Contributions to Thought
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Commenting on my recently published book, Contributions to Thought, would seem to be a rather technical undertaking. And while that is certainly the type of approach this material calls for, I feel I should make it clear that I will try in today's brief presentation to limit my comments to highlighting the principal problems and questions treated in the text, without excessive rigor.

As you may know, this work consists of two essays: "Psychology of the Image" and "Historiological Discussions." As these titles indicate, these essays are reflections on topics that would seem to fall within the fields of psychology and historiography, respectively. And as we will see, these two essays are connected by their shared objective of laying the groundwork for the construction of a general theory of human action, a theory that at the present time lacks sufficient foundation. When I speak of a theory of action, I am not speaking simply of an understanding of human labor, as in the praxiology of Kotarbinski, Skolimowski, or the Polish school in general, though they have the merit of having dealt extensively with the subject. Rather, these essays are an attempt to understand the phenomenon of the origin of human action, its significance and meaning. Of course, some may object that human action requires no theoretical justification; that action is, in fact, the antipode of theory; that the urgencies of the moment are primarily practical ones; and that the results of action are measured in terms of concrete achievements. Finally, they may maintain that this is the time for neither theories nor ideologies, since both have already demonstrated their failure and definitive collapse, clearing the way at last for concrete reality itself-a way that should lead straight to the simple choice of how to achieve the most effective action.

This patchwork of objections belies an underlying pragmatism which, as we know, is a way of thinking employed every day by that anti-ideological stance which would submit the value of any proof to "reality" itself. But the defenders of this attitude tell us nothing about this so-called "reality" that they are invoking, or the parameters that they are using to measure the "effectiveness" of a given action. Because, if the concept of "reality" is reduced to nothing more than crude perceptual verification, then we remain under the influence of a superstition that science, at every step of its progress, has shown to be false.

It seems reasonable to ask as a minimum that those who invoke the criteria of the "effectiveness of an action", explain their criteria. Is the supposed success of that action to be measured in terms of immediate results on the basis of only the action itself, or is it to be measured with an eye to the consequences of that action, that is, on those effects that continue even after the action itself is completed? If it is only the first of these criteria that these pragmatists affirm, then there is no way to see how one action is connected to another. This then leaves the way open for incoherence, or to contradiction between our action at moment B and our previous action at moment A. If, on the other hand, there are continuing consequences to action, then it is clear that at a given moment A an action can be successful whereas at moment B it is no longer so.

At the risk of digressing and even of lowering the level of this presentation, I feel that I must respond, if only briefly, to this ideology that pretends not to be one, this view of things that, however flawed its argument, has gained a certain hold over public belief, and can thus lead to an unthinking prejudice against ideas such as those we'll be talking about today.

We appreciate the value of theoretical formulations relating to the problem of human action, and indeed frame our ideas within the array of existing ideological positions-taking "ideology" to mean any complex of thought, scientific or not, that is articulated into a system of interpretation of a given reality. Yet from another perspective, I would claim a complete independence from those theories that, born in the nineteenth century, have demonstrated their failure not only in a practical sense but also, and above all, as theory. Thus, the collapse of those nineteenth-century ideologies in no way diminishes, but quite the contrary makes all the more important the new conceptions taking shape today.

In addition, I would say that both "the end of ideologies" heralded by Daniel Bell in the sixties and "the end of history" more recently announced by Fukuyama correspond to outmoded perceptions, remaining closed in a debate that in ideological terms had already been exhausted in the fifties-that is, long before recent spectacular political events so shocked those who, hypnotized as they were by their assumptions of practical success, took only belated notice of the march of history. That is why this worn-out pragmatism-whose roots we find in the Metaphysical Club of Boston around 1870, and which William James and Charles Peirce set forth with their characteristic intellectual modesty-has also long since failed in ideological terms. All that's left now is to watch the amazing events that will soon bring to an end those assumptions about the "end of history" and the "end of ideologies."

