizing gizmos! It turns out our subject has received very good news and that is what has been changed. But on other occasions we have seen that in similar conduct, through the gizmo, the subject has been beaten and powerless. What has happened in either case? The vitality has been changed by the intervention of another factor for which we

find no better way of naming than “emotion.” And the enclosure in which emotions are is what Ortega called “soul.” And, as we have seen, the border between the vitality and the soul is ever-shifting and undetermined.

It is false; it is unacceptable to pretend sectioning humans in body and soul. Not because they are not different, but because there is no way to determine where the body ends and begins the soul. [28]

In the soul reside emotions, and these have certain characteristics. One is that they extend in time: you can be sad, happy, or angry and that feeling has some duration. The other is that various and even contradictory emotions may coexist: love and hate, fear and desire, rejection and attraction. If, as we have seen, conflicts tend to hinder the action, this feature of emotions is not what most favors these conflicts to be resolved. It is even more unfavorable if we consider that beliefs are a result of the amalgamation of ideas and emotions.

Consequently, an order-bringing item is needed, an element that integrates, that absorbs the diverging and sometimes even opposing emotional tendencies that nest in the soul for life to maintain a certain course. Because circumstances will always offer some nice options, also called “entertainment,” or, when they are most dangerous, “temptations” that redirect the project as their voices are often more attractive than the harsh call of vocation. That guiding element is the “spirit.”

The spirit has no feelings: it thinks and it wants. The soul is what desires, loves, hates, rejoices and becomes sad, dreams, and imagines. Both powers collide perpetually within us, being of remarkable notice that the spirit is primarily concerned to stop our soul’s automatism. [29]

Unlike emotions, which extend in time, spiritual phenomena are instantaneous.

The spiritual or mental phenomenon does not last: psychic phenomena take time. Understanding that  $2+2=4$  is done in an instant...For “to think” we mean the succession of many acts of thinking, each of which is a mental lightning. Similarly, you want or do not want in a moment. Volition, which perhaps takes time to form, is a ray of intimate activity which fulminates its decision. Instead, all that belongs to the fauna of the soul lasts and stretches over time. [30]

(continued)

We have the vitality that blends with the emotional or psychic world which requires the spirit's intervention to prevent a dispersion that would probably lead to subjective and objective chaos.

It is interesting to investigate the repertoire of efficient actions that the spirit possesses over the soul, and, on the other hand, to notice its limits. The spirit or "I", cannot, for example, create a feeling or directly annihilate one. Instead, it can, once a desire or emotion has arisen at some point of the soul, close the rest of the soul and keep this desire from overflowing it, from filling its entire volume [31].

Although the term "spirit" is filled with supernatural overtones, again we find that Ortega can remove humans away from nature without enrolling it in any supernatural or religious context, but, at the same time, without amputating any features that make the absolute originality of human beings. The most notable one is the ability to access universal instances and participate in modes of existence that transcend the individual-subjective.

Whoever thinks a truth realizes that every spirit must think it as he did. Instead, my sadness is mine alone, no one can feel *with* me and *like* me [32].

The functions of the spirit are thinking and wanting. When we understand something or when we come to a decision that emanates from a well-defined will, the spirit is at work.

What does seem clear however, is that when we think or want, we give up our individuality and start participating in a universal world, where all other spirits lead and participate as ours does. Even though it is the most personal thing that there is in us—if person is understood as the source of all actions—the spirit, strictly speaking, does not live of itself but of the Truth, Norma, etc., in an objective manner on which it rests, from which it receives its particular frame. In other words; the spirit does not rest in itself, but it has its roots and foundation in that universal and transsubjective world. A spirit that worked in and of itself, in its way, taste and genius, would not be a spirit, but a soul. [32]

What is the importance of spirit to the topic at hand: psychotherapy? Now comes the time to reap what was sown above. We saw that for Ortega, "The substantial problem, originally, and in that one sense, is for me to fit in myself, agree with myself, to find myself." That fitting, that

coincidence, is the result of the integrative action of the spirit over all psychic life.

I consider the spirit is the set of intimate acts of which each feel as real author and protagonist. [30]

We also said that: "today what is repressed is contact with ourselves, the authenticity, to be the one everyone is. People live shallowly and, therefore, aimlessly" and that given the critical situation in which culture is, the solution "...Is sought, precisely, where it cannot be found, in the 'outside' since as the situation is a crisis, there is nothing in the social context in which to assert." Therefore, what is left is to withdraw inwards, inside ourselves, and self-absorption is the state in which the spirit can act:

Without a strategic withdrawal within ourselves, without any warning thought, human life is impossible. Remember all that man owes to certain large withdrawals! It is no coincidence that all the great religious founders preceded first of their apostolates famous withdrawals. Buddha retreated to the mountain; Muhammad retired to his tent, and even within his tent, he withdraws by covering his head; above all, Jesus leaves into the wilderness for 40 days. [33]

We have seen that society is undergoing a cultural crisis that permeates everything, even the therapeutic field. The result of this cultural crisis is for life to become shallower, with an increasing loss of touch with ourselves as a social phenomenon, meaning it affects those that seek consults and those who do not. Consequently, and beyond the specifics of each individual case, a psychotherapeutic action which tries to be effective must take into account this situation and be alert to the real help and "cure," which comes through authenticity, contact with ourselves that allows withdrawal and allows, resorting to the spirit, to truly exercise thought.

