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Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies

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The Gaos-Nicol polemic of 1950:
An argument on Ortega and Post-revolutionary epistemology in Mexico

by
Matthew T. Corey, MALAS

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INTRODUCTION

The phrase *national philosophy* sounds at best internally inconsistent, at worst chauvinistic. The themes of philosophy-- being, meaning, love, friendship-- appear to antedate and transcend necessary fictions like the Nation. In postrevolutionary Mexico, however, intellectuals of the new republic, having always found themselves on the cultural and intellectual periphery, depended on national ideas to forge the first Third World consciousness the world had as yet known. History students know about the general political ferment in the global South that began in Mexico and accelerated with such movements as Nasserism, India's independence, and the Cuban Revolution. Less known, however, is that, as early as the 1920s, *pensadores* were challenging not only the applicability of North American and European political and economic forms to Mexico, but also the universality of European and Anglo-American truth itself. Mexican and other Latin American intellectuals were recreating a peripheral intellectual resistance that had first taken root in 19th-century Germany. There, the romantics had refused to accept the perceived solipsism of the

Enlightenment, *i.e.* English and French *national* principles masquerading as "recipes for mankind at large". Like these German romantics, Mexican philosophers waged a campaign to nationalize meaning, reason, and existence, at the same time as Mexican politicians nationalized industries.

The ideas of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), the famed Spanish essayist, lay at the center of this undertaking. Although Mexican writers only began discussing his work in the 1920s, by 1934, with the publication of Samuel Ramos¹ Ortega-inflected *El perfil de hombre y cultura en México* (*Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*) Ortegian ideas had climbed atop the heap of possible paradigms answering the question: "what is true in the first liberated nation of the century?"-- in this respect, overtaking more expected contenders like Marx. The hegemony of Ortegian thought did not mean that Ortega himself was traveling around Mexico's universities and being feted by the smart set, as happened in Argentina in 1916 and 1928. Ortega's claims to the Latin world's allegiance, Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea wrote in 1956, came "in spite of himself", because Ortega only visited Argentina and "always resisted contact with the rest of America". His surrogates, however-- Spanish philosophers fleeing the political and intellectual hostility of Franco's regime-- arrived to share in the Mexican intellectual revolution. Barred from going home for decades, many made permanent homes in Mexico City.

This report concerns the polemic between two of these men, José Gaos and Eduardo Nicol, over the 1950 publication of Nicol's sprawling discourse on being and time, entitled *Historicismo y existencialismo* (*Historicity and Existentialism*). Nicol's book and Gaos's dagger-wielding response to his colleague's effort both define and delimit the philosophical consensus in 1950 Mexico. Intellectual historians have often observed the fickleness of revolutionary regimes like Cuba and Russia, where the court darlings of one year, *e.g.* José Lezama Lima and Boris Pasternak, can find themselves casualties of the Writers Union in the next. But while social scientists have amply investigated the mechanisms the "peaceful" post-Cárdenas regime used to box in possible political opposition, works that survey Mexico's intellectual history during this century, *e.g.* Romanell's *Making of the Mexican Mind* (1952), Weinstein's *The Polarity of Mexican Thought* (1976) do not address the comparable limit-setting that happened in the small world of Mexican philosophical study at mid-century. An inarguable leap forward occurred in all Mexican intellectual enterprise after the violence died down in the 1920s, reactionaries were sent packing (exiled President Plutarco Elías Calles could not board his hasty flight to the United States without a dog-eared copy of *Mein Kampf*), Vasconcelos-conceived university reforms took root, and anti-imperialist intellectuals from Europe

and the Americas began to detect and publicize that something dramatic was happening in Mexico City-- thereby, of course, helping to make it so. It is possible that scholars of Latin American intellectual history mistook *new* avenues for expression for *open* ones, analogous to the applause given Soviet intellectual production under Lenin, when Isaac Babel and other Jewish intellectuals were in ascendancy, as long as they remained uncritical. Newer work like that of José Luis Gómez-Martínez, Enrique Krauze, and Clara E. Lida attempts to rectify this simplistic picture of extreme intellectual freedom under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and the culturally experimental (and economically prosperous) period of the 1940s and 1950s.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHILOSOPHY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICO

The philosophical consensus circa 1950 took root in events of the 1920s and 1930s. Morse breaks the philosophical century in Latin America into two periods, both of which saw great intellectual ferment in Mexico. The Marburg school idealists, enemies of Porfirian positivism, came first, according to Morse. History primarily associates two writers, José Vasconcelos (1881-1959) and Antonio Caso (1883-1946), members of the Ateneo clique, with idealism in Mexico. As the most famous *pensadores* of the 1910s, they helped lead the new regime's Secretariat of Education and ruled an intellectual climate desperate to comprehend and explain the million deaths of the Revolution. Ateneo member Manuel Gómez Morín, reminiscing in 1927 about the national ferment of the violent years, lyrically expressed this yearning:

[Through the struggle] was born the purpose of absolutely vindicating everything that could belong to us: petroleum and song, nationhood and ruins.

In this Utopian vein, Vasconcelos saw the Revolution from the beginning as a national rebirth into innocence. Just as their political counterparts, from Madero to Zapata, Villa, Carranza, and Obregón, blamed the tyrannies of Díaz and Huerta for making violence necessary, the *ateneístas* wreaked vengeance on positivism, the dominant thought of the Porfirian dictatorship. Using the scalpel of unbending reason, Caso claimed, the positivists tried to kill the essence of soulful Mexico, something Vasconcelos associated with the "cosmic" mixing of Spanish and Indian blood.

The Ateneo dominated the most violent period of Mexican public life (1910-

25), but in the late Twenties, a group of younger intellectuals sought to rebel against the idealists of the 1910s. Again following Morse, this represented a regional trend away from idealism and toward the phenomenology of Husserl, of which Ortega was the main conduit for the Spanish-speaking world: "a return to metaphysics featuring the philosophy of culture, the theory of values, and existentialism," a new reason for a new republic. The values separating subject from object have no basis. Rather than consciousness grasping at reality, consciousness *forms* reality, with physical, biological and chemical truth becoming poor approximations of essential truth.

Ramos (1897-1959) led the younger essayists and lecturers who embraced the new thinking in Mexico. He had little respect for Caso and Vasconcelos as intellects. Reminiscing in 1943, he wrote,

An intellectual generation which began to act publicly between 1925 and 1930 felt uncomfortable with the philosophical romanticism of Caso and Vasconcelos. After a critical revision of their doctrines, they [*i.e.*, we] found their anti-intellectualism baseless, but neither did they want to return to classical rationalism.

Caso and Vasconcelos did not receive identical opprobrium, however. Ramos published a series of articles excoriating Caso's work, but Vasconcelos was spared, not on "anti-intellectual" or any philosophical bases, but because of politics: Ramos felt revolutionary sympathy with Vasconcelos' crusade to revolutionize Mexican public education. Ramos believed that it was not reason itself that threatened Mexico's intellectual nationhood, but rather the specific notion of reason-- scientific, unbending with time, and based in the individual consciousness-- central to all forms of liberalism, from John Stuart Mill to the hated Porfirian positivists.