Now that the objective of this book is clear-that is, to lay the foundation for the construction of a general theory of human action-let us go on to the most important points of the first essay, "Psychology of the Image." This essay attempts to establish the basis for a hypothesis that posits consciousness as not simply the product or reflection of the action of one's surroundings. Rather, it holds consciousness as something that, taking the conditions imposed by the surroundings, constructs an image or complex of images that are capable of mobilizing human action toward the world and, through this action, modifying the world. The one who produces the action is in turn modified by that action, and in that constant feedback there emerges the structure subject-world, and not two separate terms that only occasionally interact. Therefore, when we

speak here of “consciousness”, we are doing so simply in accordance with the psychological focus imposed by the theme of the image, even though we understand consciousness to be the moment of interiority in the opening of human life in-the-world. It follows, then, that the term “consciousness” should be understood in the context of concrete existence, and not separate from it as is often the case in certain schools of psychology.

An important aspect of the work we are commenting upon today is its treatment of the phenomena of representation in their relationship with spatiality, precisely because it is thanks to representation that the human body can move and therefore act in the world in its characteristic manner. If we found reflection-based explanations convincing, we would have at least partially solved the problem, but there would remain the problem of the deferred response to stimuli-that is, the response that is postponed-and this demands a broader explanation. Furthermore, if we accept a variation in which the subject makes a decision to act in one direction and not another, then the concept of reflection becomes so diluted that in the end it explains nothing.

If we were to seek antecedents for the study of consciousness-become-behavior we would find them in the works of several scholars and thinkers, among whom Descartes stands out. In a remarkable letter to Christina of Sweden, Descartes speaks of the point of union between thought and bodily mobility. Almost three hundred years later, Brentano introduced into psychology the concept of intentionality, which he in turn drew from Scholasticism’s commentaries on Aristotle. But it is with Husserl that the study of intentionality is developed more thoroughly, particularly in his “Ideas Relating to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy.” In the best tradition of strict reflection, Husserl calls into question not only the data of the external world but also those of the inner world, opening the way for the independence of thought vis-à-vis the materiality of phenomena. Up until that time, thought had been squeezed in a vise-on one side, the absolute idealism of Hegel and, on the other, the natural physical sciences, which were just then undergoing such rapid development. Husserl did not remain long in the study of the hyletic, material data, but produced an eidetic reduction, and from that moment on it was simply impossible to turn back.

With respect to the spatiality of representation in general, it must then be considered a form from which the contents cannot be independent. Varying the size of the image, Husserl verified that in any visual image, color cannot be independent of extension. This point is of fundamental importance, because it establishes the form of extension as a condition of all representation. It is from there that we take up this assertion as the theoretical basis for the formulation of the hypothesis of the space of representation.

No doubt all of this requires some supporting explanations that at the moment we can deal with only in passing. In the first place, we need to understand sensation as the register of the variation in the tone of a sensory organ impacted by a stimulus from our external or internal environment. Moreover, we view perception as a structuring of sensations carried out by consciousness in relation to one sense or a complex of senses. We all know perfectly well that even in the most elemental sensation a structuring occurs, and recognizing that classical psychology contains at least an approximation of this aspect of our subject we will not need to go too far into the definitions of all these terms. Lastly, I would note that the image-which is a structured and formalized re-presentation of sensations or perceptions that are coming or have come from the external or internal environments-precisely because of the immediate structuring effected, cannot be considered a mere passive “copy” of the sensation, as naive psychology would claim.

