



José Ortega y Gasset and Karl Jaspers Some Intriguing Parallels

Oswald Sobrino

University of Florida

osobrino@ufl.edu

Abstract: In this essay seven parallel themes in the thought of José Ortega y Gasset and Karl Jaspers are being identified and discussed. The first parallel is the horizon of knowledge as a common commitment to perspectivism. The second is the shipwrecked human who will benefit from philosophical orientation; while their respective philosophizing in and by itself is shown as the third parallel. The fourth parallel is heroic individual philosophizing and the primordial reality that the philosopher faces (for Jaspers, Being; for Ortega, life); here, Jaspers' Encompassing is being compared with Ortega's vitalism, and is being examined with regard to how Jaspers' treatment of anthropology relates to Ortega's fundamental statement: "I am I and my circumstance." The fifth parallel is man as decision-maker: man as possible *Existenz* in Jaspers compared to man as futurity in Ortega. The sixth parallel offers a closer correlation between the two uses of I (*yo*) identified by Ortega and the way Jaspers speaks of man when facing the Other and also the way he speaks of man as possible *Existenz*. The seventh parallel compares Ortega's historical reason and Jaspers' historicity in their respective attempts to describe the actualization of man's freedom..

Keywords: Ortega y Gasset, José; Jaspers, Karl; perspectivism; philosophizing; Being; life; *Existenz*; futurity; historical reason; historicity.

Both philosophers José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) were born in 1883, and both shared a formation in the German academy.¹ Ortega arrived in Leipzig in his early twenties with a Spanish doctorate in hand and eventually made his way to a decisive year at the University of Marburg.²

At Marburg, Ortega encountered the neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. Jaspers, although trained primarily as a psychiatrist (along with some legal training), reacted, like Ortega, to the powerful influence of neo-Kantianism in Germany.³ Both Ortega and Jaspers knew the highly versatile philosopher-

¹ At the kind invitation of Dr. Helmut Wautischer, president of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America, I am happy to submit this comparison.

² This brief outline of Ortega's contacts with Germany is based on Julián Marías, *José Ortega y Gasset: Circumstance and Vocation*, transl. Frances M. López-Morillas, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press 1970, pp. 187-200, here at p. 192. [Henceforth cited as CV] Julián Marías (1914-2005) arguably was

the foremost disciple of Ortega and commentator on his work. Ortega's diverse oeuvre benefited from the diligence of this disciple.

³ These and later references to Jaspers' biography derive from Chris Thornhill and Ronny Miron, "Karl Jaspers," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/jaspers>, last accessed July 15, 2019.

sociologist Georg Simmel, who would later go well beyond his own doctoral thesis on the essence of matter in Kant (CV 192).

These biographical details provide a picture of two European intellectuals, reaching adulthood around the year 1900, within the intellectual milieu of German neo-Kantianism. In later life, Ortega, from a family devoted to journalism, remained to a great extent a journalist himself who practiced philosophy by appealing to the general public and did not hesitate to involve himself in Spanish politics in the tumultuous thirties. The mature Jaspers, from a political family and seared by his own experience in the thirties with the rise of German National Socialism, also did not hesitate to involve himself in the political life of post-war Germany.

These generational, intellectual, and political parallels naturally lead me to compare some of their philosophical perspectives and to encounter Jaspers in a new way. In what follows, I consider various striking and stimulating philosophical parallels that arise from a fresh reading of Jaspers with Ortega in mind.

The Horizon of Knowledge

In the last introduction to his *General Psychopathology*, Jaspers asserted his methodological preference: "The object of methodical research...is not the whole of reality but something particular, a certain aspect or perspective, and not an event in its totality."⁴ This perspectivism insists on connecting the particular to the whole and vice versa: "one has to see the whole through its elements and the elements by way of the whole" (GP 12). Jaspers defines his idea of "the basic philosophical operation" as "thinking beyond every definite being, beyond every discernible, hence definite, horizon, toward the Encompassing in which we are and which we ourselves are."⁵ Awareness of the Encompassing is present "in thought only as a limit" (VW 27). The Encompassing locates one "within the open horizon of infinite movement" (GP 18).