The solution to this dilemma lay in the writings of Ortega y Gasset. Again from the vantage of 1943, Ramos wrote,

Meanwhile, philosophy appears not to fall within the ideal portrait of nationalism because it has always intended to situate itself with a universal human point of view, rebelling against time and space, concretely determined. Ortega y Gasset came to resolve this problem by showing the

historicity of philosophy in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*.
Joining these ideas with others which he had expounded in
the *Meditaciones del Quixote*, that Mexican generation found
the epistemological justification of a national philosophy.

Along with his philosophical message, Ortega's Spanish identity also
excited Ramos. He wrote,

Ortega's most valuable teaching for Mexico and in general
for Hispanoamerica, is the profoundly Spanish character of
his thought and of his style. In these, we see an exemplary
attitude, offering us the "philosophical bases for legitimating
the aspiration to realize a national philosophy".

Ramos claimed that he and his peers wanted independence from
universalism. Villegas¹ confirms this, adding that the historicism and
(national) immanentism of Ramos negated not only the universal validity of
ateneísta concepts, but of *all* universal concepts, presumably to include
legitimacy. Ramos credited Ortega, however, for making this new
particularism "legitimate" and giving it "philosophical bases". Legitimate in
whose eyes, one wonders, if not the universalist court of international
opinion? The above passage shows a tension between the Ramos who
inveighed publicly against universality, and Ramos who aspired privately to
universal, possibly foreign, authority.

Ramos may have harbored secret desires for universal epistemologies of
value, but in open discourse, the Generation of 1915, as Krauze names it,
formed an intellectual consensus around the new reason. Ortega's writings
variously called this interpretation of reality *perspectivismo*,
circunstancialismo, or *razón vital*. The Mexican Ortegans benefited from an
influx of Spanish exiles, often personal acquaintances of Ortega, into their
clique. The open arms policy that had brought Trotsky and other radical
personae non gratae to Mexico attracted Spanish dissidents en masse,
starting in 1938. As examples, Ramos named Gaos, Nicol, Joaquín Xirau,
Juan Roura-Parella, and Luis Recaséns Siches. Émigrés usually found
appointments to the proud philosophy faculties of the Universidad Nacional
Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Casa de España en México, founded in
the emigration year of 1938 and renamed Colegio de México in 1940, or
other Mexican universities within a year of arrival. In the 1940s, a

generational circle closed around the core of Mexican Ortegans and imported Spaniards. No territorial challenge would be mounted from outside this group until the ambitious Octavio Paz published the book-length version of *Labyrinth of Solitude* in 1959. Internecine competition, on the other hand, started almost immediately.

Like Antony's skewering of Brutus, this competition had to occur behind a thick haze of mutual admiration. The Mexican philosophers of the time believed in the sanctity of the nation. The goal of promoting Mexico's intellectual production outweighed a *pensador's* true opinion of his peers. This credo resulted in a strange situation, reminiscent of academic literary criticism in 1997 America. After Ramos' *Perfil de hombre y cultura* in 1934, the members of the circle confined most of their writings to three basic and interwoven themes: their friends' accomplishments-- "histories" of careers that had only recently begun-- the nation, and Ortega. To support this assertion, one can peruse the bibliography of Leopoldo Zea, the best-known Mexican philosopher of US scholars, during the Forties and Fifties. Zea's body of publication included *La historia de la filosofía en México* (1943), *Dos etapas del pensamiento hispanoamericano* (1949), "En torno a la filosofía mexicana" (1952), *La filosofía en México* (1955), *America in the Consciousness of Europe* (1955), *Esquema para una historia de ideas en Iberoamérica* (1956), and "Ortega el americano" (1956).

Zea formed, with Ramos and Gaos, a troika who throughout the 1940s promoted Ortega as the sage of the century. In 1947, Gaos wrote,

Ortega's work is comparable with a great musical composition in which an electrifying richness of greater and lesser themes appear and reappear interlaced with a harmony that doesn't run away from the dissonances, all of it designed with the most brilliant instrumentation.

Flowery words also fell on colleagues who styled themselves Ortegan disciples. Among Gaos' first writings upon reaching Mexico in 1938 was a commentary on the soon-to-be-published second edition of Ramos' *Profile*. In it, Gaos could not help connecting his praise of Ramos to Ortega:

The first thing that was called to my attention, as a Spanish disciple of Ortega y Gasset, is the similarity of the problem posed in [Ramos'] book, of the manner of posing this

problem, and even the sort of attempts at finding a solution, with the problems of another advancing country... from which was born the work of the Spanish *maestro* in 1914, the year of the *Meditaciones del Quijote*.

In keeping with the Mexican Zeitgeist, Gaos¹ critique followed the following pattern: Ortega is great, Ramos is like Ortega, *ergo* Ramos is great.

The Mexicans¹ special affinity for Ortega among philosophers based itself in how, as Ramos noted, his works allowed them to imagine national meaning. Gómez-Martínez divides Ortega's image into thirds. The first facet of this cut stone was Ortega the Spaniard, who compelled Latin Americans simply by addressing philosophical questions in their language. The belief that the Spanish language lacks a philosophical writing of quality seems dated, the inadequacy complex of colonials. However, as late as 1980, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Ortega's death, Octavio Paz was making the same point:

His texts are something uncommon in Spanish: exercises in clarity that also aspire to a sharpness of focus (*nitidez*). That was one of the greatest gifts to the prose of our language: he showed that to be clear is a form of intellectual cleanliness.

Ortega's second persona was the rather conservative polemicist who warned of a "revolt of the masses," (a figure beloved in the United States and almost unknown in Latin America, according to Gómez-Martínez). Finally, there was the Ortega who relates to this study: the theorist of vital reason and circumstance. An analysis of one of his many, vastly similar essays shows the theoretical referent on which both polemicists, Gaos and Nicol, staked their positions. Ramos mentioned *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (*The Modern Theme*, 1922) specifically, as inspiring the budding Mexican philosophical consensus, and it is key to Nicol's analysis of Ortega's work at large in *Historicismo y Existencialismo*.

In *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, Ortega addresses the problem of truth. For truth to be adequate, *i.e.* true, it needs to be complete and invariable. However, Ortega writes engagingly, humanity "has constantly changed its

mind, consecrating as true whatever it happened to be in favour of at the moment." Recognizing this makes some modern men relativists, but how, Ortega asks, can they take themselves seriously? If nothing is true, relativism itself is a manmade fiction. Outside the relativists, modern thought consecrates pure reason, which bases itself on the creaky assumption that man is rational. That modern man believes reason is true leads, Ortega writes in horror, to revolutions. Ironically, this work became a popular text for the house intellectuals of the revolutionary regime in Mexico City.

