

# LIFE (MEMORY AND HOPE) AS A PRIVILEGED PERSPECTIVE FOR UNDERSTANDING

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**ABSTRACT:** In this work, we would like to offer a proposal on the issue of the relationship between life and knowledge. In particular, I am going to present life, the actual life of every person, as a privileged perspective for knowledge. Especially since the Enlightenment, many authors have doubted that life, real life, with all its content, can be an appropriate place for knowledge. The criticism of the prejudices held by thinkers such as Descartes, Kant or Lessing, not to mention Husserl, has placed the philosopher to the position of having to remove himself from life in order to know, and so put aside what we thought we knew, abandon the tradition to which we belong and which shapes our way of thinking and, in general, relate to reality. We would show that the individual perspective, the life of each person, with his or her tradition («performative memory») and expectations («performative hope»), is the only possible perspective to achieve a true knowledge of reality.

**KEY WORDS:** theory of knowledge, perspectivism, realism, relativism, tradition.

## *La vida (memoria y esperanza) como perspectiva privilegiada para el conocimiento*

**RESUMEN:** En este trabajo deseamos ofrecer una propuesta sobre el tema de las relaciones entre la vida y el conocimiento. En concreto voy a presentar la vida, la vida concreta de cada cual, como la perspectiva privilegiada para el conocimiento. Especialmente desde la Ilustración, muchos autores han dudado de que la vida, la vida real, con todo su contenido, pueda ser un lugar apropiado para el conocimiento. La crítica de los prejuicios que llevaron a cabo pensadores como Descartes, Kant o Lessing, y también Husserl, han situado al filósofo ante la tesitura de tener que salirse de su propia vida para lograr conocer, y así dejar de lado lo que creíamos saber, abandonar la tradición a la que pertenecemos y que configura nuestra manera de pensar y, en general, de relacionarnos con la realidad. Deseamos mostrar que la perspectiva individual, la vida de cada persona, con su tradición («memoria ejecutiva») y sus expectativas («esperanza ejecutiva»), es la única perspectiva posible para lograr un verdadero conocimiento de la realidad.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** teoría del conocimiento, perspectivismo, realismo, relativismo, tradición.

In this work, I would like to offer a perspective on the issue of life and knowledge. In particular, I am going to present life, the actual life of every person, as a privileged perspective for knowledge. It will be understood right away that this is something really quite simple, since the deceased do not know or, in any case, if they do know, it will in a way that makes my work uninteresting, at least for them. If we speak of the living, it is sure to know (if we know) in that state, that is, alive, and therefore, it is not that your life is a privileged place for knowledge but it will be a compulsory place, yet, at the same time, it must also be indispensable and irreplaceable. Well, it is precisely that fact that I would take seriously.

I will begin comparing two very different texts, which, in my opinion, express two different ways of understanding the real life in which we live, with its circumstances, experiences, traditions and what we denominate *performativeness*.

These are the reflections of the first chapters of *De visione Dei* by Nicholas of Cusa in comparison with the parable of the three rings found in Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (and before in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, of course).

## I. NICOLAS OF CUSA AND LESSING

In the retreat of the monks of the monastery of Tegernsee in Bavaria, which led to the text of *De visione Dei*, Nicholas of Cusa turned to a particular icon of Christ that he bought and sent to the monastery for that particular occasion. In the icon there appeared an image of Christ looking straight ahead, the way the image seem to have its eyes on us whatever our position and continue to look at us when we move. This way, everyone who looked at the picture would be, at the same time, the object of the gaze of Christ in the icon. The idea was that each of the monks, wherever he may be located, would perceive that his gaze upon the icon was always accompanied by Christ's gaze fixed upon him, contemplating him.

The relationship which is then established between the icon image and the observer is revealed as a metaphor for the relationship between God and the creature. The vision of God appears as an absolute vision, not only because it sees everything, especially because it constitutes every look that is directed toward Him. Thus, the finite spectator, who attends the picture from his particular viewpoint, feels personally observed: Perceives the gaze concentrated on him as if it were a clear and personal preference. The knowledge that there exists an experience that is both equal and different for each observer (since it is the experience of a relationship with God himself, but in a relationship that is unique to each individual) does not allow any of the monks to place himself in the position of any of the others, not even by occupying the same space (relative to the picture) that another previously had. Wherever he may be, it is still embedded in his own perspective, in his own relationship.