In contrast, then, to atomistic psychology, we reach the conclusion that sensations, perceptions, and images are all forms of consciousness, and that it would be more correct to speak of a “consciousness of sensation”, a “consciousness of perception”, and a “consciousness of the image”, without necessarily thereby locating ourselves within an apperceptive stance. What I mean by this is that consciousness modifies its mode of being, that consciousness is none other than a mode of “being”-for example, “expectant”, or “moved”, and so on. In accordance with the idea of intentionality, it is clear that there is no consciousness without consciousness of something, and that this “something” cannot escape the spatiality of representation. And since all representations, considered as acts of consciousness, refer to objects that are represented, and since these two terms form a structure in which the two parts cannot be separated from each other, then representing any object involves the corresponding act of consciousness in the spatiality of representation. Spatialization always occurs in all experience with external representations, whether these have as a base either the five classical senses or the internal senses (originating in coenesthesia or kinesthesia). Moreover, just as the spatiality of sensation and perception are inextricably linked to “places” on or within the body where the sensory detectors are located, the corresponding re-presentations follow the same path. To represent, for example, a toothache we no longer feel today is to try to “re-create” it at a precise point in one’s mouth, and not, for example, in one’s leg. This is clear and holds true for all representations.

But it is here that one of the most interesting problems arises. The image can become modified to such an extent that it bears little resemblance to the original object, and naive psychology has always treated such “distortion” as a fundamental defect of the image. For that approach, the idea was clear: If an image was a simple copy of a sensation that allows the memory to recall that sensation-that is, if it was only an instrument of what has been called the “faculty of memory”-then any distortion in the image was almost a sin against “nature”, which psychiatrists of the time felt they had to rush in and treat aggressively when some poor

unfortunate would go too far in his or her alteration of reality. But joking aside, it is clear that naturalism, and it could not have been any other way, had invaded psychology, just as it had invaded art, politics, and economics. However, it is this very "defect" in the image that allows an image to be distorted, transformed, and finally, as in dreams, translated from one sensory source to be localized in another-and this demonstrates not only the plasticity of this phenomenon but also its extraordinary activity. You can see that to develop these statements more fully would require far more time than we have available today, so let's continue with our initial idea of outlining the central themes of this investigation. There is, for example, the problem of how the image acts in distinct levels of consciousness, and how it produces various motor abreactions, depending upon how far internally or externally the image is located in the space of representation.

To confirm this, consider an image that, when one is in vigil, makes it possible to extend one's hand. During sleep, this same image is internalized and no longer moves the hand-except in rare cases of altered sleep or somnambulism in which what occurs is precisely that the image becomes externalized in the space of representation. Even when one is awake, in vigil, a strong emotional shock can displace the images corresponding to fight or flight to a more internal level, sometimes to such a degree that the body is left paralyzed. Conversely, we see how in altered states of consciousness projected images-that is, hallucinations-can mobilize bodily activity, even though they are based on sensory sources that are displaced, translating re-elaborations of the internal world. Thus, depending on the depth and position of the image within the space of representation, various types of bodily activity may be triggered. But we should remember that we are talking about images that are based on different groups of senses-some external, some internal. Coenesthetic images, operating at the appropriate depth and location in the space of representation, provoke abreactions or somatizations in the intrabody, while images that correspond to kinesthesia are what ultimately act on the body from "inside", setting the body in motion externally.

But in what direction will the body move, given that kinesthesia is a manifestation of internal phenomena? It will move in the direction that has been "traced" by other representations that have the external senses as their sensory basis. If I imagine my arm extended in front of me, I can easily confirm that it does not move simply on account of the visual image, and yet (as has been amply demonstrated in experiments on variations in muscular tonicity) the image does cause my arm to "trace" the direction, although my arm will actually move only when the visual image has been translated into a kinesthetic one.

Let us proceed to those issues related to the nature of the space of representation and to the concepts of copresence, horizon, and landscape, and their role in the system of representation. We have nothing new to add to what has been said in paragraphs three and four of Chapter 3 of "Psychology of the Image", except what bears upon the final conclusion of this work:

We have not been speaking of a space of representation per se or of a quasi-mental space. Rather, we have said that representation as such cannot be independent of spatiality, though we are not thereby maintaining that representation occupies space. It is the form of spatial representation that concerns us here. So it is that when we speak of a "space of representation" rather than simply of representation itself, it is because we are considering the ensemble of perceptions and (non-visual) images that provide the registers (the corporal tone, as well as that of the consciousness) on the basis of which I recognize myself as "me." That is, I recognize myself as a continuum despite the flow and changes that I experience. So the space of representation is not such because it is an empty container to be filled with phenomena of consciousness, but rather because its nature is representation, and when particular images occur, the consciousness cannot present them other than under the form of extension. Thus, we might also have emphasized the material aspect of what is being represented without thereby speaking of its substantiality in the same sense as would physics or chemistry; rather, we would be referring to the hyletic data, that is, to the material data and not to materiality itself.