⁴ All quotations of Jaspers' works are taken from the collection of excerpts in *Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. and transl. Edith Ehrlich, Leonard H. Ehrlich, and George B. Pepper, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press 1994, [henceforth cited as *BPW*]. This note refers to selections of Jaspers' *General Psychopathology*, in *BPW*, pp. 9-20, here p. 10. [Henceforth cited as *GP*]

⁵ Selections of Jaspers' *Von der Wahrheit*, in *BPW*, pp. 25-30, here p. 27. [Henceforth cited as *VW*]

This perspectivism in Jaspers' earliest work in psychopathology (1913) is also famously present in Ortega's first philosophical work *Meditations on Quixote* (1914), where Ortega meditates on the Castilian landscape near Madrid:

The true forest includes the trees that I do not see. The forest is invisible nature...The forest is always a little beyond where we find ourselves...The forest is the sum of our possible actions, that, upon being actualized, lose their unique significance [as possibilities]. The part of the forest that is present to us in an immediate manner is only a pretext so that the remainder remains hidden and distant.⁶

In a literary, somewhat romantic, way, Ortega makes the same point as Jaspers does in his early work in psychology. The forest becomes an open horizon, the limit that one can never reach, that relativizes one's present concrete location. For both the scientist and the philosopher—in other words, for the thinking human being—the ultimate reality is not fully graspable in its totality. The partial and perspectival nature of knowledge must be fully recognized and embraced so that, as Jaspers notes in his *General Psychopathology*, "this book was meant to be an enemy of all fanaticisms which—because of people's desire to assert themselves—are so strongly inclined to absolutize one particular conception" (GP 15). In this comparison of both the early Jaspers and the early Ortega, one can find a perspectival awareness with regard to the acquisition of knowledge, one that is not found in current or past political fanaticisms, in particular also the ones that erupted in both Germany and Spain in the 1930s.

Culturally and Individually Shipwrecked

The perspectival awareness in philosophizing can be seen in Jaspers' juxtaposition of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, a juxtaposition which is said to have "decisively marked the inception of what Jaspers

⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Madrid, ES: Ediciones de la Universidad de Puerto Rico 1957, pp. 69-71, with a commentary by Julián Marías. [Henceforth cited as *MQ*. All translations from the Spanish are by the author unless noted otherwise.] The original 1914 edition is at <https://archive.org/details/meditacionesdelq00orte/page/6> (same page range but without commentary).

preferred to call 'Philosophy of Existenz'.⁷ In this juxtaposition, Jaspers' use of the metaphor of being "run aground" and of "shipwreck" is immediately suggestive to a reader of Ortega.⁸ In discussing the historical significance of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Jaspers speaks of the condition of freedom, whereby "infinite reflection must *run aground*" so that *Existenz* can come to the fore (VE 44). This running aground is a *commune naufragium* that is part of the general human condition. Jaspers even refers to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche directly as being "shipwrecks who have dared to be just that" (VE 47). This metaphor suggests that Western philosophy had suffered shipwreck by the beginning of the twentieth century and was to be followed by new philosophical enterprises taking their impulses from awareness of this shipwreck. A new open-mindedness replaces the intellectual arrogance of earlier closed systems of philosophy.

Ortega likewise speaks of *naufragio* in Spanish (from the Latin *naufragium*) in various works.⁹ For example, in *What is Philosophy?* Ortega sets forth his own renovation of Western philosophy:

To live is not to enter by choice into a place which has been chosen earlier according to one's taste, as one might choose a theatre after dinner; it is to find oneself suddenly fallen, submerged, projected without knowing how, into a world which cannot be changed, into the world of now. Our life begins with the astonishing and continuous surprise of existence. Without our previous consent, we are shipwrecked in a world we neither built nor thought about. We did not give ourselves life, but we find it at the very moment when we find ourselves.¹⁰

⁷ Edith Ehrlich, Leonard H. Ehrlich, and George B. Pepper, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: Their Historic Significance," in *BPW*, pp. 37-8, here p. 37.

⁸ Selections of Jaspers' *Vernunft und Existenz*, in *BPW*, pp. 38-53, here pp. 44, 47. [Henceforth cited as *VE*]

⁹ See Ricardo Tejada, "La metáfora del naufragio en Ortega y su pregnancia en algunos Orteguitanos" (The Metaphor of Shipwreck in Ortega and its Presence in Some Followers of Ortega), <https://ricardotejada.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/naufragioortegatejada.pdf>, last accessed July 15, 2019.