We find, therefore, two sets of different perspectives: That of each of the observers, which is known as non-absolute and which looks at the icon within this contingency, and that of Christ that encompasses everything and everyone, but very especially everyone. What did this wise German cardinal want to explain with this visual metaphor?

We could say that different observers have as their first experience their own contingent position, from which they discover the continuity and prominence of the gaze of God, which never changes, enduring, not subject to time, which is, therefore, «necessary». If we are truly faithful to what the viewer of the picture discovers in this relationship with the countenance present on the icon, we will have to maintain that the look that comes from the icon is always first, even though the monk had not yet noticed the presence of the picture, his figure would have already been captured by the eyes of Christ represented. For this reason, Nicholas of Cusa starts with the idea that is first in the order of being and, in the same way, will be recognized as first in the field of experience: The gaze of

God, the absolute gaze that covers all things<sup>1</sup> and also all the «ways of being»<sup>2</sup>. However, it would be unfair and abstract to consider such a gaze outside this relationship between the contingent self and God, since it is precisely in this relationship (and not in a previous discourse or cultural assumption or in a system of beliefs in itself made without verification) where you have experience of the gaze of God, while limiting the gaze itself. This raises the difference between a gaze that is, as Cusanus would have it, «contracted» (latin: *complicatio*) at a time, a place, to some object, to a particular circumstance, which is given in a particular life, and an absolute gaze, not subject to such concretions.

The perspective occurs in a historical, temporal, and cultural setting as well as individual, which is mediated equally by the affections of the body and spirit. Thus, before God and in the face of reality, there is a huge variety of gazes that appear to announce chaos and dissent. That would be, in fact, if were it not because the perspective «contracts» the gaze, although it is not the basis of it, a contingent gaze is a «contraction» of God's gaze itself, a response to this first gaze which is, also, the sustenance and the possibility of the same response and also source of each individual (*contracted*) gaze. It is very important to emphasize this point. In the mind of Cusanus we do not find a variety of perspectives that could (in theory, in abstract) join together or conjugate in such a way as to result in a vision of whole, as if each point of view were part of the whole from a quantitative consideration. It is not about any kind of relativism. Each of the perspectives promises to be true, corresponding with the appropriate plan to the observer, precisely for being the particular circumstance which providence assigns or, put another way, is a gift from He who is the source of the gaze. It is exactly the contraction of the gaze itself, which is the appropriate place for the personal relationship with God, a place primarily understood as a gift, a gift which is irrevocable, irreplaceable.

The perspective, understood here as a historical, cultural and individual concretion, ultimately a life in which each individual finds himself, is no longer an obstacle to overcome to attain knowledge, but the possibility of it. Furthermore, the contraction of being is its ability to be in so much as to be created and therefore contingent. If there exists any particular perspectives it is due to its participation in the «perspective» not contracted, which is not individual but universal. God is thus «the essence of essences, which provides the essence of what they are»<sup>3</sup>.

Looking at Christ thus becomes the true gaze you can have on oneself and on reality. The whole is given in the particular without being limited by it, in the same way that the particular no longer understands its limits as that which is made impossible to know, but as a contraction of the divine gaze and as a gift of participation in the unlimited gaze of God. Local becomes universal by local,

<sup>1</sup> DE CUSA, N., *Opera Omnia*, h. VI, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1929, Capitulum I, 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, Capitulum II, 7.

<sup>3</sup> «Es igitur essentia essentiarum dans contractis essentiis, ut id sint, quod sunt», *op. cit.*, IX, 34, 11-12.

historical contraction of the universal, while «universal» is not compromised by any particular perspective, since none comprises the gaze of the All.