To escape the arbitrariness of rationalism without falling into relativism (which Ortega says brings on suicide), he adds vitality to culture. Culture, here defined as imperatives of objective quality like truth, goodness, and beauty, needs vitality, defined as imperatives of human life like sincerity, emotional drive, and enjoyment. Perceptively, Ortega argues that men have been pretending these imperatives are not important, while acting like they are. How did objectivity gain its status above subjectivity, when living people engendered objectivity in the first place? In Socrates¹ time, Ortega explains, the Greeks developed the image of *logoi*, or ideas purer than reality. If ideas are purer than life, knowledge derived from reasoned thinking (*episteme*) is purer than knowledge derived from spontaneous convictions (*doxai*). This devaluation of the spontaneous and lived constitutes an irony as man runs around pretending to think what he says, instead of saying what he thinks.

"The modern theme" attacks pure reason with a counterirony, Dionysian irreverence, which ridicules the pretensions of reason to absolute sovereignty and makes culture serve life instead of the other way around. After all, according to Ortega, "life is the cosmic realisation of altruism... a perpetual emigration of the vital Ego in the direction of the Not-Self." In this conceit, ideas become "fine things", goals that living, spontaneous man invented for his own use-- not to displace vital life, but to better understand it. This is a common conclusion of the interwar period, when it seemed that civilization itself had led to monstrous disregard for life. The carnage showed that culture, like individual man, has appetites, too. As an alternative to the hypocrisies of culture, Ortega poses a concept fascinating to Latin Americans: the "vital estimation of value". When added to traditional epistemologies of value, this would enrich our knowledge of the world. Man should measure intelligence, for example, not just as the "cultural and objective value of truth," but also more vital attributes, like dexterity-- how else, Ortega asks rhetorically, can one explain the greatness of a brilliant bandit like Napoleon? The crux of the last sentence lies in the word *also*, because Ortega¹s philosophy believes two mutual exclusive

propositions can both be true. If subjective man, shackled and blind in Plato's cave, cannot see truth head on, than he can never be certain of mutual exclusion (based in limitations on truth's possibility) either.

The paradox is this: knowledge, the acquisition of truths, requires that the knower, a subjective being, *identify* an inherently transcendental, trans-subjective element: truth. Rationalism imagines reality can penetrate knowledge without disturbing it, while relativism denies the existence of transcendent reality. Ortega, no relativist, argues that transcendent reality exists. Man can perceive parts of it, and is condemned to blindness of others. Each person, and each age, dips a mesh of perception through the running current of transcendent reality. The pieces of reality this mesh catches build a perspective. Far from disturbing reality, perspective is its organizing element.

With this summary, it becomes clearer why readers in the emerging Third World would seize on such a philosophy. If progress, like intelligence, could also plot itself along different axes (cultural, vital, etc.), then Mexico is not really backward. Or rather, Mexico can be both backward, by some estimations of value, and ahead by others. Because cultural estimations of value reinforced the centrality of the center and the topness of the top, reason became "truer" than life. Through revolutionary cataclysm and then the aggressive promotion of the nation as intellectual force, Mexicans would reorder truth along the axis of vitality and thus right the imbalances of positivism. Since Uruguayan *pensador* José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900), left-leaning intellectuals had convinced themselves that sensitivity was the province of the South, and that they should feel pride at this superiority of spirit. Ortega's perspectivism gave this emotionally resonant self-image an additional, *philosophical* resonance. The genius of Ortega, according to Abellán, lay in "knowing how to unconsciously capture and intellectually justify a philosophical attitude that is product of the spontaneity of Hispanic Man." This reinforces the irony redolent in the earlier passage of Ramos: Mexican intellectuals wanted to justify spontaneity, construct a theory to allow the natural. It is an irony that the Ortega of *Modern Theme* would have appreciated.

THE POLEMIC

No-one promoted the *mexicanidad* of Ortega more assiduously than Gaos, one of the Spanish-born duelists in the 1950 polemic. Gaos made two adoptive identities his own: first, Ortegian, and second, Mexican. As evidence of his dedication to Ortega's ideas, in 1940, Gaos wrote with no small emotion,

Over the years, I have lived in frequent daily coexistence with [Ortega]. I have been the hearer of words or the interlocutor of conversations in which gestation his own ideas sharpened, I have read the unedited manuscripts. In this manner, I no longer know if the ideas I think, if the reasoning I do, if the example or expression I employ, I know not if I got these things from him, or they occurred to me upon hearing or reading him, or they occurred to me separately and after all the coexistence with him. Sometimes I've had to admit that such idea or expression that I considered to be mine I had appropriated from him, assimilating it to the point of forgetting its origins.

Clearly, Gaos did not demure from admitting the signal influence of Ortega in his work, something he endeavored to pass on to students like Leopoldo Zea.

The above passage rings characteristic in its personal frankness, for autobiographical details abound in Gaos¹ writing. This is appropriate, because he believed a philosopher's life and times created his destiny. Mexican philosophy remembers Gaos best for his so-called *filosofía de la filosofía*, which he outlined in his autobiography *cum* philosophical tract, *Confesiones profesionales (Professional Confessions, 1958)*. Its pretenses to universality and professionalism notwithstanding, Gaos believed all philosophy to be no more than "personal confession". A philosopher can only derive ideas from the particulars of his or her own life. Because of this indomitable subjectivity, the number of different philosophies in the world equals the number of different philosophers. Approvingly, he often quoted the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte: "The kind of philosophy one elects depends on the kind of man one is." Bartra provides a very funny précis of Gaos's personalist interpretation of the Mexican intellect in an imagined symposium, made entirely of actual writings by the putative participants, at the Café Paris in Mexico City. Ramos and his follower Emilio Uranga are arguing that the Mexican can be construed as a general type who likes the Virgin of Guadalupe and bullfights. Bartra's Gaos interrupts,

The philosophy of the "Mexican," rather than of man or humanity "in general"? Well then it would be of *the* Mexican, if not daring to be of Leopoldo Zea, or of Emilio Uranga...and

not *philosophy*, but rather an inexpressible paradoxical soliloquy by each one of you concerning yourselves. Strictly speaking, it would be each one's purely irrational¹ *Selbsterlebnis*.

This individuated philosophy came from one whose *Selbsterlebnis* was marked by a grand juncture, his 1938 escape from the fratricide in Spain.

The first, Spanish, phase of his life comprised Gaos¹ intellectually formative years. Gaos was born in Gijón in 1900. Raised in Oviedo by his grandparents, Gaos pursued the *bachillerato* there and later in Valencia. He received his *licenciatura* in Philosophy and Letters at the University of Madrid in 1923. The vestiges of the Generation of 1898 still remained in Madrid, and Gaos acquainted himself with the neo-Kantian Morente; Zubiri, an adherent first of phenomenology and later of existentialism; and Ortega himself. He passed the late 1920s lecturing Spanish at the University of Montpellier, France, and completed his doctorate in 1928. In 1930, he began his first tenure as professor of philosophy in the University of Zaragoza, and then found a position at the University of Madrid in 1933. The subsequent period deepened the friendly and intellectual intimacy between Gaos and Ortega, who still resided in the capital. It ended with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, when Gaos and much of the university decamped to the city of Valencia, held by the republic. By 1938, Franco had almost consolidated his rule over the country, and Gaos fled to Mexico City.