¹⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *What is Philosophy?*, transl. Mildred Adams, New York, NY: W.W. Norton 1960, p. 220. [Henceforth cited as *OGP*] In the "Translator's Preface" Adams explains that the book arose from lectures given by Ortega in 1928 and 1929 and was published after his death in 1955 (*OGP* 9). A similar

This extended quotation allows the reader to taste Ortega's style and, for some even the attraction of reading him. When Jaspers uses the metaphor of shipwreck in discussing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, one can see the context of a Western philosophical crisis that the open-minded *Existenz*-philosophy of Jaspers will address. Likewise, Ortega is using that same metaphor to set forth his own philosophical answer to the same crisis that Jaspers also identifies. For Ortega, the shipwreck of philosophy is related to the shipwreck of human lives, as every human does live in *medias res*. If philosophy is the attempt of humans to find orientation, then the disorientation of a shipwreck describes both our individual lives and the broad cultural enterprise of Western philosophy seeking to confront that common human disorientation. The metaphor of shipwreck shared by Jaspers and Ortega tells of the humbling realization that despite all explanation (*Erklären*) there is only limited comprehension (*Verstehen*) and humans are bound to face the shipwreck of previous knowledge systems.¹¹

What is Philosophy After the Shipwreck?

Jaspers begins by seeking to philosophize departing from a general exception established by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. That exception is, in Jaspers' words,

use of the metaphor of a shipwreck occurs in the appendix to a Spanish edition of this same work: "To live is to find oneself shipwrecked among things" (*Vivir es encontrarse naufrago entre las cosas*). Ortega y Gasset, "¿Qué es filosofía?," in *Obras de José Ortega y Gasset*, no. 5, ed. Paulino Garagorri, Madrid, ES: Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial 1989, p. 230.

¹¹ It is prudent to point out that Ortega did not view himself as an uncritical, conventional existentialist descending from Kierkegaardian *Angst*. Late in his life in 1948, Ortega said as much when he strongly criticized the existentialist who "starts out resolved that it is not possible to know what man is and what the world is. Anything that is not abysmal, an irreducible mystery, a black chasm, unknowable and loathsome, does not 'pay its way' with him...As the morphine addict needs his drug, so does the existentialist need darkness, death, and Nothingness." José Ortega y Gasset, *The Idea of Principle in Leibnitz and the Evolution of Deductive Theory*, transl. Mildred Adams, New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co. 1971, p. 311. Regardless of whether or not Ortega's comments are an unfair caricature, these mature comments reveal the need for a certain caution when speaking of him as an existentialist.

"the end of the possibility of questioning by means of limitless reflection, on the part of exceptions which are devoid of communication and either with God or with nothingness" (VE 51). Apparently, the reference to God refers to Kierkegaard's specific exception, while nothingness to Nietzsche's specific exception. The general exception is "a permanent putting-everything-to-the-question" to avoid collapsing "into more or less crude, foregone conclusions of a complacent frame of mind that does not think radically" (VE 51).

For Jaspers, the basis of this new philosophizing is "in one's own experience — at the point where one really knows" (VE 51). He continues as follows:

In fact, we are not facing nothingness but standing again, as at all times when human beings exist, before our primal source. The new philosophizing grows out of this experience, and we will present a picture of its possibilities. [VE 51]

To a reader of Ortega, these words are quite dramatic for this new philosophical work arising from what Jaspers describes as the experience of "standing again... before our primal source" seems to be none other than the experience of being alive: of facing the fundamental reality of life — that, after the shipwreck, one must go on living.

For Ortega, philosophy is the choices one takes in order to continue living after the shipwreck. Alas, there is a difference to philosophizing post-shipwreck. Here one recognizes, as one could see in Jaspers' words above, that it brings forth a new situation in which the closed systems of the past are inadequate (as radically exposed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) and that one must begin anew from a philosophy that is lived in experience.