With this, it is intended to show that God is understood in the concrete created, remained transcendent, that is to say, not identifiable with the particular perspective, not limited by it but «expressed» in it (never completely, never the last word, always remaining, in the language of Pseudo-Dionysius, as *hyperousia*)<sup>4</sup>. It is God who sees and constitutes the gaze of the beholder or, in other words: «In seeing me, You who are the hidden God, You allow me to be seen by me»<sup>5</sup>. Here we find a double emphasis: On the founding character of the infinite nature of the finite but at the same time, the ennoblement of man's finitude, his historical reason, as a concrete place of demonstration of the infinite. The man may be so, truly, «alter Deus», «sub-creator».

It is very interesting to take as a basis for comparison the famous parable of the three rings in Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*, which allows us to discover how the Enlightenment understood the problem of the perspective.

The story, moreover well known since the publication of the *Decameron* (1351), goes as follows:

A man had a ring of inestimable value, because it had the power to make its owner pleasant to the eyes of God and men. The man wanted to leave the ring as an inheritance to his most beloved son, and asked his son that all the future holders of the ring do the same. The ring, therefore, passed from generation to generation until the day came when a distant descendant of the man could not decide which of his three children was the dearest. Prisoner of the weakness he had for each of his children he secretly promised the ring to each of them. Nearing his death, he found himself in a predicament, he could not resolve the question as to which of the children to give the precious treasure. In that circumstance, he made the following decision: He called upon a famous artist who he commissioned the manufacture of another two rings just like the original, so it was impossible to distinguish between them and, so, when he had the three rings, he proceeded to give each descendant one of them, stating in each case it was the true ring. The father died and three children came to claim their due right in the house as owners of the ring, but were unable to demonstrate that theirs, and not the other, was the real ring.

In the parable, each ring represented the three major religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Each claims to be the true religion of God, but in reality, it is impossible to know which one is right. The children of that father must choose between two possible ways: Either continue to assert that theirs is the only authentic tradition that comes from God and impose it on others or, from Lessing's position, recognizing that it is impossible to know which ring had passed from generation to generation until the appearance of the three identical rings.

<sup>4</sup> Vid. *De coelesti hierarchia*, J. P. MIGNE, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca, III, 119ss.

<sup>5</sup> «Videndo me das te a me videri, qui es deus absconditus», *De visione Dei*, *op. cit.*, V, 13, 12.

Lessing's stance has not only had a decisive influence on the understanding of interfaith relations and the place of religion in life, but also, as we are now interested in, the way of understanding the concept of «vital perspective», noting that the pretence of each perspective is, by being limited, ultimately unfounded, unjustifiable, thus only the universal-rational can be taken as valid. The bottom line is that it is necessary for someone to make a certain scepticism prevail upon the three children or at least resolve the conflicts between them not as if the three perspectives were somehow true (which is impossible, since the tale sets them as exclusive), but as if they were all false: It would be the state that will save us from the intractable conflict between faiths.

The difference between the conception of «perspective» for Nicholas of Cusa and Lessing is more than notable: For one, the particular perspectives are all a path that gives access in some way to being, for the other, each prospect, each tradition, is no more than a prejudice that must be overcome to achieve universality thus break the pernicious cultural and historical limitations of our thinking.

From our point of view, the position of Cusanus is the true one: Knowledge is possible, and it is possible only from the being that is constituted within the heart of a particular tradition and in specific circumstances in life. Human beings cannot «leave oneself» in order to know the data as a conscience without a place nor a history.

## II. JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

I will attempt to show this from a review of phenomenology, especially Husserl's phenomenology prior to the last of the *Cartesian Meditations*. To do this we will follow, to some extent, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.

José Ortega y Gasset, in a prologue of a German edition of his Complete Works argued decisively about the need to overcome idealism. Moreover, he argued that this was the vocation of his generation, its main target within the history of ideas. Not surprisingly, the theme of realist disciples of Husserl, «*Zu den Sachen selbst!*» is so similar to the expression adopted by Ortega as a *leitmotif* of his own philosophy and first appears in the *Assembly for the Progress of Science*, «Save ourselves in things»<sup>6</sup>.

