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Xavier Zubiri

An Introduction

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José Francisco Xavier Zubiri Apalategui (1898-1983) is often considered one of the “big three” of 20th century Spanish philosophy (along with Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset). Although his published works were not as numerous as Unamuno’s or Ortega’s, Zubiri’s impact on the Spanish-speaking intellectual scene singles him out as the forerunner of most contemporary Spanish and Latin-American philosophical thought. In this essay, I seek to present Zubiri the man, the teacher, and the writer. Zubiri’s influence as a philosopher is quite apparent given the large body of translations and secondary literature on him in many different languages and cultures.

Most of the biographical information in this essay is gleaned from the wonderful 2006 biography *Xavier Zubiri: La soledad sonora* by Jordi Corominas and Joan Albert Vicens.¹ This mammoth work, with over 900 pages of text, indices, and photographs, is an excellent source. It is divided into three parts, each of which could be its own book: (1) Zubiri’s childhood and education, (2) Zubiri’s struggles with the priesthood and his marriage to Carmen Castro, and (3) Zubiri’s private lecture courses and his later years. The book does not go into many details about Zubiri’s ideas, but it is a thorough account of his life and the times that made such a life possible. This was the authors’ intention for the book, as they themselves say in the prologue: “our plan has not been to write an intellectual biography, nor a

1 Jordi COROMINAS and Joan Albert VICENS, *Xavier Zubiri: La soledad sonora* (Madrid: Taurus, 2006). For my review of the book, see *The Xavier Zubiri Review* 8 (2006), pp.163-165.

critical trip [*itinerario*] through his thought; rather, [our plan is to write about] the life of a philosopher.”²

Most of the bibliographical information for the essay is from Rafael Lazcano’s *Repertorio bibliográfico de Xavier Zubiri*.³ This bibliography is considered the most complete (up to 2005) bibliography of Zubiri’s writings and the secondary literature. It consists of twelve sections. Of note is the seventh section, “Temas,” which classifies secondary sources under fifty-seven different categorical headings from “actualidad” to “volición.” There is also a brief chronology at the end.

Life

Xavier Zubiri was born in San Sebastian, the Basque Country, Spain, on December 4, 1898. A sickly child, there was great concern about his survival and mental development. Fortunately, Zubiri would live a long life (almost 85 years) and become one of Spain’s greatest contemporary thinkers. Zubiri’s formal education began when he was six years old. He was taught by French Marianist priests at the Colegio Católico de Santa María. Four years later, Zubiri began his studies for the *bachillerato*. His *bachillerato* years were interrupted when the eleven-year-old Zubiri enrolled in the Seminario de Cantabria in Comillas in order to begin his preparation for the Jesuit priesthood. Homesickness brought him back to San Sebastian, where he finished his *bachillerato* in 1915 at the age of sixteen.

The year before his graduation, 1914, marked a serious shift in Zubiri’s evolving thought. Corominas and Vicens devote eleven pages to Zubiri’s profound intellectual and spiritual crisis during his penultimate year of *bachillerato*. This crisis played a significant role throughout Zubiri’s life. The Catholic world at the beginning of the 20th century was itself in intellectual crisis; Zubiri absorbed that crisis into his very person. Modernism was prohibited by the Vatican (Pius X’s 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, as well as the 1910 Vatican *Motu Proprio “Sacrorum Antistitum”*) due to its potential for heresy. The Marianists conscientiously objected to these documents, not because they disagreed with the rift that modernism caused in the life of faith, but rather because they believed that intellectual engagement with modernity would show its errors. This was the position of Zubiri’s teacher Domingo Lázaro, who taught courses on modernism with a special emphasis on why it “is the expression of what reason is when it

2 COROMINAS and VICENS, *Xavier Zubiri*, p. 20 (my translation).

3 RAFAEL LAZCANO, *Repertorio bibliográfico de Xavier Zubiri* (Washington, DC: The Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America, 2006).

has lost its sense of reality."⁴ Zubiri could indeed regurgitate this position, but his sympathies were with modern thought. Zubiri read the pragmatists ferociously, as well as other modern thinkers. Since these texts were banned by the Church, Zubiri would often read them at night while everyone else was asleep. As a result of his studies, Zubiri was truly conflicted between the arguments he found in these banned books and the teachings of the Church. Noticing his behaviour, his teachers gave him more chores and controlled his reading activities more. Zubiri resolved then and there to problematize the entire training he had received and to attempt a reconciliation between reason (even in its modern formulations) and faith.