From early on, Gaos refused to call himself *exiliado*, and instead called himself *transterrado*, which might be understood as "radically naturalized", a complex function of his disgust for Franquista Spain, gratitude to his Mexican hosts, and possibly even his belief in Fichtian self-invention. The Mexican intellectual class reacted to Gaos¹ arrival with enthusiasm, and appointed him to a series of prominent lectureships. He taught constantly from the time he arrived, first in the Casa de España en México/Colegio de México, and UNAM. He toured universities in the provinces, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, as well, where he attended or organized conferences on different themes in Spanish American thought, Ortega studies, and Western philosophy.

Gaos loved teaching, and colleagues huffed at how he kept them waiting while patiently dissecting an undergraduate theme or doctoral dissertation.

Lida and Matesanz suggest that two interrelated motivations prodded Gaos's cultivation of students in his Seminario del Pensamiento en la Lengua Española: first was the familiar impetus to build a community of first-class scholars who would interpret the Mexican condition correctly. This intellectual nationalism would have its locus in the Colegio de México. Revolutionary authenticity, a concept associated with the historian Edmundo O'Gorman, was paramount. Scholars of "philosophy" hoped to apply native interpretative realities to Mexican (and Spanish and other Latin American) texts, while avoiding "recourse to categories extrinsic to the text and the context" and the "existing interpretative schemes of other cultures". Gaos disabused Zea, for example, of his desire to write a thesis on the Greeks and directed him instead to write on the history of ideas in Mexico, a suggestion which resulted in Zea's famous study of positivism.

The second motivation for Gaos to affect a deep and abiding union with his students was to keep them loyal as they grew into men of influence. They would become, as Lida and Matesanz indicate tartly, a "nucleus of close disciples" rather than a "group of colleagues". Gaos sought to emulate not just the Ortegian intellectual tradition, but Ortega's savvy in academic politics.

It was clear that [Gaos] was very attracted to being the outstanding and only figure, to be the maestro par excellence, just as he had learned from his own maestro par excellence, José Ortega y Gasset.

Apparently, Gaos's ambitions (and the insecurity that is often the obverse of such ambition) kept the seminar in Spanish-language philosophy from developing into a full-fledged Centro de Estudios Filosóficos to balance the Colegio's *centros* of social, philological, and historic study. A larger gathering of great minds would have to include rival Quetzalcoatl from Spain, a risk that Gaos did not want to take.

Catalan philosopher Eduardo Nicol followed a similar geographic trajectory, but a dissimilar intellectual path from Gaos. As Nicol did not embrace biography as the source of all philosophy, he did not leave as many details as his colleague. Born in Barcelona, Nicol studied at that city's university and became director of the Instituto Salmerón in 1933 at the age of twenty-six. Like Gaos, Nicol fled Spain in 1939. He landed first in Toulouse, and then in Mexico a year later, where he found a position as *catedrático numerario* (full professor) at the UNAM. He helped found the

Centro de Estudios Filosóficos and two major Mexican philosophical journals, *Filosofía y Letras* and *Dianoia*. Like Gaos, Nicol was destined to live the rest of his life as an exile in Mexico. Unlike Gaos, Nicol had doubts about Mexico's viability as an intellectual power, which he enunciated in his 1961 work, *El problema de la filosofía hispánica*.

The literature recalls Nicol as an innovator in philosophy of science and the primacy of dialogue. Here, it should be noted that Nicol defined "science" more broadly than is common. Science, as Abellán paraphrases Nicol, is that which satisfies three conditions: it is material (dealing with a defined area of reality), formal (addressed through reason, objectivity, and method), and ethical or existential (driven by *sophia*, pure knowledge, and not utility). Four principles govern scientific epistemology: 1) the logical relation between thought and itself, 2) the relation between thought and reality, 3) the connection between thought and the thinker's place in history, and 4) dialogue.

The third principle was Nicol's central problem, his life mission. In Domínguez Vello's analysis of Nicol, he writes, "In Man, the historic is *ontos* and *ontos* is historic." In other words, the only immutable about man is his constant mutation, which makes human knowledge extremely problematic. The third principle throws the first two into crisis, because this *situational*, time-conditioned subject has no lasting inner logic and no lasting relation to the object. The fourth principle, then, gives the only epistemological exit: dialogue comes closest to Truth, as it tests relativity against relativity when two communicators try to find common meaning. "Meaning is a dialogic fact," Nicol declared in *Los principios de la ciencia* (Principles of Science, 1965), "if a meaning isn't shared, the term means nothing." Later in the same work, he wrote, "*Logos* always implies a simultaneous communicative intention as well as meaningful content." Meaningfully for this study, Abellán writes of Nicol's "philosophy of science":

This community of being and unity of the real, as Nicol also says, is that which keeps the diversity of subjectivities from dissolving Truth, as the *personalismos* of our day seem to believe.

Any reader cognizant of Mexican philosophical trends of the 1940s and 1950s would instantly recognize Abellán's reference to Gaos, with whose *filosofía de la filosofía* the term *personalismo* was inextricably linked. A

canyon lay between the epistemologies of Gaos and Nicol: while Gaos asserted each person's distinct version of truth, Nicol claimed that only shared truth could have any consequence.

In 1950, the Colegio de México's press published Nicol's history of ontological thought. Nicol predicated his study on the belief that time conditions being, meaning, and reason, a concept known as historicity, similar to the third of Nicol's four scientific principles. In 428 densely printed pages, Nicol covered the history of ontology and epistemology from Plato to Heidegger, all the while lamenting the lack of historicity in each age's conception of being. Nicol advanced no thesis of his own, but, as Gaos pointed out, his opinions shone through. In his two reviews of the book, Gaos would make two assertions: Nicol's treatment of Ortega is the real crux of *Historicismo y existencialismo*, and that this treatment was scurrilous and groundless.

Historicismo y existencialismo follows Ortega through what Nicol identified as the four stages of his career: vital reason, exemplified by *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, the historical reason of *Las Atlántidas* (1924), an authenticity (individual essence) which man must escape to be free (*Pidiendo un Goethe desde adentro*, 1932), and finally, its opposite: an authenticity which man freely chooses, man as *causa sui* (*Historia como sistema*, 1942). Nicol organized the chapter as a gradual enlightenment, an intellectual search from specious, nihilistic youth to wise maturity.