The overcoming of idealism that Ortega did in his youth was mainly based on the critique of phenomenology and, more generally, the notion of «conscience».

For Ortega the first situation of a person in the world is having to take care, especially one having to take care of oneself. However, one is not alone. On the one hand there is what we have, «things», but on the other hand there are «others», «others» without whom I cannot take care of my life.

If I can say that what I find is something, it is because it has appeared on the horizon of my own personal existence. It is true that my relationship with my

<sup>6</sup> «Salvémonos en las cosas», *Obras Completas*, I. Fundación Ortega y Gasset, Madrid, 2004, p. 185.

surroundings is mediated by my perceptions: The Earth sustains me, it creaks under my feet and smells a certain way, but it is more than that, it is also a promise of the fulfilment of my desires, my longing for realization, of my wanting to be me. It is because my neighbourhood falls within my horizon of life as a possibility, as interpretation, as an ease or as a difficulty. What surrounds me has consistency and it is, is a presence and at the same time, a peculiar extension of myself, both because my first contact is to feel-it, and because my first experience is to live-it. We can say that things are something *to me* because their presence is not merely «being there» but a *performativeness* about me, which cannot have its origin in a being without subjectivity. They affect me as far as they are *my* life. This situation transforms the world, so to speak, in a world that is always experienced in the first person.

Understand well that this life in the «first person» is very different to the attention given to the experience that we find in the *Logical Investigations*. It is precisely the phenomenological method which leads us away from real life by wanting us to put aside the «natural attitude» and, by doing so, the tradition in which things appear to me acquire their meaning, to do two things: First convert the world into a virtual world which it is separated from the concrete to be later analyzed by the phenomenological method. The given, according to the phenomenologist, is not what is really given, *performativeness* of things, but the memory of what was given and on which I now concentrate. At the same time, second, that virtualization also occurs in the self, who is taken only as a conscience that sees things as a limit of the world, a conscience artificially achieved which cannot be identified with the self that is present, *performativeness*, in experience. For Ortega, this is the point at which the phenomenology of Husserl becomes unacceptable: The phenomenological method requires being unfaithful to the fundamental principle of phenomenology, given that it obliges us to attend to what was given, not as it was given, that is to say, *performatively*, but as it is remembered and re-submitted after the *epojé*.

However, the question immediately arises: How is it possible to have a knowledge of what is *performative* and immediate, in life? Would we not end up with a variation of performances in which we never have the thing itself, a world of impressions in which we never stop to think what things are? Or, put another way: How is knowledge possible if we stay on the *performativeness* of life?

When Ortega wrote his book entitled *An Essay in Aesthetics by Way of Preface* (1914), he had in mind some of the problems we have raised. His starting point, as noted, is to show that what we call world is really *my* world, and I will not have as its key feature «being-there», putting the subject and the object of its knowledge in opposition, but the performative *Be-me*, something that changes the entire approach. In fact, rethinking from this point of view the theory of knowledge and its major versions (realism and idealism) is a surprising result.

Ortega used the example of a toothache, insisting that the new framework that he had planned no longer allows us to analyze the pain as a pain. It is not possible to leave pain in order to observe it without its *performativeness* and

pretend that our reflections and analysis will be more accurate: They will be in respects to the new objectified pain, but this pain is very different from the *performative* pain. The initial characteristic, fundamental, of my toothache is that it hurts *me*. The pain of others does not hurt me, but it is some kind of static representation of pain that is not, for me, pain. In the words of Ortega «not the aching pain, but the anodyne image of pain»<sup>7</sup>.

We must avoid the temptation that aims to eradicate the subjective conditions of knowledge, as if in order to achieve true knowledge we had to remove the subject from the equation and turn it into a neutral entity in principle (after perhaps constituent) that we call «pure conscience». It is also a big mistake to begin the analysis of pain, or any object external to us, from the presumption that it is a projection, a content of my mind, which leads back to a prior distinction between the mind and objects and/or representations that are projected or constituted. Opposing all this, what is given to me first is the pain I feel. Therefore, what is primordial is an encounter, a relationship, a hassle or a gratification, a being with me, a coexistence which is life itself in the present moment, I mean, as performance.