After *bachillerato*, Zubiri returned to his priestly vocation. Zubiri began his seminary studies at the Seminario Conciliar in Madrid, only to be interrupted by his fascination for the emerging philosophical revolution in Madrid led at the time by José Ortega y Gasset. In 1918 Zubiri left seminary to study with Ortega and Gabriel Garcia Morente at the Universidad Central de Madrid. It was here that Zubiri was formally introduced to phenomenology. He went to Louvain in 1920 and 1921 to study, and during these years began his formal preparation for the priesthood. Zubiri obtained his Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Collegium Theologicum at the Gregorian University in Rome on November 9, 1920. In the same year, Zubiri received his *licènce* (master's degree) from Louvain. His thesis, written in French, was the first non-German thesis on Husserl. Returning to Spain in the summer of 1921, Zubiri defended his Ph.D. dissertation on the phenomenology of judgment in Husserl's logic on May 13. This ended Zubiri's formal education, although he would not be done learning.

After finishing his education, Zubiri was ordained to the priesthood on September 21, 1921, at the age of twenty-two. Zubiri never felt comfortable as a priest, given his frequent philosophical clashes with Church authorities, which led to him being threatened with excommunication in 1922. He immediately reconciled himself with the Church, but seldom celebrated mass, and, when he did, as Corominas and Vicens state, Zubiri would move through the service briskly and without feeling, ironically making him a popular priest due to his brevity.⁵ Zubiri wanted to be a philosopher and thinker more than a priest and dogmatist.

His chance came in March 1923. Ortega invited Zubiri to join the faculty of the Universidad Central as an auxiliary professor. Zubiri accepted the offer, and quickly became known for his philosophical depth and dif-

4 COROMINAS and VICENS, *Xavier Zubiri*, p. 46.

5 COROMINAS and VICENS, *Xavier Zubiri*, p. 55.

ficult yet invigorating courses in the history of philosophy. In 1926, Zubiri prepared his case for the *oposiciones* for a history of philosophy professorate at the Universidad Central. He presented a paper titled "La filosofía del pragmatismo" during his interview. This paper criticized pragmatism, in the vein of Lázaro, yet Zubiri was clear to praise its merits. He was victorious in the opposition (the vote was unanimous), and he began his job as *catedrático* in 1927.

Holding a university chair, Zubiri was now free to travel and study. Obtaining permission from the Church, Zubiri left Spain in 1928 to study in Germany. Zubiri spent two years in Freiburg studying philosophy with Martin Heidegger. Zubiri was often frustrated at Heidegger's treatment of him, as if Heidegger did not know that Zubiri was a philosophy professor in his own right. They finally came to terms with each other and began a true philosophical friendship (Zubiri would translate Heidegger's 1929 inaugural lecture "What is Metaphysics?" into Spanish in 1933). In 1930, after a five-month visit to Munich, Zubiri went to Berlin, where he studied with and befriended Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, and Zermelo. Having studied with these thinkers, Zubiri grew not only as a philosopher, but also as a scientist and mathematician.

On December 10, 1930, while in Berlin, Zubiri met Américo Castro, a famous Spanish historian, and, more importantly, Castro's daughter, Carmen. They became infatuated with each other, which was quite scandalous given Zubiri's clerical status. Zubiri returned to Spain unaccompanied, but rumours of his romance were already circulating back in Madrid. Zubiri knew what he had to do. In 1933, Zubiri requested that he be returned to the status of laity. As part of this process, Zubiri went to the Vatican and personally requested his dismissal from Pope Pius XI. Zubiri presented his case as having more to do with his philosophical and existential crises with the priesthood and less about his relationship with Carmen. On July 14, 1934, Zubiri was released from the priesthood, but was ordered to remain celibate. This led Zubiri to a second round of requests to the Holy See, and he was finally freed from all of his clerical vows on February 21, 1936, but on one condition: Zubiri was required to leave Madrid and resign his position at the Universidad Central in order to avoid the scandal of being an ex-priest. Zubiri agreed to these conditions. Freed from the clerical collar, Zubiri married Carmen in Rome on March 23, 1936. Zubiri was conveniently out of the country as the Spanish Civil War began. Unwilling to return to Spain during this conflict, and being expelled from Italy in August of 1936 due to Italy's support of Franco (who opposed many of the Spanish intellectuals),

the Zubiri family moved to Paris, where they stayed until the beginning of 1940.

Upon returning to Spain, Zubiri began a new position as *catedrático* of philosophy at the Universidad de Barcelona. Zubiri found Barcelona disagreeable, and, feeling unable to philosophize there as he wanted, he abandoned his position in 1942. This was the last time Zubiri held a formal academic position. Although he could not return to the Universidad Central, Zubiri and Carmen moved (back) to Madrid. Zubiri finished the manuscript for *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* just prior to leaving Barcelona. It took two years to publish the book, mostly due to the religious claims made therein. Composed mostly of revisions of previously published essays, it finally appeared with a *nihil obstat* at the end of 1944.