There are many passages in Ortega's writings that can set forth this new philosophizing. I choose one that is close to Jaspers' assertion,

In the Philosophy of Existenz the clarity of transcendently oriented life shall again become communicable out of original decisiveness, in articulated expression, and as a philosophizing in [the world in] which we actually live. [VE 51]

Here is Ortega's reflection on doing philosophy:

I consist in an occupying of myself with what there is in the world, and the world consists of everything with which I occupy myself, and of nothing else. To occupy oneself is to do this or that — it is, for example, to think. Thinking is living because it is occupying myself with objects in that peculiar dealing with them which is

thinking them. To think is to make; for example, to create truths, to make a philosophy. To occupy oneself is to make a philosophy, or to make a revolution, to make a cigarette, to make a footing, to make time. This is what I am during my lifetime. [OGP 236-7]

For Jaspers, decisiveness in philosophizing makes communicable the clarity of a life open to the horizon. That project is present in Ortega as a form of actual living arising from the decision to occupy ourselves with thinking.

What is Man?

But who is this person who can be occupied with philosophizing? The question as to what a human being is becomes paramount in both Jaspers and Ortega. Jaspers sets forth his philosophical anthropology with his *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (1931).¹² The heroic character of the individual person is present, especially in times of crisis:

One who has genuine courage is one who, inspired by the anxiety of sensing the possible, takes hold in the knowledge that he alone who wills the impossible can attain the possible. Only through his experience of the impossibility of achieving fulfillment does man become enabled to perform his allotted task. [MMA 54]

Whether intended or not, there is an undeniable echo of the literary figure of Don Quixote in this passage. Be that as it may, this excerpt triggers two thoughts in the reader of Ortega. First, Jaspers has the sense that individual life is always one of crisis, of being a shipwrecked individual who must somehow, as Ortega would say, decide what to do next. Second, Jaspers points to the heroic character of the individual who strives for the infinite horizon in order to perform the finite. Ortega characterizes that self-chosen striving as the distinctive mark of the noble individual.

This anthropology common to Jaspers and Ortega is evident in Ortega's most famous work, *The Revolt of the Masses*. Ortega uses the historical word "nobility" to fashion a concept that is not tied to any one single social class:

For me, then, nobility is synonymous with a life of effort, ever set on excelling oneself, in passing beyond what one is to what one sets up as a duty and an

¹² Selections of Jaspers' *Man in the Modern Age*, in *BPW*, pp. 54-60 (translation emended by editors). [Henceforth cited as *MMA*]

obligation. In this way the noble life stands opposed to the common or inert life, which reclines statically upon itself, condemned to perpetual immobility, unless an external force compels it to come out of itself. Hence we apply the term mass to this kind of man – not so much because of his multitude as because of his inertia.¹³

The following extended quotation is useful for it captures the book's gist as not merely a political-sociological commentary from the 1930s but as a social analysis based on a philosophy of the individual, a markedly existentialist philosophy with regard to how Ortega, like Jaspers, defines human nature:

Note well: a stone is given its existence ready-made, it has no need to struggle to become what is: a stone in its natural surroundings. But, for man, to exist is to be forced to incessantly fight with the difficulties surrounding him; because of this necessity, to live is to be obligated to make one's own existence in each moment. Let us say, then, that man is given the abstract possibility of existing, but not the reality of existing. He must conquer that reality, minute by minute: man must win life for himself, not only economically but also metaphysically.¹⁴

Jaspers sees the same manner of human existence in his *Existenz*-philosophy:

If man be no longer recognized as Being (which he is), then he brings himself, in cognition, into the suspension of absolute possibility. Therein he experiences the appeal to his freedom, in virtue of which he becomes, through his own agency, what it is possible for him to become but what he is not as yet. As freedom he conjures up being as his hidden transcendence...In the end, that which is authentically itself experiences shipwreck as mere existence. [MMA 56]

Being, as primordial reality, becomes none other than life itself, as an individual co-existing with one's circumstance (*OGP* 205). Ortega reveals his renovation of Being:

on searching carefully for the basic data of the Universe...I find that there is one primary and

fundamental fact which carries its own assurance. This fact is the joint existence of a self, a subjectivity, and of its world...Insofar as subjectivity and thought are concerned, I find myself as part of a dual fact whose other part is a world. Therefore, the basic and undeniable fact is not my existence, but my coexistence with the world. [*OGP* 199-200]