The term «coexistence» that Ortega used cannot be understood as static. Perhaps the word «encounter», which means a dynamic, would be more appropriate, as we shall see later.

The presence of a cypress tree or a snowy mountain is evident in its *performativeness*, which is quite different and follow or aim at different characteristics of things: The cypress impedes my view and hinders me, or shrinks my mood, or fills me with its mellow aroma of resin, but in any case its *performativeness*, the first manifestation of its presence and its own being, it opens a peculiarity, in its intimacy, which would be impossible if its being-before-me was not a *be me*. Penetrate, thus, into a relationship that can begin to be understood through its metaphorical structure.

Notice that what we are saying is not contrary to or voids the characteristics of the cypress which are individual and also penetrate into my life: Its greenery, its height, its shape, but that does not go beyond the external observation of the cypress, and if it is possible to address these notes it is also precisely the particular *performativeness* that these notes present.

In *An Essay in Esthetics by Way of Preface*, Ortega quoted some verses of the Barcelona poet Josep Maria López-Picó in which there is a reference to a cypress as the «ghost of a dead flame»<sup>8</sup>. With this metaphor we allude, firstly, to the aspect we could call «external» of the Cypress, the resemblance between the flame that rises into the sky looking for oxygen as a gift that comes from above and the tree gathers itself and raises above itself, embracing itself, aiming towards heaven like an arrow to get stuck, frozen, in the exact moment of the launch. However, it is obvious that the metaphor goes beyond that, not simply to show the resemblance, perhaps curious, between one thing and another. Rather it signals a more intimate

<sup>7</sup> «Ensayo de estética a manera de prólogo», *Obras Completas*, I, 672.

<sup>8</sup> «D'un xiprer», *Epigrammata* (1915). Cit., JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET, *Obras Completas*, I, 673.

collusion between the two situations, extrapolating to the cypress that it is not just to facilitate a more intimate communication with what it is aiming to take on a whole more radical than its outward appearance. The *performativeness* of the cypress appears as a metaphor full of meaning: We move from impression to senses, to the sense of being given in a variety of representations, on the mark that leaves its presence on the soul. Is it fair to go beyond what is perceived in intuition or just focusing only on what is given in so much as the sensitive data entails a reduction of reality that prevents us from addressing it radically enough?

To understand that the cypress is like the ghost of a dead flame we need to place the tree in a field of meaning that apparently is not its own, but expresses important features of what the cypress is.

Contrary to what might be thought when a metaphor makes the *performativeness* palpitate from the thing does not distance us from the real world to plunge into idyllic space, merely invented or imagined, in the sense that it is false. Rather, our imagination plays in our favour here. Pegasus is a metaphor of a horse, but brings a presence of force, arrogance and speed of the horse that brightens the essence of these noble animals. Pegasus makes us intimate with the power of the horse.

In these examples, and in using metaphor, and can discern that our relationship with an object is bipolar. On the one hand, we have the impression; with the executive impact of the matter when it is given in experience, in a representation which is always partial. Furthermore, in the sense of the matter, which aims to collect the whole and can only do so from a particular point of view that puts it into a vital relationship with the circumstance, with other things and with the world. The sense of the matter intended to be the rule that produces the unity of the diversity of representations. How is this possible?

Let us recall the quote from Kant to which we have alluded and which thus appears in the *Critic of Pure Reason*: «We are, however, dealing only with the manifold of our presentations. And since that X (the object) which corresponds to them is to be something distinct from all of our presentations, this object is nothing for us. Clearly, therefore, the unity that the object makes necessary can be nothing other than the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of the presentations. When we have brought about synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition —this is when we say that we cognize the object—. This unity is impossible, however, unless the intuition can be produced according to a rule through a certain function of synthesis, viz., a function of synthesis that makes the reproduction of the manifold necessary a priori and makes possible a concept in which this manifold is united»<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> «Es ist aber klar, dass, da wir es nur mit dem Mannigfaltigen unserer Vorstellungen zu tun haben, und jenes X, was ihnen korrespondiert (der Gegenstand), weil er etwas von allen unsern Vorstellungen Unterschiedenes sein soll, fuer uns nichts ist, die Einheit, welche der Gegenstand notwendig macht, nichts anderes sein koenne, als die normale Einheit des Bewusstseins in der Synthesis des Mannigfaltigen der Vorstellungen. Alsdann sagen wir: wir erkennen den Gegenstand, wenn wir in dem Mannigfaltigen der Anschauung synthetische Einheit