To support himself and Carmen in Madrid, Zubiri taught courses at his home. These *cursos privados* were started with the support of Pedro Laín Entralgo and several students willing to pay tuition. These courses would define Zubiri's legacy. They ran concurrently with the academic year, with several universities eventually granting credits for the classes. In 1946, the Zubiris traveled to the United States to visit Carmen's father, who had moved there during the Spanish Civil War. After teaching jobs in Wisconsin and Texas, Castro eventually got a position at Princeton University. Zubiri gave a public lecture (in French) at Princeton during his visit. While visiting Washington, D.C., he was surprised and delighted to find a copy of *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* in the Library of Congress.⁶ In 1947, Zubiri became involved with the newly-formed Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones (the SEP), which would, along with the private lectures, sponsor Zubiri's work in Madrid.

From 1948–1954, Zubiri immersed himself in his teaching and research. He published only one essay between the publication of *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* and *Sobre la esencia*: a small two-page article in 1953 connected to his 1953–54 course, “El problema del hombre.” In 1953, Zubiri was honoured by the journal *Alcalá*, which published a volume titled *Homenaje a Xavier Zubiri* to celebrate his twenty-fifth year as a professor. He did not teach from 1954 to 1959, probably to finish writing *Sobre la esencia*. Zubiri resumed teaching in 1959, but the courses were no longer year-long (the exception was 1971–72). Instead, he would give about three to six lectures on the topic for the year (there are some exceptions: 1967, 1968, 1970, and 1973). In 1961, Zubiri first met a young Spanish Jesuit named Ignacio El-

6 See Thomas B. FOWLER, “History of Zubiri Studies and Activity in North America,” in *The Xavier Zubiri Review* 6 (2004), p. 100.

lacuria, who would later move to El Salvador (where he was assassinated in 1989) and give Zubirian philosophy a home in Latin America.

In 1962, Zubiri published *Sobre la esencia*, considered by many to be his magnum opus. The reception of the book was lukewarm at best and at worst quite hostile. The book was so exacting and densely written that few felt able to access it. One year later, Zubiri published *Cinco lecciones de filosofía*, which were his lectures for his 1963 lecture course. Paulino Garagorri writes that *Cinco lecciones de filosofía* was the antidote to *Sobre la esencia*, which wore out the readers due to its “probably indigestible ... excess of concentration.”⁷

Zubiri continued to give his private lecture courses from 1964 until 1976 (at the age of 78). He also lectured in Barcelona and Rome during this period. A two-volume *Homenaje a Xavier Zubiri* was published in 1970 by the SEP, gathering 1,584 pages of essays in honour of Zubiri’s philosophy. In 1972, the Seminario Zubiri was created as part of the SEP in Zubiri’s honour, involving works by students, admirers, and critics. Two anthologies of papers from that seminar, *Realitas I* and *Realitas II*, were published by the SEP in 1974 and 1976 respectively. *Realitas III-IV* appeared in 1979.

Zubiri published *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad*, the first part of his noological trilogy, in 1980 (at the age of 82!). Unlike *Sobre la esencia*, this book gained a warm reception. In the same year, he was granted an honorary doctorate in theology from the Basque Country. In 1982, Zubiri received the Premio Nacional de Investigación Santiago Ramón y Cajal from King Juan Carlos I and published the second part of *Inteligencia sentiente*, titled *Inteligencia y Logos*. The third part, *Inteligencia y Razón*, was published in 1983.

Zubiri began editing his private lecture courses for publication, but intestinal cancer cut those efforts short (several of these have been published posthumously, with the rest in progress). Zubiri died on September 21, 1983. At the time of his death, he was at work editing the text of what later became his first posthumous book, *El hombre y Dios*, volume 1 of his theological trilogy. His dying words were “En esta vida uno está solo, y no es de extrañar que muera solo”: “In this life one is alone, and it is not strange that one dies alone.”⁸ Fitting words for a thinker whose life is best described, to use the subtitle of Corominas’ and Vicens’s biography, as a “soledad sonora.”

7 Paulino GARAGORRI, *Unamuno, Ortega, Zubiri en la filosofía española* (Madrid: Editorial Plenitud, 1968), p. 125.

8 COROMINAS and VICENS, *Xavier Zubiri*, p. 705

Teaching

Zubiri was esteemed by many of his students as a brilliant and challenging professor. His courses, as we read them in published form, often did not “review” material that the students could have read on their own. Instead, Zubiri’s courses were philosophical workshops in which he was formulating his own philosophical ideas. It is only now that we have a glimpse into his university teaching;⁹ the majority of what we have of Zubiri’s own lecture notes comes from the *cursos privados*. In this section, I will focus on these courses, as well as give the history of their posthumous publication.