We are left, however, with a difficulty. Of course, no one would think that the consciousness has color or that it is a colored container simply because visual representations are presented as colored. So when we say that the space of representation possesses different levels and depths, is it because we are speaking of a three-dimensional space with volume? Or is it that the perceptual-representational structure of my coenesthesia is presented as having volume? Undoubtedly the latter is the case, and it is thanks to this that my representations may appear above or below, to the left or the right, toward the front or back, and that my "look" may also have a particular perspective toward the image.

For each structure of representation there exist countless alternatives that are not "unfolded" completely, but rather act copresently, accompanying the images that appear "center stage." Clearly, here we are not referring to "manifest" and "latent" contents, or to the associative paths that can carry the image in one direction or another. Let's consider an example: When I imagine a certain object proper to my bedroom, even though other objects from that same environment are not present "center-stage", they accompany that represented object copresently, they are part of the same environment as that object. And thanks to that region, in which non-present objects are included, I can, at will, call up before me some or all of those other objects from within the boundaries that demarcate what I call "my bedroom." In this way, regions are structured among themselves, linked together not simply as groups or ensembles of images but also as expressions, meanings, relationships. I am able to differentiate each region or set of regions from others

thanks to “horizons”, what might be called “boundaries” that give me mental orientation and also allow me to move through various mental times and spaces.

When I perceive the external world, when I move in it and my daily life unfolds in it, I am constituting it not only by means of the representations that allow me to recognize and to act in it but also by copresent systems of representation. This structuring of the world that I effect I call ”landscape”, and I know that my perception of the world is always the recognition and the interpretation of a reality that corresponds to my landscape. That world that I take as reality itself is in fact my own biography in action, and that action of transformation that I effect in and upon the world is my own transformation. And when I speak of my inner world, I am also speaking of the interpretation that I make of it and of the transformation I effect on it.

The distinctions we have made so far between “internal” and “external” space are based on the registers of the boundaries set by coenesthetic-tactile perceptions. But they cannot be sustained when we speak of the global nature of consciousness-in-the-world, for which the world is its “landscape” and the self is its “look.” This mode of being in the world on the part of consciousness is basically a mode of action in perspective, whose immediate spatial reference is one’s own body and no longer only the intrabody. But the body, in being an object in the world, is also an object in the landscape and an object of transformation. The body, then, becomes the prosthesis of human intentionality.

If images allow us to recognize and to act, then according to how that landscape is structured in individuals and peoples, according to the needs of those individuals and peoples (or what they consider to be their needs), that is how they will tend to transform the world.

To conclude these comments on “Psychology of the Image”, I will add only that in the configuration of every landscape there are at work, copresently, thetic contents-beliefs or relationships among beliefs-that cannot be rationally maintained and that, accompanying every formulation and every action, constitute the foundation for human life in its continued unfolding.

Therefore, any future theory of action will need to include an understanding of how it is possible that, from its most elementary expression, human activity is not a simple reflection of conditions, and how it is that this activity, in transforming the world, transforms the producer of the action as well. From the point of view of a future ethic as well the perspective of the possibilities for human progress, the conclusions reached will have import, as will the direction chosen on the basis of these conclusions. Let us now move on to comment briefly on the second essay.