This quote, you will remember, agrees with the later a moment ago: Our access to reality is produced through a «manifold of presentations» which are never a complete given matter in itself, but what Kant called «presentations». As each thing is given to us in a variety of presentations and only in them, how is it that we speak of «some this» (*tóde ti*, substance) instead of recognizing what we can only resort to as partial manifestations which are only data from the senses, as would Nietzsche say in *On True and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*?

If I can appeal to an object and try to understand it, if I group the variety of presentations and point to only one thing, it is because there is some rule that makes the synthesis of the diversity of presentations. We can say, keeping the level of mere impressions, we accede to different perspectives that correspond to their own particular and concrete giving at any given time. Kant argues, as we have read, that this synthesis provides the unity of the diversity of presentations, performed by the conscience that is both «constituent» and it is precisely the formal unity from conscience that allows us to speak of a «some this».

Ortega resumes this idea when trying to explain the relationship between truth and perspective<sup>10</sup> at the beginning of the first volume of *The Spectator*. There he starts by saying that reality «precisely for being and be found out of our individual minds, can only reach this multiplying into a thousand faces»<sup>11</sup> a statement which followed the famous example of the Guadarrama Mountain Range.

Since its specific location in El Escorial, Ortega receives a certain impression; he has access to a precise panorama of the mountain range that fits well, which could not be otherwise, with the geographical area it occupies. The prospect to which it appeals is clear, and following the terms of Nicholas of Cusa, «contracted», limited, that is to say, individual. On the other side of those mountains, in the lands of Segovia, we can see the opposite side, strikingly different due to atmospheric phenomena. Does it make sense that a native of Madrid, who looks at the mountains from El Escorial, and one from Segovia, who is on the other side of the mountains, argue which of the two perspectives is valid? It is inadmissible to think that only one particular perspective, which has no specific location, is true. True and impossible and therefore useless to explain how we know.

If we focus on the issue we would realize that the only way the view of both of them can coincide, or that they could do a synthesis or a series of eclectic postulates to which both agree as good, it would either forget their own and real experience and agree to the lie that is «intermediate», or the view of both coincide,

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bewirkt haben. Diese ist aber unmöglich, wenn die Anschauung nicht durch eine solche Funktion der Synthesis nach einer Regel hat hervorgebracht werden koennen, welche die Reproduktion des Mannigfaltigen a priori notwendig und einen Begriff, in welchem dieses sich vereinigt, moeglich macht». *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 105.

<sup>10</sup> «Verdad y perspectiva», *Obras Completas*, II, 159ss.

<sup>11</sup> «... precisamente por serlo y hallarse fuera de nuestras mentes individuales, sólo puede llegar a éstas multiplicándose en mil caras o haces», *Obras Completas*, II, 163.

that is to say, that they see the same landscape but were located in different places. However, for this to be possible, the mountains *should cease to be real!*, becoming an abstraction. Precisely because the land that appears different to both is real, cannot match what is given to each man. It is reality that is offered in a plurality of views. *Perspective is an element of reality.*

The diversity of impressions that we have of an object is effective and directly related to the characteristics of that object. Only secondarily, the perspective depends on the location of the subject, which is the «contraction» of it. It is not the spectator who orders the perspective. Rather, we must agree that we completely respond to some of the possibilities that the object offers. Therefore, still installed in the area of impressions, to talk of perspective is to talk of adaptation. Reality has the first and most important word.