As stated in the previous section, Zubiri taught standard “academic year” courses from 1938 until 1954. After a brief hiatus between 1954 and 1959, he returned to lecturing, but gave fewer lectures per course (with the exception of 1971–72). This first phase of private courses began with the 1945–46 course “Ciencia y Realidad: Introducción al problema de la realidad.” The 1946–47 course was “Tres definiciones clásicas del hombre.” “¿Qué son las ideas?” was the 1947–48 course, followed by “El problema de Dios” in 1948–49. The 1950–51 course was “Cuerpo y Alma.” “La libertad” was the 1951–52 course, with “Filosofía primera” and “El problema del hombre” finishing this phase of teaching in 1952–53 and 1953–54 respectively. None of these courses, except for parts of the 1953–54, has yet been published as of the time of this article.

A substantial amount of the lecture courses from 1959 to 1976 has been published. To facilitate this part of the discussion, we will begin with published lectures (in chronological order of publication) and then state what is yet to be published. The 1963 course, “Cinco lecciones de filosofía,” was published in the same year and is described in the next section. Soon after Zubiri’s death, in 1984, the SEP published *El hombre y Dios* with Alianza Editorial. Ignacio Ellacuría finished Zubiri’s editing of the lectures (Zubiri planned to publish this text, but died in the middle of the project). This lecture course “El hombre y Dios” was given in Rome at the Gregorian University, which makes it technically not a *curso privado*, although it served as the basis for the first part of Zubiri’s 1971–72 course “El problema teológico del hombre: Dios, religión, cristianismo.”

Ellacuría would edit one more collection of Zubiri’s writings, published in 1986 as *Sobre el hombre* with Alianza in conjunction with the SEP. The

⁹ See Xavier ZUBIRI, *Cursos universitarios, Vol. I*, Manuel MAZÓN (ed.), (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2007). The texts contained therein are an assemblage of students’ notes for three different classes: one on Aristotelian metaphysics, one on Plato’s *Parmenides*, and one on Descartes and Husserl.

greater part of the text is an unfinished manuscript that Zubiri wrote in the 1970s; however, Ellacuría created Chapters 4 and 5 out of the 1959 lecture course “Sobre la persona” and Chapters 6, 7, and 10 from parts of the 1953–54 course “El problema del hombre.” In 1989, the 1968 course was published with Alianza (now in conjunction to the successor of the SEP, the Fundación Xavier Zubiri, which would henceforth publish with Alianza) as *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*, edited by Diego Gracia. Gracia would also edit *Sobre el sentimiento y la volición*, which was published in 1992. This text collects together Zubiri’s 1961 course “Acercas de la voluntad,” the 1964 course “El problema del mal,” and the 1975 course “Reflexiones filosóficas sobre lo estético.”

Antonio González edited *El problema filosófico de la historia de las religiones*, published in 1993. This text publishes Zubiri’s lecture course “El problema filosófico de la historia de las religiones,” which served as the basis for Zubiri’s 1965 lectures in Barcelona, there titled “El problema de Dios en la historia de las religiones” and the second part of the 1971–72 course “El problema teológico del hombre: Dios, religión, cristianismo.” One year later Antonio Pintor-Ramos edited *Los problemas fundamentales de la metafísica occidental*, the lecture course from 1970.

In 1996, Antonio Ferraz Fayos edited and published *Espacio. Tiempo. Materia*. The first and second parts consist of Zubiri’s 1973 course “El espacio” and the 1970 course “Sobre el tiempo.” The third part is an unfinished manuscript. Noteworthy is the March 4, 1973, visit by then Prince Juan Carlos and his wife, the Doña Sofía, to Zubiri’s class on space.¹⁰ Their paths crossed again in 1982, when King Juan Carlos I presented Zubiri with the Premio Nacional de Investigación Santiago Ramón y Cajal. *El problema teológico del hombre: Cristianismo*, edited by Antonio González and published in 1997, covers the last third of Zubiri’s 1971–72 course “El problema teológico del hombre: Dios, religión, cristianismo” and the last part of the 1968 course “El hombre y el problema de Dios.”

El hombre y la verdad, Zubiri’s 1966 lecture course in Barcelona, was edited by Juan A. Nicolás and published in 1999. *Sobre la realidad*, which Zubiri taught in Madrid in 1966, was published in 2001, edited by José A. Martínez. The 1967 lecture course *El hombre: lo real y lo irreal* was published in 2005, edited by Jesús Conill. In 2006, Jordi Corominas edited and published *Tres dimensiones del ser humano: Individual, social, histórica*, which was Zubiri’s 1974 lecture course.

10 COROMINAS and VICENS, *Xavier Zubiri*, p. 660.

Lecture courses that have not yet been published in their entirety from this second phase of Zubiri's teaching (1959–1976) are “Sobre la persona” (1959; I am unsure if Ellacuría used all of this course), “Acerca del mundo” (1960), “Reflexiones filosóficas sobre algunos problemas de teología” (1967), “El hombre y la verdad” (1968, not to be confused with the 1966 lectures),¹¹ “Estructura de la metafísica” (1969), “Sistema de lo real en la filosofía moderna” (1970), and “La inteligencia humana” (1976). Also, if there are some variances in Zubiri's account distinct from the three lecture courses that inspired the 1971–72 course “El problema teológico del hombre: Dios religión, cristianismo,” it would be good to have the lectures published in the future.