In the longest section, that concerning vital reason, Nicol attacked Ortega without pause. Nicol believed that vital reason as originally posed by Ortega constituted epistemological and ontological nihilism. Ortega's epistemological confusion, Nicol wrote, consisted in affirming that when man does not know the reasons for phenomena, he thinks that these do not have a reason. Nicol countered that the *search* for the (inherently unprovable) reasons for things, laws, and phenomena, brings philosophy and science into existence, and gives them meaning. Reality, Nicol argued, is not thinking, *i.e.*, not as consistent as intelligence, but it is thinkable, *i.e.* consistent enough to permit investigation and to be intellectually or rationally represented. The existence of an ordered reality is manifest, Nicol said rather hopefully and with no evidence. Ignorance of the constitutive laws of this order does not throw us into chaos, but the intrinsic impossibility of thinking about the real would. Ontologically, in his vitalist period, Ortega declared that *being* is an article of quasireligious faith. Where Ortega tripped, according to Nicol, was in defining existence as the Greek metaphysicians defined it: "a stable and fixed figure." As early as Heraclitus, Nicol notes, philosophers had steered ontology down a more

accommodating road. It is not being itself, but rather *the laws which regulate its change* that are stable and fixed.

Ortega's most famous aphorism in Mexico, Nicol recounted, is "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia", a declaration that circumstance as well as identity define the horizon of possibility for the individual. According to Nicol, there are several problems with this statement. First, Ortega posits the *yo* itself as irreducible (this is necessary to an ontology, based, as Ortega's is, in perception: if the water is always changing, the net must stay the same). The subject, Nicol argued, evolves through history, and even through a person's life. Nicol also criticized Ortega for not distinguishing adequately man's varying powers to affect and thus be part of circumstance. One can separate these entities into 1) natural and inalterable, 2) natural but within man's power to change, and, 3) manmade. Finally, Nicol made his most serious charge against Ortega's aphorism: how can one define *yo* without *circunstancia* and vice versa? One is the existential function of the other: the net helps create the water and the water helps create the net. This, of course, is a pure distillation of Husserl's eradication of the subject-object distinction. What Ortega's beloved aphorism lacks is interaction, Nicol wrote, between the individual and his environment, and between the individual and *el otro-yo, tú*. The individual filters almost all circumstance through other people with whom he interacts.

Nicol shuddered at relativist individualism, which he claimed as the endpoint of Ortega's philosophy of truth. He quoted Ortega disapprovingly, "Every individual-- person, people, epoch-- is an organ without substitute for the conquest of truth... the individual point of view seems to me the only point of view from which the world can be seen in truth." Nicol's rejoinder: "This would perhaps be true, if truth consisted in seeing, and not in speaking." The truth is *logos*, or word. Dialogue transcends pure subjectivity, and only when we exchange our impressions, can we know the defects in our vision. Nicol faulted Ortega for failing to explain differences in the *quality* of perception: the superiority of a vision founded in communicated knowledge rather than the atomized cogitation of one person.

The doctrine of the point of view, in Nicol's interpretation of Ortega, demanded that perspective, fully articulated, penetrate the system which helped create it, a circularity. If reality is the sum of perspectives, each individual point of view is irreducible ("Every individual is an essential point of view," Ortega wrote). Nicol, wedded to the importance of dialogue, found this essentialism absurd. While Nicol's Ortega believed only God can see the truth (*una visión omnímoda*) composed of all these partial visions,

Nicol himself believed that one can test his own singular perspective against the divine totality through dialogue with other people's fallible perspectives.

Vitalist Ortega (the one who defended Napoleon's decisiveness) said he saw life as a task (*quehacer*), a series of actions. Nicol, however, believed subtle assumptions limited what Ortega sold as "life" in toto, especially in his banishing ideal truth from it. Nicol cited Bergson to fault the positioning of *razón vital* against *razón pura* in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*. The two are, Bergson believed, the same. Bergson equated the two "reasons" thus: since the possible does not exist in concretion, but has elements of the concrete within it, possibility equals the real plus the ideal.

The first epoch of Ortega's work having consumed twenty-two pages, Nicol dispatched the subsequent three stages in eighteen. *Las Atlántidas* (1924) represents Ortega's second, Diltheyan period, Nicol wrote, although with the strange admission that Ortega did not read Dilthey until 1933. Both Nicol and Dilthey, according to Nicol, seek to question the permanence of Kant's categorical imperative. Pure concepts (Kant's categories) are historical, because the understanding (*entendimiento*) that gives them flesh is historical. Dilthey and Ortega II independently arrive not at relativism and the consequent abandonment of categories, but a replacement set of categories that can act as constants, reacting to variable understanding. Ortega, Nicol recounts, had become fascinated with psychology-- and in the Freudian Twenties, he was far from alone-- and believed that in the science of the mind lay the key to a new, *idoneo*, system of categories. As Nicol wryly noted, "The idea that psychology could be a valid foundation for historical study and man's knowledge is characteristic of a certain era." Rules that governed the mind's act of idea creation would be, for Ortega II, the immutable that ideas themselves used to be.

Nicol touched lightly on the third stage of Ortega's development, what Nicol called the "surpassing" of Dilthey. Here, according to Nicol, Ortega III acknowledged what Nicol himself had urged in his analysis of the vitalist stage, the importance of interaction. The atomized psychology of motivations could not explain the historical shifts in meaning and understanding. Life, Ortega wrote in *Pidiendo un Goethe desde adentro* (1932), is co-life, the interaction of individual lives, which transcends the immediate and psychological. What *did* determine the historicity of meaning was the realization of each person's individual project of existence. The "project", the true ontological kernel of man, consisted in a categorical, irreducible possibility for living. Authenticity, or adherence to the "project", did not depend on man's following a prefixed path, however, but lay in the *manner* he follows the path he chooses. These ideas about authentic destiny

seem tangled and opaque. Contextually, however, they could serve an important political purpose in the Mexico of revolutionary consolidation, and are probably what Ramos students mean when they call *Perfil de hombre y cultura* an Ortegian work. A zeal for distilled truth often floats in revolution's wake, because a revolution, to its adherents, is an event devoid of ambiguity-- especially compared with the *ancien regime*, an age of lies. Power then accrues to the authentic, or, in the case of intellectuals, the arbiters of authenticity.

The fourth and final stage of Ortega's intellectual production, according to Nicol, surpassed the others in its sophistication. According to Nicol, *Historia como sistema* completely inverts the thesis of *Pidiendo un Goethe*. In that work, Ortega posited free will as a deviation from authenticity. In the new work, he decided that "man is *causa sui*." Now, if man follows his free will, he serves his unique categorical destiny. The primary character of radical reality (the stream in the old metaphor of *Tema de nuestro tiempo*) became *dynamism* in *Historia como sistema*, change as the ontological constant. History is a system, Nicol quoted Ortega, without a shadow of a doubt. The systematic science of historical reality, however, is not history or even any of the positive sciences, but ontology. History turns on a fundamental reality: man exists and cannot not exist. This is the "conducting wire" that allows phenomena that seem unique and irreproducible to cohere together.