This identification of fundamental reality or Being with life as constituting the coexistence of the individual and the world can be compared to Jaspers' similar concept of the Encompassing:

The Encompassing is then never the horizon within which our knowledge is located and in which we encounter any definite mode of Being, for the Encompassing is never visible as a horizon. What encompasses, then, is Being, from which – as that which encompasses absolutely – all new horizons emerge. [VW 27]

Ortega's language would express this reality by saying that all new horizons emerge from life as the primordial reality. Life is what encompasses all, namely me, other individuals, and all human circumstances and projects. Yet, there is no need to attempt forcing the different ways of expression of each philosopher into a one-to-one correspondence. What is important is to see that both are defining philosophizing as an on-going way of life that never embraces one static object as exhaustive of reality but moves ever forward by engaging the world within an ever-receding series of practical horizons. Philosophizing described as this type of human activity is one example of the many activities that make up the life-projects of individuals within the Encompassing. There is no escape from life or from the Encompassing except through death (unless one subscribes to continuity of existence beyond bodily disintegration).

In sum, for both Ortega and Jaspers, the answer to what man is lies in the freedom to discover oneself. Jaspers speaks about what *Existenz*-philosophy can do for the discovery of the "authentic human being" (MMA 59). He argues that "I am not what I cognize, nor do I cognize what I am," or else I would fixate man as a mere object (MMA 59). Jaspers then immediately follows with the corollary of this statement: "Instead of cognizing my Existenz, I can merely inaugurate the process leading to its clarity" (MMA 59).

A careful comparison of these two sentences by Jaspers with Ortega's most famous philosophical assertion is insightful. In his very first work, Ortega states: "I am I and my circumstance; and if I do not

¹³ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, transl. anonymous, New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company 1957, p. 65. Online <https://archive.org/details/TheRevoltOfTheMassesJoseOrtegaYGasset>.

¹⁴ José Ortega y Gasset, "Meditación sobre la Técnica," in *Obras de José Ortega y Gasset, no. 21*, ed. Paulino Garagorri, Madrid, ES: Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial 1982, p. 47.

save it, I do not save myself" (MQ 43-4). Ortega's colleague Julián Marías provides a commentary regarding this statement and differentiates between the first I (that is, the "I am") and the second I (that is, the I in "I and my circumstance").¹⁵ The first I (*yo*) is the entire human person who is not merely a subject defined by one's circumstance, not merely an object, not merely "something," but rather "someone" (MQ 266-7). Consequently, circumstance neither defines nor exhausts the first I in Ortega's assertion (MQ 267). The second I refers to a particular circumstance, as being the subject who is facing the object, who is the "center of a *circumstantia*" (MQ 266-7). Note that Marías uses the feminine Latin word *circumstantia* in singular form. This singular form encompasses all that we normally think as separate circumstances in the plural, such as my health, my geographic location, my nationality, or my occupation. Marías points out that circumstance in the singular even encompasses my interior, insensible world of thought (MQ 266-7).¹⁶

Ortega's insistence on a human identity that can never be a mere object exhausted by circumstance is comparable to Jaspers' emphatic rejection of human identity as being reducible to the objects of the various social sciences:

Existenz-philosophy would be instantly lost if it were to believe, on its part, that it knows what man is. It would then once more provide the basic outlines for the exploration of human and animal life as types and would thus again become anthropology, psychology, sociology. The only possibility for it to have meaning lies in remaining without a fixed foundation in its relation to objects. Its role is to awaken what it does not itself know; to illuminate and move but not to fixate. [MMA 59]

Along with Ortega, Jaspers sees an authentic human being as incapable of being fixated as an object by its anthropological, psychological, or sociological parameters, which are an important part of Ortega's "circumstance." Yet, for both Ortega and Jaspers, these social sciences, along with history and the physical sciences, are worth pursuing for achieving an ever-expanding knowledge of man; while it must be acknowledged that these perspectives can never definitively and exhaustively define a human being. In other words, knowledge about a human being can be

gained scientifically by examining one's circumstance; however in one's transcendence in freedom beyond one's circumstance one must remain open to and expect new perspectives.