Writings

The Zubirian corpus is immense, most of it published posthumously, with many volumes of material left to edit and publish. Zubiri was a well-published scholar in his lifetime as well. Lazcano cites thirty articles, as well as fourteen prologues and introductions. Some of these writings are published in the *Realitas* volumes. A number of the other essays have been collected in anthologies published by the Fundación Xavier Zubiri.¹² Zubiri was also a translator, publishing fourteen translations of philosophical, theological, and scientific texts, including writings by Heidegger, Scheler, Hegel, Schrödinger, Suárez, Brentano, Thibaud, Pascal, and Feurer.¹³ In addition to all of this philosophical activity, Zubiri wrote and published six books, which I will present in chronological order.¹⁴

Naturaleza, Historia, Dios was first published by Editorial Nacional, Madrid, in 1944. Zubiri included an additional essay, “Introducción al problema de Dios,” in the fifth edition (1963). This book is a collection of essays, all but four (three in the original) of which were previously published

11 See LAZCANO, *Reportorio bibliográfico*, p. 222.

12 There have been three such anthologies to date: (1) Xavier ZUBIRI, *Primeros escritos (1921-1926)*, Antonio PINTOR-RAMOS (ed.), (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000); (2) Xavier ZUBIRI, *Sobre el problema de la filosofía y otros escritos (1932-1944)*, Germán MARQUÍNEZ ARGOTE (ed.), (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2002); (3) Xavier ZUBIRI, *Escritos menores (1953-1983)*, Germán MARQUÍNEZ ARGOTE (ed.), (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2007).

13 LAZCANO *Reportorio bibliográfico*, pp. 27-28. Lazcano lists sixteen translations, but grants that two of them were really done by Carmen Castro. I prefer to count those in her bibliography instead of Zubiri's.

14 These summaries are not by any means exhaustive. As those who have read Zubiri know, Zubiri creates new terms, uses old terms in new ways, and gives few examples. I attempt here to simply capture the main gist of the text, providing a skeletal outline of its central argument.

in various journals. In the introduction, Zubiri tells us that there is a unity among the essays insofar as the collection as a whole “thematically and deliberately bespeaks a modest reaction before some of the more serious undercurrents presently agitating philosophical thought, in the broadest sense of the term.”¹⁵ This book is a response to what philosophy had become, a reflection of what philosophy used to be, and a hope for what philosophy could be in the future.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section, “Realidad, ciencia, filosofía,” consists of five essays: “Nuestra situación intelectual,” “¿Qué es saber?,” “Ciencia y realidad,” “La idea de filosofía en Aristóteles,” and “El saber filosófico y su historia.” This section focuses on the relationship between philosophy and modern scientific thought, preserving the true object of philosophy (the reflection of things “inasmuch as they are”)¹⁶ from trivialization at the hands of philosophy’s modern-day (and often internal) enemies—viz. positivism, pragmatism, and historicism. The second section, “La filosofía en su historia,” offers interesting readings in the history of philosophy, focusing on how certain philosophers dealt with the question “What is philosophy?” This section has three essays: “Notas históricas” (mini-lectures on Suárez, Descartes, Pascal, Hegel, and Brentano), “Sócrates y la sabiduría griega,” and “Hegel y el problema metafísico.” The final section, “Naturaleza, historia, Dios,” contains five essays: one on nature (“La idea de naturaleza: la nueva física,” which explicates the innovations in quantum physics by his teachers and colleagues Schrödinger and Heisenberg), one on history (“El acontecer humano: Grecia y la pervivencia del pasado filosófico,” which was clearly influenced by Heidegger’s arguments for a return to the Greeks), and three essays on God (“Introducción al problema de Dios,” “En torno al problema de Dios,” and “El ser sobrenatural: Dios y la deificación en la teología paulina”). Zubiri’s main argument is that atheism *simpliciter* is an impossible position given that human existence is itself always already religious.

Sobre la esencia was first published by the SEP in 1963. As Caponigri notes in his introduction to the English translation, *Sobre la esencia* marks a turning point in Zubiri’s work. Before *Sobre la esencia*, “Zubiri’s major, though not, of course, exclusive, preoccupation had been with the ‘idea’ of philosophy ... In this work and henceforward his chief concern will not be with the idea of philosophy, historical or normative; his purpose will now be

15 Xavier ZUBIRI, *Nature, History, God*, trans. Thomas B. FOWLER (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981), p. vi.