Acting swiftly, Gaos wrote two essays analyzing and responding to Nicol's work, both dated December, 1950. One, "De paso por el historicismo y existencialismo," appeared in the Mexican journal of letters *Cuadernos Americanos*, in 1951. The other, "De paso por el historicismo y existencialismo: parerga y paralipomena," found print in another scholarly periodical, *Filosofía y Letras*, the same year. The former surveyed Gaos's criticisms generally; the latter attacked *Historicismo y existencialismo* literally line-by-line. Gaos devoted to Nicol the close reading that authors claim they desire from their reviews. As would befit a philosopher of note, Gaos showed the same encyclopedic knowledge of the classical and Continental forms.

Primarily, Gaos complained that Nicol used what was advertised as an unbiased survey for the ulterior purpose of attacking Ortega. In the first, shorter essay, Gaos distinguished between Nicol's comments on Ortega and the sections on all other philosophers.

Within this historical scheme, the philosophers to whom Nicol dedicates these chapters are only those who represent

for him the principal articulations of the development of historicist and existentialist philosophy, plus one which he displays for very different motives: the others are the philosophers of the eighteenth century [*sic*], Leibniz and Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bergson, Dilthey, Heidegger; the one is Ortega y Gasset.

These "very different motives", according to Gaos, are jealousy and libel. The picture Gaos painted of Nicol in the essays shows an insecure, semi-talented man trying to make his own name by sullyng someone else's. Gaos wrote that he felt duty-bound to respond to these attacks.

Ortega gets the worst role in [Nicol's] review... I can't punctuate my agreement or disagreement with all these [interpretations of other philosophers], but I feel I should make an exception with those relating to Ortega, I find it essential and indispensable on my part.

Gaos's special attention to the reputation of Ortega y Gasset shows that Nicol's historicist rereadings of Marx, Hegel, Vico *et al* could not exercise Gaos to the same degree, although these others take a larger place in the Western philosophical pantheon than Ortega. Had Nicol published his work without interpreting Ortega, it is doubtful that he would have received such a detailed and aggressive response from Gaos.

Nicol's interpretation of Ortega isolated Nicol among their peers, according to Gaos. He communicated this *ad hominem* critique (the popularity of an argument would seem more appropriate for a political debate, not a philosophical one) in an anti-clerical fashion. Gaos wrote,

But I don't know other scholars and experts to whom Ortega's writings have produced the reiterated frustrations as to Nicol, and who think Ortega has no prestige, save the Most Reverent Padres, Iriarte, Sánchez Villaseñor, Roig Gironella, Garmendía de Otaola, all S.J., and some other less important clerics and novitiates.

In contrast with these benighted priests, Gaos assembled a list of eminent Spanish thinkers, both of the 1898 generation and his own Civil War coterie, who "experienced not the slightest frustration" with Ortega's writing: Morente, Xirau, Recaséns, García Bacca, María Zambrano, Marías, and Granell.

Nicol's journey through the thicket of advances, retreats, and internal contradictions in Ortega's oeuvre offended Gaos, because he believed that Nicol reserved this treatment for Ortega alone. Even if Gaos agreed with the efficacy of Nicol's "historicist method," he could not agree with the conclusion that historical inconsistencies invalidated Ortega's philosophy and his position as a philosopher. Gaos countered,

The validity of this conclusion would seem to require the application of the same method to all the other philosophers, without excluding Nicol, with adoption of this criterion: if the results are the same, the conclusion should be "all of them are or none"; only if the results are exclusive to Ortega, should the conclusion be "everyone but him"-- discarding the possibility of "no-one but him."

To sum up his indignation at Nicol's disrespect for Ortega, Gaos asked rhetorically how Nicol himself would react to such scrutiny.

What would Nicol feel, think, and say if someone said of him literally that he is a "sophist", "lacking in virtue"? Would he say that there were no reasons or motives for saying it? Is he so sure, then, of himself that he can throw this stone, in no way the first?

The above demonstrates the fiercely personal and only indirectly philosophical nature of Gaos's response. It is evident that Gaos chose to emphasize feeling over fact; he discourses at length on the harshness of the sophist accusation, rather than concentrate on whether or not it was true. Also, crucially, Gaos did not hesitate to play the Spanish Card: he said, in effect, that he belonged to a community of learned exiles, and Nicol had also been a member of that circle, but had betrayed it. Gaos called on the authority that his leadership of the circle afforded him and denounce the

apostate.

In two lengthy articles criticizing Nicol's bias against Ortega in *Historicism y existencialismo*, Gaos proposed no motive for Nicol's putative unfairness. It seems certain that Gaos's personal friendship with Ortega prompted the vehemence of his defense. We remember that Gaos admitted he was "essential and indispensable" to Ortega's reputation in Mexico. Gaos, however, did not speculate about Nicol having a similar *enmity* for Ortega that would provoke him to unfairness. Gaos allowed himself one remarkable hypothesis for what caused Nicol to toss aside judicious analysis in favor of libel. Employing his own Fichtean *filosofía de la filosofía*, Gaos insinuated that Nicol's loneliness had colored his thinking. Nicol fixated on dialogue, Gaos wrote, because Nicol himself was missing human contact:

Nicol knows that I am, even more than historicist, personalist, in the sense of the sentence "the kind of philosophy one professes depends on the kind of man one is"... In the impassioned last part of the book, Nicol paints himself if I am not mistaken, like this: "Solitude is an abnormality in the human as such, and no-one knows it better than he who has had to live it, through imposition of philosophical office, through the adverse combination of circumstances, through radical vocation seated in his character, or for the three motives together."

Here, at the very end of the *Cuadernos Americanos* essay, Gaos made his final, most unfriendly innuendo, that Nicol's own self-pity had caused him to pull Ortega down to his level.

The same issues of the *Cuadernos Americanos* and *Filosofía y Letras* that contained Gaos's attacks on Nicol gave Nicol an opportunity to refute them. First, Nicol drew a global distinction between his dialogic focus and Gaos's *personalismo*, presumably to show the gulf between the two writers¹ starting purposes. Later, he took a strange detour into the charge of sophism levelled against Ortega, an imputation which Nicol argued was not an insult, but rather a statement of fact.

Nicol believed that, as a philosophy of philosophy, *personalismo* lacked both usefulness and heart. He wrote,

Gaos thinks that philosophy as activity is a personal duty, and... its content is equivalent to that of the confession, an autobiography, a historical memoir.

While these undertakings seem modest, Nicol smelled arrogance and even vanity. The representational value of ideas, he noted, decreased as the representational value of philosophers increased. He countered the aridity of autobiographical philosophy with the expansiveness of *his* mission: a philosophy for the sake of metaphysical engagement. "What keeps us engaged in philosophy isn't what we produce, but the engagement itself," Nicol wrote, if "a well-intentioned man" called the philosophers "servants of truth", this was an honor to the service itself, and not truth, which was of course conditioned by history. The passion of the engagement-- "drives, ambitions, longings, and efforts"-- became love.