The second essay, “Historiological Discussions”, is an attempt to study the prerequisites needed for a proper foundation of what we call “historiology.” The discussion begins by questioning whether or not the terms “historiography” and “philosophy of history” can continue to be useful for much longer, considering that they have been used in such diverse ways that it is now difficult even to determine just what they refer to. The term ”historiology” was coined by José Ortega y Gasset in about 1928 in an essay titled “Hegel’s Philosophy of History and Historiology.” In a note to my essay, I quote Ortega, who says the following:

Against this state of affairs in the realm of History, there raises up historiology. It is moved by the conviction that History, like empirical science, above all has to be construction and not a ‘gluey mass’-to use the words that Hegel hurls again and again at the historians of his time. The case that the historians could have against Hegel, by opposing [the idea] that the body of history should be constructed directly by philosophy, does not justify the tendency, even more marked in that century, of being content with a sticking together of data. With a hundredth part of what for some time has already been gathered and polished, it was enough to work out some kind of scientific conduct much more authentic and substantial than so much, in effect, that History books offer us.

In the present essay, then, continuing that debate begun so long ago, I speak of historiology in the sense of the interpretation and construction of a coherent theory in which historical data per se cannot simply be juxtaposed or treated as a simple chronology of events, except at the risk of emptying the historical event of all meaning. The pretension of a History (with a capital H) free of all interpretation is nonsense, and has invalidated many historiographical efforts in the past.

The second essay of Contributions to Thought studies the vision of historical fact that has been employed from Herodotus on, a vision that begins with the historian’s landscape being introduced into the description of historical “fact.” In this way, at least four distortions become apparent in the usual historical optic. In the first place, there can be the intentional introduction of the time in which the historian is living, in order to emphasize or minimize facts in accordance with this perspective. This defect can be observed in the presentation of the historical account, and it affects the transmission of the facts as much as the myth, legend, religion, or literature that has served as its source. The second error involves the manipulation of sources, and such imposture merits no further comment. The third error is the simplification and stereotyping that allows facts to be elevated or discredited, in order to make them conform to some more or less generally accepted model. The economy of effort for both the producers and readers of works of this nature is such that they often draw a large readership, though their scientific validity is questionable at best. In these works, stories, rumors, or secondhand information are often substituted for verifiable information. The fourth form of distortion is the “censorship” that at times lies not only in the pen of the historian but in the mind of the reader. Such censorship prevents new points of view from being accurately disseminated, because the historical moment itself, with its whole repertoire of beliefs, forms such a powerful barrier. The free circulation

of new views and perspectives thus arises only with the passing of time, or perhaps the eruption of dramatic events that discredit widely held beliefs, clearing the way for a candid reassessment.

This discussion thus examines the general difficulties that exist for the evaluation of events in the "mediate past." But our disquiet grows as we see that even in the telling of the most immediate history-a subject's own autobiography-the person will tell third parties and even him or herself of events that never took place or are clearly distorted-and all this, in turn, within an inescapable system of interpretation. If that is the case, what will not happen with events that have not been lived by the historian and form part of what we call "mediate history"? At any rate, we note that none of this necessarily leads us to a skepticism with regard to History itself, thanks to our recognition of the need for Historiology to be constructive and, of course, to meet certain other conditions if it is to be considered an exact science.

"Historiological Discussions" continues, but now with what we call "conceptions of history without temporal foundation." This is from the first paragraph of Chapter 2: "In the numerous systems in which some rudiments of historiology appear, all the effort seems to be focused on justifying the dateability, the accepted calendar time, of facts, analyzing how they occurred, why they occurred, or how things must have occurred-without considering what this 'occurring' is, how it is possible in general that something occurs." All those who have undertaken to construct true cathedrals of the Philosophy of History, insofar as they have not answered the fundamental question on the nature of occurrence, have presented us with a history of the accepted dateability of things, but without the dimension of temporality that is necessary in order for that to be apprehended. In general terms, we observe that the concept of time that has prevailed is one that corresponds to naive perception, in which facts or events "unfold" without structurality, in simple succession from one, earlier phenomenon to the next, in a linear sequence of occurrences following "one after another", without our understanding how it is that one moment turns into, becomes another-without our grasping, that is, the inner transformation of events. Because to say that an event occurs from moment A to moment B and so on to moment n; from a past, moving through a present and projecting into a future, speaks to us only of the location of the observer in a time of conventional dateability, emphasizing the historian's perception of time-and, as the perception that it is, spatializes it toward a "back then" and an "up ahead" in just the way that the hands of a clock spatialize time to show its passing.