16 ZUBIRI, *Nature, History, God*, p. 107.

effectively to *do* philosophy.”¹⁷ That he does in this book. Dense in thought and demanding of its reader to follow the ideas presented therein, *Sobre la esencia* argues that the essence of a real thing is a physical, structural moment of the real thing itself. In other words, what a real thing is is given to sentient intelligence (human beings) *as* reality. As Caponigri states, “reality is to be reached only in and through real things, things that are real . . . reality cannot be reached or attained by any logical process or dialectical ploy.”¹⁸ The essence of reality is something that reality itself is and gives: the human mind must simply be open to it.

This book is written in three parts. The first part argues that traditional philosophy has been misguided in its pursuit of the essence of things, especially by connecting the question of essence to the very different question of existence. It has also failed to consider the essence of something as a moment of the physical structure of the thing itself. Therefore, Zubiri proposes a correction, focusing on “the essence considered in and for itself.”¹⁹ This, as Zubiri already stated in *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*, is the true object of philosophical inquiry. The second part discusses in great detail the positions of Husserl, Hegel, and Aristotle (respectively in Chapters 3, 4, and 5) concerning essence. What unifies them all is their respective failure to consider the essence of the thing as something physically “inside” the thing, as a physical structural moment of the thing. This is not their only error. They also attribute essences to things that, for Zubiri, do not have essences (e.g., chairs, tables, and other “*cosas-sentido*”). The third section seeks to correct these errors. Section three is the largest part—more than half—of the book. In Chapter 6, Zubiri offers five points concerning essence that ground his investigation: (1) the essence is a moment of a *real* thing; (2) this moment is the primary unity of notes; (3) this unity is *intrinsic* to the thing itself; (4) this unity is a principle on which the other notes of the thing are based; and (5) the essence within the thing is its *truth*, the truth of reality.²⁰ To explore these five points further, Zubiri states that he must explore the question in three stages: (a) define the compass of the “essentiable,” (b) determine what within the compass of the “essentiable” is actually “essentiated,” and (c) explain the “essence” itself of “essentiated” realities. These three stages correspond to Chapters 7, 8, and 9 respectively.

17 Xavier ZUBIRI, *On Essence*, trans. A. Robert CAPONIGRI (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1980), pp. 18-19, emphasis his.

18 ZUBIRI, *On Essence*, p. 35.

19 ZUBIRI, *On Essence*, p. 47.

20 See ZUBIRI, *On Essence*, p. 122. I have retained Zubiri’s emphases on the words “real,” “intrinsic,” and “truth.”

The “essentiable” are *real-things* (“*cosas-realidad*”) in comparison to *meaning-things* (“*cosas-sentido*”). Real things possess notes “in their own right” (*de suyo*). Meaning things do not possess their own notes, but rather rely on the real things’ notes to constitute them. It is here that Zubiri drops a metaphysical bombshell: *meaning things do not have essences*. Only real things themselves will be the object of his analysis. The “essentiated” things will be a subset of the “essentiable” things, namely the reality *simpliciter* of the thing. The reality *simpliciter* of the thing will be its *essential notes*, those notes which form the primary *constitution* of the thing in such a way so as to be self-sufficiently *substantive*. Although this sometimes matches what traditional philosophy has called “substance,” it is actually prior to it (and sometimes there can be “substances” without substantivity insofar as they lack self-sufficient constitution). To determine the essence of X, one must (a) determine whether X is a real thing or a meaning thing, and (b) if it is a real thing, determine its reality *simpliciter*. One is then able to talk about X’s essence. Chapter 9, which accounts for more than half of the book, describes Zubiri’s notion of essence in light of the work done in the rest of the third part. It divides into four articles. Article One explores what essential notes are and how they constitute reality. The second article discusses the unity of essence and how the unity that constitutes reality *simpliciter* is prior to any individual constitutive (essential) note. It is here that Zubiri unfolds his notion of *respectivity*, making every note a “note-of” the substantive system it constitutes. The next article is the longest. In it, Zubiri describes how the essence is a moment of the real thing. To do this, he reiterates how essence is divorced from logic definition (predicative *logos*). He then focuses on two dimensions of thinking about essence: the *talitative* (“suchness”) and the *transcendental*. Although the essence of the real thing is indeed capable of showing that something is “as such,” the real benefit of his account of essence is that it is capable of showing that something is “a reality.” This is what he considers the transcendental dimension of essence. Criticizing the traditional uses of the term, Zubiri offers an account of transcendentality that keeps transcendentality from itself being transcendent. The transcendental dimension serves as the principle for the suchness of real things, as well as the ground that makes it possible for open essences (sentient intelligences, human beings) to indeed “sense” things as real things.