However, it would be naive of us to stop at this point. If the Guadarrama Mountain Range has among its more than varied impressions, which is given to me from the perspective that I adopt, it is inexcusable to point out the importance of that it is precisely me who does it. If we are affirming the epistemological primacy of the performative, to gather an impression, however much we be given, is perceived in a particular horizon of life, resulting in the impression, in addition, being something, is also mine, being in a certain sense me. Therefore, the impression is not absolutely independent of its receptor, but is rather the beginning of a relationship.

These last considerations lead us to a different conception of the perspective that extends the one we were using with the example of Ortega. To speak about impressions, we deliberately place emphasis on that it was reality that clashed with us and not in that it was us who constituted or formed the reality. However, we must add an important nuance that will prevent us from definitely associating the knowledge of reality with a passive attitude by the subject, which is limited in this way to receive impressions.

Returning to the metaphor that Ortega borrowed from the poetry of López-Picó when referring to a cypress as a «ghost of a dead flame», we realize that reducing the perspective to an impression closes the horizon and limits us. The relationship we build with the things that appear in our life is much more interesting and deeper, but we will never forget that it is all based on the central axis of the impression as is given in the experience.

The issue is quite complex and has to do with what Ortega called «depth of perspective» or «foreshortened» and to what we have given the name, we think most appropriate of «meaning of things».

The impression itself, if we understand it from a purely static point of view, of which the notion of «meaning» delivers us, causes us no relationship to reality different from that of other animals that can receive the same impressions of things. The essential difference of human knowledge is that between men and objects a real encounter is established which does not eliminate the impression, but goes further, putting the object in relation to all other things while introducing it to the bosom of a field of meaning that generates a hypothesis on meaning.

Prejudices, defined now as performative tradition, alive, acting at present in me, give us a first hypothesis of meaning that, compared to the actual object, we are called to verify. In this way we can understand the bias, in general, and taken as a whole (*Weltbild*), as the explanatory hypothesis about what is real, what is «real», how it acts in our lives and how we develop our relationship with it, for which, one has to appeal to a variety of networks of concepts or significant criteria that we inherited from past generations to form a framework within which initially unfolds my interpretation of what things are.

Thus, we can state that our contact with things begins with the impression, which is already a form of adaptation to the object, but it is also the beginning of a relationship that will go much further, introducing things into the bosom of life. That is why the impression received starts to open, to show its depth in the context of «implication schemes» (Husserl) that make us see, at the same time, that this impression is one of the possible perspectives and what is the arc of other possible perspectives that things can offer, providing a first approximation to the object as a reality. Standing before a mountain, we are presented with its overwhelming enormity and at the same time descry between the mass and some of the many roads that dip and emerge from the forests and the mist that seems to play hide and seek among the trees. Before us is not only nature, but also nature is presented to us as a landscape, as a panorama.

Let us consider a quote of *Adam in Paradise* that, although rather extensive, should be read, both for its clarity as for the timeliness of its content:

«Everything is a relationship between several. Painting something well is not, then, as before supposed, as simple as copying: We must determine in advance the formula of its relationship with others, that is to say, its meaning, its value.

Proof that things are only values, is obvious; take anything at all, apply to it different rating systems, and take so many different things instead of only one. Compare what is Earth to a farmer and an astronomer: The farmer will just walk on the red planet's skin and scratching to plough the land; Earth is a road, some grooves and harvest. The astronomer needs to determine the exact place of the globe at every moment within the huge assumption a space sidereal: The point of view of accuracy requires him to turn it into a mathematical abstraction, in a case of universal gravitation»<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> «Cada cosa es una relación entre varias. Pintar bien una cosa no será, pues, según antes suponíamos, tan sencilla labor como copiarla: es preciso averiguar de antemano la fórmula de su relación con las demás, es decir, su significado, su valor.

La prueba de que las cosas no son sino valores, es obvia; tómese una cosa cualquiera, aplíquense a ella distintos sistemas de valoración, y se tendrán otras tantas cosas distintas en lugar de una sola. Compárese lo que es la tierra para un labriego y para un astrónomo: al labriego le basta con pisar la rojiza piel del planeta y arañarla con el arado; su tierra es un camino, unos surcos y una mies. El astrónomo necesita determinar exactamente el lugar que ocupa el globo en cada instante dentro de la enorme suposición del espacio sidérico: el punto de vista de la exactitud le obliga a convertirla en una abstracción matemática, en un caso de la gravitación universal». *Obras Completas*, II, 59-60.