...Man needs to think if he wants to live, whether he likes it or not. If you think incorrectly, that is, without intimate truth, you live badly, in pure anguish, trouble, and distress. If you think correctly you will fit in yourself, and *that* is the definition of happiness. [34]

## Happiness

In such a context, the stories legitimize their presence not because they are good but because of what the message is that they are intended to convey. This is no exception. As an example, we may imagine that a patient attends a consultation with a therapist and says, “Doctor, I feel well, you could almost say I’m happy, but all my friends happen to visit you and I also want you to know my side of the story.” Except in terms of fiction, it is not expected that someone who is happy will request a consultation, at least not for himself. Consequently, psychotherapy must sooner or later deal with the problem of happiness. It is actually our well-known cultural crisis that has worsened the problem and has displaced the instances which traditionally would have taken care of answering this question (priests, philosophers, “teacher”) and has made the whole psychiatry-psychology responsible for, nothing more and nothing less, than human happiness. A discipline which originally dealt with patients who were “sick” has greatly expanded its reach, but still does so by using an instrument designed for pathological situations. In fact it is still called *psychotherapy*. This has generated a response in a movement called “Positive Psychology,” that aims to generate a body of knowledge relevant to those who wish to improve their lives without being “cured.”

As was noted above, Ortega says that life has been given to us, but it has not been given to us *already made*: making our life is our task. The task is to deal with the circumstances and to address this task we must assert ourselves in a life that draws its strength and power from being the realization of a vocation. However, one of the worst consequences of life becoming shallower is that together with the lack of contact with ourselves, people have lost touch with the vocation. Self-absorption is required to retrieve it, and great determination and clarity to follow when trying to retake it.

It happens that man feels happy when he can apply the different vectors of his intentionality to a target and, additionally, get a positive outcome from those procedures, like when vitality, soul, and spirit are integrated into an action. It is of note however, that this integration is not static. It is like the bike: if you stop moving, you fall. It is pure dynamism and is the objective which, by

concentrating the various rays of intent, holds the tension of the whole. But this convergence requires the essential action of the spirit, which, being in another plane, can achieve the synthesis between both emotions as well as beliefs, emotions that are amalgamated with received ideas. The same happens when said in an informal language intended to suggest a state rather than to make a polished conceptual exposure.

Ortega refers to that state when he says:

...Our life is never to simply be, to just lie. To live is always to live, by something or for something: it is a transitive verb. Hence there cannot be a human life without a vital interest, which holds, makes up and organizes that life. At the moment all vital interest comes loose completely and effectively, life would cease to be. [35]

And that vital interest is a vocation taking place. When you are not in a life in which this happens, suffering occurs:

Obviously, it is our life—project, which, in the case of suffering, does not match our actual life; man dilutes, splits in two, the man he had to be and the man he is. The dislocation is manifested as pain, anxiety, anger, moodiness, and emptiness; the coincidence, however, produces the prodigious phenomenon of happiness. [36]

Positive Psychology has moved in this direction with the Flow Theory, in which an ideal state is described as one in which the actor of a task is fully involved in the activity he performs and that in which personal skills are at the height of the present difficulties. This was said by Ortega in “Theory of Happiness” (OC, T II, pg 222) in 1916. He had already said:

Not like possessed or obtained do they [things] contribute to make us happy, but as reasons for our activity, as a matter on which this is shooting and from mere possibility becomes exercise. When we ask existence to be clear on their meaning, we do nothing but demand for it to show us anything capable of absorbing our activity. If we noticed that something in the world was enough to replenish the volume of our vital energy, we would feel happy and the universe would seem justified... When have you heard of someone completely absorbed by an occupation feeling unhappy? [37]

It is worthy to note that the Theory of Flow refers to what happens to the subject with himself, while Ortega states that “To live is always to live by something or for something,” meaning

this ideal state of being absorbed by an occupation requires giving something to something that transcends the subject: a mission.

That is why every human life has a mission. Mission is this: the consciousness that every man has of his most authentic self which is calling him to become who he really is [38].

This must not be interpreted as a sacrifice or giving up on something. On the contrary, Ortega says that living this way is what leads to a happy and fulfilling life. That unhappiness is the result of not delivering, lacking a way, lacking a meaning, a result of a cultural situation that leads to an increasingly shallow/superficial and inauthentic life and contact with ourselves. In other words, who keeps his life will lose it, and who gives his life away, shall win it.

Human life, because of its very nature, must be set to something, to a glorious or humble enterprise, a famous or trivial destination. This is a rare but inexorable condition, written in our existence. On the one hand, life is something that everyone does by itself and for itself. On the other hand, if this life of mine, that only I care about, is not given by me to something, it will lack and will be without “form.” These years witnessed the gigantic show of countless lives, marching, lost in the maze of themselves because they lack something to deliver themselves to. [39]

## Corollary

The psychotherapeutic activity should have a philosophical foundation that gives some clarity on what the man and his life are or should be.

The human being is not a thing, he is his life, which is a pure event produced by the encounter between an *I* and its circumstance (which consists of the body and mind he was given and with which he must fulfill his life project). But this project cannot be just any project; it must be the realization of a vocation. Vocation means life as a mission, and requires the integrative action of the spirit, which, through contact with him, retains the authenticity and saves us from the confusion that the circumstance’s alternatives may give in a culture in crisis.

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