Zubiri’s 1963 *Cinco lecciones de filosofía* was published by the SEP the same year they were given. Considered a peace offering for the complexity and rigor of *Sobre la esencia*, Zubiri returns to the question of philosophy made famous in *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*. Choosing five philosophers—Aristotle, Kant, Comte, Bergson, and Husserl—Zubiri demonstrates how, “although they do not say the same things ... they all talk about the same

thing. About what? Not about a *concept* of philosophy, but about the *stepping march of real knowledge*.”²¹ In each lecture, Zubiri focuses on how each thinker treats the task of philosophy and the proper object of philosophical inquiry: (1) Aristotle and being, (2) Kant and the phenomenal object, (3) Comte and scientific facts, (4) Bergson and the immediate data of conscience, and (5) Husserl and the pure essence of conscience. Since this book is not the formulation of Zubiri’s own claims *per se*, I will not summarize the chapters.

In 1980, Zubiri published *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad* with Alianza Editorial in conjunction with the SEP. This text is a more mature formulation of positions argued in *Sobre la esencia*, but it should not be treated as a substitute for the 1962 treatise. Furthermore, *Inteligencia sentiente* recasts the discussion in terms of noology, a theory about human intelligence. It consists of ten chapters, which I will arbitrarily divide into three parts: (I) sentient intelligence vs. sensible intelligence [Chapters 1–4], (II) the actualization of reality [Chapters 5–7], and (III) the modes of intellection [Chapters 8–10].

First, Zubiri’s account of sentient intelligence seeks to overcome the traditional error of classifying sensing and intelligence as two distinct faculties with distinct objects. In the traditional view, which Zubiri calls “conscient intelligence,” sensing “gives” sense data “to” the intelligence, which then makes a judgment about the data received. In this view, the relationship between sensing and intelligence is a dualism. Zubiri’s account places sensing “in” the intelligence. The object of intelligence is not to make judgments about sense data, but instead to apprehend reality. This is what sensing is in human beings: intelligent sensing. In Chapter 3, Zubiri differentiates intelligent sensing from “pure sensing.” Pure sensing is to be affected by reality, but only as a stimulus to which one responds. Intelligent sensing, in contrast, is affected by reality *as* reality in its own right (*de suyo*). Sentient intellection (the same as intelligent sensing, now with emphasis on the intellection instead of the sensing) *transcends* the content of sensing to the formality given to us by the real. We are called to intellection by the reality of what affects us. To show this, Zubiri lists ten intellectual senses and their matching sentient intellectual faculties (e.g., eidetic presence/vidence [“seeing” in the most general sense], naked presence/groping). This account unifies the old dualism between sensing and intellection.

21 Xavier ZUBIRI, *Cinco lecciones de filosofía* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994), p. iv (emphasis Zubiri’s). I am using Joaquin REDONDO’S translation (<http://www.catholicphilosophy.com/sys-tmpl/backcovertransinto/>).

But what is that which affects the sentient intelligence? For Zubiri, what is intellectually sensed and sentiently intellected is the actuality of reality. Here, actuality refers to the *prius* of reality, the “being-here-and-now-present-from-within-itself” of the real. This actuality is not merely the “being-at-hand” in Heidegger’s sense; the actuality of the real co-actualizes sentient intelligence. As Zubiri writes, “I not only *see the rock* but I sense that *I am now seeing the rock*.”²² This overcomes the traditional epistemological dualism of traditional philosophy: there is no “space” “between” sentient intellection and the actuality of reality. Reality does not have to be interpreted in order to be real. Zubiri calls the worldly actuality of reality as *being*. Unlike Heidegger, Zubiri considers being a secondary to reality. As Zubiri notes, “reality is not *esse reale* but *realitas in essendo*.”²³ What “is” is reality as actualized. That such actuality occurs is “true.” Real truth (Chapter 7) is the “ratification” of having been impressed by reality. This ratification is not the same as judgment; it is simply having apprehended X as reality. Reality is true prior to any judgment about it; there is no room for error at this fundamental level.

Inteligencia sentiente ends with a discussion of the modes of intellection. What Zubiri has described in the book is the primary and fundamental mode of intellection: the primordial apprehension of reality, “the intellection of something ‘only’ as real in and by itself.”²⁴ In the primordial apprehension, one knows that X is a reality: nothing more, nothing less. However, the task is far from over. Knowing that X is a reality does not answer the question of what X is *in* reality. What *is* this X that “really is?” The primordial apprehension of reality does not answer this question, but it does serve as the ground for other modes of intellection, *ulterior* modes of intellection. Zubiri claims that the primordial apprehension of reality opens one up to intellections that are less rich in reality, but richer in content. These two modes of intellection are *logos* and reason. These two modes will be the respective topic of the other books in what is now referred to as “The Trilogy.”

The second book in this trilogy, *Inteligencia y logos*, was published in 1982, again with Alianza Editorial in conjunction with the SEP. The text is divided into three sections, each having two chapters. In the first section, Zubiri describes sentient logos, “the intellection of what a real thing is in

22 Xavier ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, trans. Thomas B. FOWLER (Washington: Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America, 1999), p. 57. Fowler’s translation includes *Inteligencia y realidad*, *Inteligencia y logos*, and *Inteligencia y razón* with consecutive page numbering.