### III. LIFE, MEMORY, HOPE AND UNDERSTANDING

We find a situation that is familiar, it seems a similar situation to which we appealed in the example of the Guadarrama Mountain Range, but with relevant and crucial nuances. Can we perhaps say here that one of the two, the farmer or the scientist is wrong? Is it our tendency to claim science will make us consider that the position of the farmer is outdated, erroneous or sterile? The two subjects that are in this example hold diverse perspectives on the same thing, reaching truly different conclusions, seemingly incommensurable, but both also look at the ground trying to give an adequate explanation of what it is from their experience and their memory, meaning here the word «memory» as the tradition that is present, performative, active in my *self*. In both cases we can speak of knowledge, and so, to truly be possible to call it what either says as true knowledge, it has not been sufficient for the land to give itself to its particular perspectives, but has been necessary to place it within a context of meaning in what is revealed to the particular light of a particular interpretation of experience.

Things reveal themselves for what they are when we look in a field of meaning which are related to the rest of the universe. We can study the heart as an organ that has different parts, but our knowledge is extended when seen within the circulatory system. Thus, the transition from impression to meaning is a kind of deepening of the subject in its encounter with reality, it is receive in the form of an interpretation, the interpretation is the self, present in the fullest form where the self can be found: As «performative memory».

We are given things in the form of interpretation of our memory, our tradition of living in what remains in us, that is to say, the way in which «in action» appears. In the encounter, the subject verifies his interpretation of reality immersing the thing into a field of meaning which shows what it is, and must be verified in the presence of things. Philosophical knowledge requires realism: More affect to what is given than to the hypothesis of sense that we had previously.

We only need to add one more issue briefly. The meaning of things in our life is shown only from the encounter with a «memory», but also hope is very relevant as a driving force and as a source of freedom.

It is significant that Dante conceived hell as an eternal present which is no longer given the *performativeness* of hope. There is no future for those condemned; there is nothing that can be expected. At the gates of hell is the famous inscription: «Lasciate ogni speranza» («Abandon all hope»), and from the mouth of Charon comes the following statement: «Non aspettatevi mai di vedere il cielo» («do not expect to ever see heaven»).

The condemned arrive there as a self that, like all, is constituted by a memory but is now petrified, stopped, since it will not find any variation: Its sentence is to be precisely what they have become, as Dante says to Capaneus. The lack of novelty is the absence of any gift. There is nothing more.

Hope is the source of freedom; it brings the gift of the future into the present, it makes it *performative*. At the same time, hope emerges from this present

knowledge, from a hypothesis of meaning, which produces, as Saint Augustine points out<sup>13</sup>, a present expectation, which acts in the present and moves the action.

The future projection of memory, which occurs in hope, launches the self into the future now, in a presentiality that is modulated by expectation, producing tension towards the afterlife of the presentiality (as an arrow in the taut bow) that consists of waiting for a future gift, which is resolved today in a vocation, in a call.

On the one hand, the assumption of meaning that we have called «performative memory» and that is to be verified in the encounter with reality is also a hypothesis about the future. Every act of understanding tends to be an act involving a hypothesis about the meaning of everything. In this way affects my view on things and also my action.

The central category of a new theory of knowledge, which must go beyond idealism and must renew realism, is the category of encounter. The subject appears with all its history and expectation, that is to say, as memory and performative hope and not as an abstract and unreal artifice that we call «conscience». It appears before things under the assumption of meaning in which things show themselves for what they are with features and characteristics that are their own and revealed in that perspective. If we try to impose a perspective upon a thing that is not the gift that it gives us, we cannot access it, we will only cast a shadow upon it, a monstrous result of our fantasy.

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<sup>13</sup> Vid. Saint Augustine, *Confessionum*, XI, 20.