Understanding this concept presents no great difficulties, once we recognize that all perceptions and representations occur in the form of "space" (see "Psychology of the Image"). Now, why must time flow from a back-there toward an up-ahead, and not, for example, the other way around, or in unpredictable jumps and leaps? And one can't answer with a simple "because that's the way things are!" If each "now" is "at each end" an indeterminate succession of instants, then one comes to the conclusion that time is infinite. When we accept that purported "reality", we remove our look from the finitude of the person who is looking, and we pass through life with the sense that "doing" among things is infinite, although copresently we know that life has an end. Thus, the "things we have to do" escape death at every moment; that is why one "has" more or less time for certain things, because "have" refers to "things", and then as we pass through life, the flow of life itself becomes a thing, is naturalized.

The naturalistic conception of time to which Historiography and the Philosophy of History have been subject until today lies in the belief in the passivity of the human being in the construction of historical time, and with that we have come to consider human history as a "reflection", an epiphenomenon, or a simple mechanism for the transmission of natural events. And when, in an apparent leap from the natural to the social, people have spoken of humanity as the producer of historical fact, they have continued to rely on that naturalism within which society has been "spatialized" in a naive vision of time.

A strict reflective thought leads us to understand that, in every human activity, moments in time do not follow one after another "naturally", but that past, present, and future instants act constructively, "that which occurred" as (past) memory or knowledge is as determining as the (future) "projects" one attempts to achieve through (present) action. The fact that the human being does not possess a "nature" in the way that an object does, the fact that intention tends to overcome any natural determinants, demonstrates the human being's radical historicity. The human being constitutes itself and constructs itself in its action-in-the-world, and in that way gives meaning to its journey through life and to the absurdity of non-intentional nature. Finitude, in terms of time and space, is present as the first absurd, meaningless condition that, with clear registers of pain and suffering, nature imposes on human life. The struggle against that absurdity, the overcoming of that pain and suffering, is what gives meaning to the long process of history.

We will not continue here with the interesting questions of the extended and difficult debate on the problem of temporality, the issue of the human body and its transformation, and the natural world as the growing prosthesis of society, because I would like to stop here to list the principal problems and questions that are maintained as hypotheses in this essay.

In the first place, this essay examines the social and historical constitution of human life, seeking the inner temporality of its transformation, something far removed from a succession of linear, "one after the other" events. It then goes on to observe the coexistence on a single, historical stage of generations that have been born at different times and whose landscapes of formation, whose education, and whose projects are not homogeneous. The generational dialectic-that is, the struggle for control of the central social space-is seen to take place between temporal accumulations in which either the past, present, or future are primary,

and in which those accumulations are represented by generations of different ages. The landscapes of each generation, in turn, along with the different substrata of beliefs that each of them holds, dynamize their action toward the world. But just because the birth and death of generations is a biological fact, that does not allow us to biologize their dialectic. Thus, the naive conception of “generations”-according to which “the young are revolutionaries, the middle-aged are conservatives, and the old are reactionaries”-finds strong refutation in numerous historical analyses, which if not taken into account will only lead us to a new, naturalistic myth whose correlate is a glorification of youth. What defines the sign of the generational dialectic at every historical moment is the project for transformation or conservation that each generation launches toward the future. Of course, there are more than three generations that coexist on the same stage of history at any given moment, but the leading roles are played by those we have mentioned, that is, those contiguous to the center, not those that are “copresent”-children and old people. But since the entire structure at any given moment of history is in transformation, its sign is constantly changing, as children enter youth and those in middle age move into old age. This historical continuum shows us temporality in action, and makes us understand human beings as protagonists in their own history.

And so, with greater understanding of the functioning of temporality, we find in these “Historiological Discussions” elements that, along with those concerning the space of representation in “Psychology of the Image”, will perhaps allow us to form the foundation of a complete theory of human action.

Thank you.