Thus, for Jaspers, *Existenz*-philosophy does not reify man as an object but directs the human journey:

For the man on his journey through life it expresses that which enables him to maintain his direction; it is the means whereby he is able to preserve his sublime moments so that he can realize them throughout his life. [MMA 59]

Notice how the last sentence by Jaspers ends with a reference to realization in life. Ortega would agree wholeheartedly

Existenz Involves Deciding What To Do Next

Jaspers' concept of *Existenz* that involves deciding what to do next links with a well-known line by Ortega:

The great fundamental fact which I want to bring you is here. We have to put it into words: living is a constant process of deciding what we are going to do. Do you see the enormous paradox that is wrapped up in this? A being which consists not so much in what it is as in what it is going to be: therefore in what it has not yet become! This essential, this most profound paradox is our life. [OGP 223]

Ortega's words can be seen in the light of Jaspers' concept of *Existenz*. Jaspers clarifies what is beyond all content that can be known by means of cognitive thinking (he refers to this state as world-being) with the words:

A fundamental philosophic question is entailed by the question: What is there vis-à-vis the entire world-being? It is the Being which is not within the appearance of existence [that is, of knowable objects], but which can be and ought to be, and hence decides in time whether it is eternally. This Being is myself as *Existenz*. I am this *Existenz* insofar as I do not become an object for myself...I live my life based on the possibility of my *Existenz*, and I am myself only in its actualization...Thus it is not my existence that is *Existenz* but man in existence is possible *Existenz*.¹⁷

By describing man in existence as being a possible *Existenz*, Jaspers shows similarity with Ortega's description of man's futurity: "Life is an activity executed in relation to the future; we find the present

¹⁵ Julián Marías, "Comentario," in MQ, pp. 211-443, here pp. 266-8. A similar interpretation of Ortega's well-known assertion is in CV 382-5.

¹⁶ See also Marías' comments in CV 364-5.

¹⁷ Selections of Jaspers' *Philosophy*, Vol. 2, in BPW, pp. 62-120, here p. 63. [Henceforth cited as JP]

or the past afterwards, in relation to that future. Life is what comes next, what has not yet come to pass" (*OGP* 225). As it is shown above, Jaspers' language is very similar when he posits the suspension of absolute possibility as being one instance of experiencing the appeal to man's freedom, "in virtue of which he becomes, through his own agency, what it is possible for him to become but what he is not as yet" (*MMA* 56). In these selections, one can see both Ortega and Jaspers making the signature statement of what is commonly called "existentialist philosophy" (however much both of them might have been leery of the label itself): that the individual actualizes life or *Existenz* by the exercise of freedom in deciding one's future projects.

Who is Deciding What to Do Next?

Marías' interpretation of the two uses of I (*yo*) in Ortega's assertion, "I am I and my circumstance," makes it possible to notice similarities with Jaspers' description of an I facing an Other: "The world as known is alien. I remain at a distance from it; that which understanding can know and that which can be experienced empirically repel me because they are merely that and nothing else; to me they are the Other" (*JP* 64). Here, Jaspers' understanding of I can be correlated to Ortega's concept of the second I, namely the one that is encountering a specific circumstance.

Furthermore, Ortega's concept of the first I matches what Jaspers calls "man in existence" as "possible *Existenz*" (*JP* 63). While this proposed correlation is not perfect, as Jaspers did not seek to fit his views within the schema of Ortega's statement from 1914, nonetheless one can see a resemblance in the way both philosophers try to transcend the I that is defined by its circumstance and journey and instead envision an I that is being viewed as *Existenz*.

Jaspers' I that decides in freedom as *Existenz* is then Ortega's "I" that is the person who transcends any specific circumstance. One further statement by Jaspers will capture the attention of an Ortega scholar: "Objective actuality is subject to rules and can be cognized under those rules; existential actuality is without rule and absolutely historic" (*JP* 71). Jaspers uses the term "historic" to refer to the relation of *Existenz* with temporality "in its historic consciousness" arising from "the possibility of choice as the undecided nature of the future which is my *Existenz* itself" (*JP* 71). The following section addresses how this

historic consciousness of *Existenz* can also be found in Ortega's work.