Epistemologically, Nicol was navigating a narrow strait. If universal truth does not exist, an idealized "engagement", or any ideal for that matter, appears impossible. It is reminiscent of the passage in *Historicismo y existencialismo* in which Nicol attacks Ortega for failing to distinguish between being (unstable, in flux) and the "laws which regulate its change" (stable, fixed). Nicol chose to ignore that the same historical evidence that destroyed the former, also endangered the latter. He nevertheless carried the debatable distinction into his *Filosofía y Letras* essay, writing,

Each one of these [historically conditioned] ideas of man faithfully expressed an historical reality, a determined ontological situation; none of them was able to grasp the integral existence of man, since the permanent structure of his being is manifested only in the historical sequence of his diverse forms of existence, and it is that which unifies these various forms.

The love of philosophy, for Nicol, was a component of this permanent structure of change, a romantic sentiment that Gaos-- by implication, hopelessly alienated from his calling-- could not possibly recognize.

As romantic love requires personal sacrifice, philosophical love requires

that the individual stay loyal to the community and its mystical vocation, "that which lies behind the theories". Unlike science, Nicol wrote, in which solution is possible, philosophy satisfies itself with reworking unsolvable problems through dialogue. The sophist threatens this community not through lies or even laziness, but through disloyalty. The philosopher betrays his calling, when he fails to acknowledge the importance of the philosophical community. In Nicol's phrasing,

...this harmony isn't broken with discrepancies of theory, but only when a dissonant voice compromises the unity of the concert, and threatens the meaning of philosophy itself... consequently all true philosophers always agree. The discordant is the sophist.

Nicol completed his charter for an historical *logos* with a passage that can be understood as a commentary on Gaos's placement of individual career over philosophical community. For Nicol, the scholar should not act on

...the professional vanity of mounting a better-looking mousetrap, nor to receive the congratulations of those who recognize our technical powers, but rather because the problems themselves appear to be connected to one another; and if we feel and live in an authentic way, if the problems pain us inside, the attempt to tackle them and resolve them integrally converts itself for us into a vital necessity and never in the mere lust for intelligence.

At its base, then, philosophy should not aim to please or even edify others, but serves as balm for the doubter, a way to feel better about the demise of truth.

The response to Gaos became more personal in Nicol's meditation on sophistry and his colleague's indignation about it, in the section called "Ortega". The passage shows Nicol's belief in the sanctity of philosophy, a calling so precious that the first symptoms of the sophistry virus required the destruction of the host. Gaos had asked how Nicol would feel if called "sophist" by a colleague. Nicol responded that rather than charging Ortega with a crime, he had diagnosed him with an illness, a tumor on the body

philosophic:

Sophistry is a sickness of philosophy. A contagious and periodic illness, whose symptoms have been perfectly identified since they manifested themselves for the first time in Greece... Calling a *pensador* a sophist isn't anything else than to diagnose him: it isn't an insult or an aggression, nor an expression of personal antipathy, nor a gratuitous animosity.

Here, Nicol chose not to define *sophism*, an omission that handicaps his standing to make the charge. He sniffed,

I have concerned myself so many times with the issue, that it would be superfluous to repeat now the list of all the peculiar characteristics presenting the sophist attitude.

The Greeks defined sophism as an argument which appears sound but whose inference is not justly deduced from its premise. If time conditions meaning and being, as Nicol emphasized continually throughout his career, the separation of inferences and premises, since it involves the before and after of a fixed entity, becomes confused. Nicol criticized Gaos for shunning the community of ideas, but he had no specifics to show how a community of ideas lacking a single, unassailable truth would govern itself and name its enemies.

Gaos had also claimed a community as his ally in the polemic, the community of Ortega scholars, but Nicol saw the supposedly solid Ortegan faction as riddled with fissures.

[Gaos] establishes, in effect, two opposed groupings: he includes me in the so-called adversaries of Ortega... he includes himself in the group of the partisans, among those he names various distinguished Spanish colleagues. But here it needs to be said that neither are all [our colleagues] present, not are all those present so partisan: not all those who Gaos mentions as partisans of Ortega would refuse to recognize the justice of my diagnosis, *even though they wouldn't have felt*

obliged to indicate it on their own; neither do all those who consider [Ortega's] influence injurious figure in the opposing list.

Nicol, then, admitted some Spanish exiles in Mexico were not saying what they really thought about Ortega. When scholars do not air their opinions about a given topic in their field, it could be because it is not important enough, because they are undecided, or because they fear the reaction if these views were made public. As for the first and second options, in 1956, Zea claimed flatly that, without Ortega, philosophical meditations on the American condition could not have happened.

From Spain and through the efforts of Ortega, to our America arrived the philosophical doctrines that justified and gave philosophical quality to meditation on American reality. The vital reason of Ortega and the historicism of the contemporary German philosophers gave to the present-day generation that toils in the fields of philosophy in Hispanoamerica the instrument to develop their ideas in the same line as the old *pensadores*.

If these dissenters from Ortega's greatness remained silent because of indifference or indecision, it would counter reams of evidence, including the above, of Ortega's primacy to Mexican and Latin American thought.

The final option, that intimidation played a part in silencing criticism of Ortega, has the following conjectural bases. One is grandiose praise. Ramos, Gaos, and Zea had heaped so much praise on Ortega that an unmasking of the maestro as a sophist would make them look foolish a la "The Emperor's New Clothes". Gaos's fierce ambition to be the maestro par excellence of Mexican philosophy and consequential dislike of dissent also supports intimidation, since Gaos had yoked his career so tightly to the reputation of Ortega that a fall in that reputation could have taken Gaos's leadership with it. The length and ferocity of Gaos's broadside against Nicol also lends to the intimidation hypothesis. It is possible to see Gaos's reviews as a warning to others, since a younger (or native Mexican) writer might have seen the end of his career after such a withering attack. Finally, and most importantly for the larger historical context since it involves the construction of a national consensus rather than Gaos's personal priorities,

Ortega's importance to the self-image of the Mexican philosophical community could allow no dissent against Ortega's greatness.

For if Ortega made possible the transition from lowly *pensamiento* to true philosophy in Mexico, as Zea claimed above, acts undermining Ortega's intellectual standing could undermine that transition. It is a fact that many respected Mexican academics of the 1930s and 1940s had tethered their reputations to Ortega's-- Gaos, Ortega's personal friend, most of all. When Gaos pilloried Nicol, was he trying to avoid demotion to the status of a nineteenth-century *pensador*? Without the justification (a word that both Zea and Ramos employ) of Ortega's vital estimation of value, the Mexican "philosophers" could fall to the class of a José María Luis Mora, the Benthamite architect of Benito Juárez's reforms, the Porfirian positivist Gabino Barreda, or even José Vasconcelos. These men, because of their devotion to practical matters of statecraft, elections-- even bureaucracy-- took on the appearance of thinkers rather than philosophers. Zea wrote, in effect, that although the contemporary Mexican intellectual performs the *same* social tasks as his prerevolutionary predecessor, the modern man advances beyond his ancestor in status, because of *environmental* changes, instigated by the Germans through Ortega. Ortega expanded and elasticized the notion of a philosophical tradition sufficiently so that men who expounded on worldly subjects and unused to the extreme abstraction of European arguments could also claim the lofty status of *philosopher*. With Nicol's criticisms of Ortega, this structure came under threat.

CONCLUSIONS

The vast areas of agreement between Gaos and Nicol can strike a contemporary reader of the Gaos-Nicol polemic as unexpected. Villegas neatly expresses this Ortegan consensus, which Nicol, in spite of himself, shares, in two points. The first axiom is that man is an historical being, without an unchanging essence, and the second posits that this history consists in a "succession of closed perspectives." Villegas concedes the first point readily, while the second has a number of handicaps that neither Gaos or Nicol acknowledge. The sequential adoption and abandonment of ontological realities gives no allowance for continuity, Villegas argues, while time itself is manifestly unbroken. Ortega's most ridiculous foray into successionism, which Villegas does not mention, was his belief that generations, *e.g.* the "Generation of 1789", are real, almost biological, rather than simply a useful artifice for organizing intellectual history. Both Gaos and Nicol leave this uncriticized, and indeed Ortega's generational notion took firm hold in Latin American discourse.

The other major area of agreement between Gaos and Nicol lay in their mutual belief that philosophy, although important, had virtually nothing to say about the world outside. Gaos believed that philosophy taught about philosophers-- to understand the philosophy of X, simply study X's life. There is, of course, a circularity here, which one can demonstrate with an example: it is important to study the philosopher Plato, because he wrote important philosophy, the only meaningful gleanings from which involved the life of Plato, who was an important philosopher. Nicol argued that philosophy had importance, because it gave men with a predisposition toward the big questions a device and outlet for asking them. In a way, this is even more solipsistic than Gaos. At least Gaos believed that the primary beneficiaries of philosophy, if not humanity, were latter-day students of the field. According to Nicol, the primary beneficiaries of philosophy were philosophers.

These areas of agreement lead one back to the question of politics. The careerist hypothesis laid out in this study, Gaos's effort to define and delimit what was intellectually possible, seems consistent with both both men's ideas about the purpose of philosophy and philosophers. Broadly speaking they both argued that the institution should and does serve itself first. Since the philosopher's vocation calls him only to satisfy himself and his colleagues, the field requires authenticity to prevent indistinguished claimants from taking the identity *filósofo*. Of course, the "historical" annihilation of universality that turns philosophy inward equally invalidates any authenticity beyond the emotional, but neither Nicol and Gaos addressed this problem. Whether the philosophical work is true or important-- the "eternal" distinctions before historicity-- means little, so authenticity bases itself on more honestly subjective criteria: reputation, groupthink, and even racist assumptions, like Spanish philosophy over Mexican, Germany over Spain. In a fierce criticism of Gaos published, interestingly enough, after the maestro's death, Humberto Martínez argued that if one limits the philosophical pursuit as narrowly as Gaos did, cynicism cannot be far behind:

If philosophy were, as Gaos said, an activity that could not provide us objective knowledge about anything, I fear that one would have to accept the words of Rossi: "philosophy," he said out of hand, "is good for nothing."

This cosmic shrug at the discipline's ability to inform about anything beyond itself coheres with Lida's suggestion that Gaos systematically

nudged rivals from any forum that he led. What fills a vacuum of ideas, if not ambition and power: politics.

Nicol too may have been concealing political messages beneath a purely philosophical exterior. By returning constantly to dialogue and its value, Nicol may have been communicating his displeasure with a man who Nicol thought wanted to turn Mexican philosophy from symposium to monologue. Perhaps because of Gaos's clampdown, other scholars were withholding their opinions of Ortega, in effect suppressing the dialogue which Nicol saw as philosophy's reason for existing. His disappointment with the unprincipled caving of others is a theme that resonates through much of Nicol's writing. According to Sagols, Nicol admitted that *ethos* and *logos* had fallen into crisis. Nicol had nostalgically prescribed that men remain loyal to "truth, rigor, and beauty," even as they know that these are historical and therefore inconceivable and unattainable. Sagols muses,

We have to ask what Nicol's philosophy wants, when at the same time as it explores [the *ethos-logos*] relation with great conceptual rigor, it tells us clearly and manifestly of the extinction of ethics and the death of the beautiful and rational word.

If the answer is Nicol's emotional litany of "love, hope, and health", Sagols asks where one can find such comforts in Nicol's own philosophy, which offers little else than negation and crisis. It is heroism, she answers, the heroism of acting as if, in Nicol's words, "irrationality, politics, cybernetics, and the teacher's own penury... could never annul his commitment."

Nicol's final complaint, then, may have been that both Ortega and Gaos failed to make philosophy look pure. In the case of Ortega y Gasset, Nicol's righteousness flared hottest when a youthful Ortega intimated that reality was simply unavailable, that the layers of perspective were simply too opaque and confusing for truth to emerge. Nicol, however, seemed to also believe that man could not obtain objectivity, but by trying he lifted himself from the ignoble fate of "I cannot." In the case of Gaos, Nicol saw the emphasis on philosophical biography as trivial. Since the appearance of profundity moved Nicol far more than (nonexistent) profundity itself, Gaos had committed a grave offense by lifting a veil of seriousness from the lives of greats, not to exclude Nicol's own.

What horrifies an ordinary person in such a debate, however, serves as the most basic stipulation to the polemicists of 1950. Both Gaos and Nicol flatly accepted that the epistemological and ontological bases of personal and political life themselves rest on sand. It is with this observation that Mexico can at last be brought back into the sights of this report. None of the aforementioned studies of the postrevolutionary intellectual regime address a hidden reality about historical epistemology and ontology and the establishment of an independent state among the Mexicans. Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* and Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, exuberant, fictional tragicomedies better illustrate the fact that, if time conditions all being and meaning, then *mexicanidad* is a rallying cry and authentic identity only for the rubes. The meaning of any historical event, even the sacred Revolution, has already shifted the second after that event has ended, and, significantly, the very thing that liberated a moment ago can enslave in the next.

The serious discussion of Mexican authenticity among men who did not believe in *any* essence made philosophers of the post-Ateneo century true politicians. It was a politician who invented the "concept" whose only value is its efficacy in getting others to do what one wants. Liberal philosophies saw the world as a grand irreducible in the image of the West, and Zea has condemned this solipsism in innumerable works, to the point of dismissing the entire 1800s as his continent's "lost century". The same Ortegian principles of vitality and circumstance, however, that nullify Humanity as a constant in the intellectual equation can do no better for the Nation, and broken ideals swiftly set the stage for cynicism and misrule. By failing to imagine a credible replacement for universal principle, the crushingly limited purposes of Gaos and Nicol tacitly canceled all distinction and allowed mediocrity to fill the emptiness.

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