Ortega's Historical Reason and Jaspers' Historicity

Similar to many of his contemporaries (as for example Jaspers), Ortega, too, finds it necessary to revise Western philosophy by departing from the view of reality that arose among the pre-Socratics (especially Parmenides) and continued well into the modern age of science: that what is real is what is "intelligible" or thinkable and thus stable, unchanging being (in contrast to the other pre-Socratic, Heraclitus):

To suppose, along with the entire Eleatic [Parmenidean] tradition of philosophy, that the real is intelligible in its very structure is a vicious circle and ignores, moreover, the inherent drama of knowledge. Intelligence is an instrument for knowing, and there is no likelihood—above all, there is no guarantee—that the reality to be known bears any resemblance to the instrument used in knowing it. Until now, thinking in this way has been like looking at one microscope through another one just like it, instead of looking at the very "opposite" of a microscope, which is a cell.¹⁸

Ortega takes this insight and demands a new kind of reasoning, historical reason, which must replace a "pure, Eleatic, naturalistic reason" that is inadequate to man who "has no nature" for "what he has is history... the mode of being of the entity that is constitutionally, fundamentally, *mobility* and *change*" (*HR* 118). Consequently, a new "narrative reason" which is "historical reason" is necessary to understand man who is history (*HR* 118). This understanding of historical reason beckons for comparison with Jaspers' historicity.

Jaspers describes historicity as the tension between appreciating the actual moment or instance and simultaneously recognizing that the moment is not "something enduring, something that becomes universally valid" (*JP* 81, 83). Jaspers explains:

Existentially grasped existence is recognized by the individual as infinitely important and as taking place, in true communication, between two partners; yet at the same time, to the individual facing transcendence, existence is vacuous. [*JP* 81]

¹⁸ José Ortega y Gasset, *Historical Reason*, transl. Philip W. Silver, New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co. 1984, pp. 98-118, here p. 115. [Henceforth cited as *HR*]

Jaspers' concept of communication between two interlocutors is very attractive to a student of Ortega, since Ortega generally (not always) juxtaposes the person with that person's circumstance rather than asserting a personal communication-encounter that Jaspers makes prominent: "I cannot become a self without entering into communication, and I cannot enter into communication without being solitary" (*JP* 74). For Jaspers, historicity is key because "Existenz does not arrive at appearance in an immediately finished form but achieves appearance through the steps of its decisions taken in the span of time" (*JP* 84). The historicity of *Existenz* is thus inseparable from an individual who makes decisions within temporality.

Ortega's historical reason is closely linked to Jaspers' philosophizing toward *Existenz*. Ortega very prosaically yet accurately narrates that living is deciding what one is to do next in temporality. In a telling metaphor, Ortega emphasized the historical nature of a human person for whom "life is not a fact, not a *factum*, but a *faciendum*, something that has to be accomplished; it is not a substantive but a gerund" (*HR* 96).¹⁹ Ortega and Jaspers also coincide regarding the inevitability of both happiness and unhappiness in this historicity. Ortega notes,

in my effort *to be*, in wanting *to be*, what I seek
is *to be happy*...However, since our circumstance

¹⁹ It seems more grammatically appropriate to emphasize Ortega's point by calling *faciendum* a gerundive which, in Latin, can be used to indicate what must be done by necessity.

always opposes us, the *I* we are is never sufficiently accomplished; man, whose life consists in needing to be happy is always, to a degree, *unhappy*. [*HR* 96]

In turn, Jaspers ties historicity to active faith in which one can

unite purposeful activity with the certainty that I act in truth even when everything fails...As existing life we seek certainty but we despair because of its impossibility. Faith, however, enables us to renounce certainty within the phenomenal realm. [*JP* 119]

Alongside this ever-present frustration, Jaspers points to a bold faith that accepts certainty as unattainable. That lack of certainty is created by what Ortega calls the inevitable resistance through our different circumstances, which endangers our desires, goals, and achievements.

Conclusion

The comparison of Ortega and Jaspers brings valuable insights to one's understanding of the philosophizing of two twentieth-century Europeans who were formed in the same generation within the milieu of German philosophy. While there are several commonalities with both philosophers, the differences in approach, style, and perspective are undeniable yet at the same time enriching for the attentive scholar.