23 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 79.

24 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 94.

reality, i.e., with respect to other real things.”²⁵ To do this, Zubiri begins by explicating his notion of the “field” “in which” real things are respective to other things. The field is not a place in its own right; it is not “above and beyond” real things. Instead, the field is the *Gestalt* of all real things insofar as they are respective to each other. Zubiri reiterates several times that the field is not a mere sum of all real things. Rather, it is a *moment* of reality itself. Logos is the intellection of real things in terms of this moment, the “[r]eactualization of the real . . . within a field.”²⁶ Since the apprehension of the actuality of the real is sentient, Zubiri uses the phrase “sentient logos” to distinguish his account of logos from traditional uses of that term.

Section Two discusses the dynamic structure of sentient logos. For Zubiri, the reality primordially apprehended “impels” sentient intelligence to “step back” (*distanciar*) from the formality of the real thing *as* a reality in order to freely hypothesize or “create” what the real thing *might be*. This is the first move from the fact *that* something is a reality to *what* that reality is *in* reality. But logos does not stop with the freely made potentials of the step back. In affirmation, sentient intelligence “turns expectantly from its free creation to real things from which it has stepped back.”²⁷ Dismissing traditional (mis)interpretations of affirmation and judgment, Zubiri distances himself from merely and immediately equating *logos* with predication. Zubiri writes that “[j]udging is not then attributing one concept to another but realizing a concept . . . in a real thing already apprehended as real in primordial apprehension.”²⁸ Sentient intelligence attempts to determine what that which has already been deemed a real thing really is. Zubiri lists six modes of affirmation: (1) ignorance, (2) clarescence (“getting a hint”), (3) doubt, (4) opinion, (5) plausibility, and (6) certainty. Of note here is that several of these modes would never have been connected to *logos* traditionally conceived.

The third section treats the mediated structure of sentient logos. Zubiri begins by discussing his notion of “evidence,” which must be clarified against the traditional understandings of the term as well as the phenomenological term *Evidenz*. Instead of this notion, Zubiri presents evidence as the real thing’s demand to be affirmed *in* reality (no evidence is required in primordial apprehension since nothing is affirmed there). Zubiri then presents his account of “dual truth,” the dimension of truth found in sentient logos. It is called dual truth because it is a secondary truth, grounded in real

25 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 108.

26 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligenece*, p. 124.

27 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 143.

28 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 158.

truth. Dual truth is defined as the “coincidence” (not the correspondence or the coherence) of ratification and affirmation, i.e., what is affirmed indeed is that which was ratified. Since there is “space” “between” ratification and affirmation, viz. the step back and evidence, it is possible to err when it comes to dual truth since one might affirm something that “might be,” but that thing was not that which was ratified in primordial apprehension. Zubiri ends the book reasserting the claim he maintained throughout his career that reality is metaphysically prior to being by offering a new sense of the copula “is.” The copula does not lead us into the question of being, as it did for Heidegger. Rather, the copula is just that: the point of copulation between two modes of the intellection of reality (primordial apprehension/ratification and logos/affirmation).

The final book in The Trilogy is *Inteligencia y razón*, published with Alianza Editorial in 1983 in conjunction with the SEP. This book has two main sections plus a general conclusion for the whole noological project. The first section focuses on thinking as an intellectual activity. Thinking is the result of an intellectual progression from the affirmation of what something is in reality respective to other things to the authentication of what something is in reality in its own right. Instead of field-reality, reason is intellection of world-reality. Since it is a progression from sentient logos, reason is itself sentient. It is at this discovery that the task of sentient intelligence is fulfilled, viz. the refutation of the divorce between sensing and intellection. For Zubiri, even reason itself derives from sensing. It is because the reality of things impresses us that we are able to be “rational.” Zubiri writes, “*things give us pause to think*. The real is not only *given* in intellection, but it *gives* us pause to think ... Thinking, then, is not something primary but is consequent upon the primary intellection.”²⁹ Reason is then defined as *inquiring* intellection, the *search* for what reality is “in depth.” Zubiri uses the phrase “intellection measuring reality” to describe reason. This measurement seeks to *explain* reality. Unlike the step back of sentient logos, which freely ponders what X “might be,” sentient reason hypothesizes what “could be” the ground of X’s reality in itself as a world-reality. The free act of hypothesis is called *suggestion*.

Section Two is Zubiri’s discussion of knowledge. Of note is the fact that knowing, which is usually considered the first intelligent act, is last in Zubiri’s system. Knowledge is “intellection in reason, i.e., intellection of the real in its in-depth reality.”³⁰ In other words, knowledge is the intellection of what X *really* is in reality compared to what X is in reality respective to other

29 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, pp. 253-254.

30 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 301.

things (logos). This account of knowledge greatly differs from traditional understandings of the term, which equates knowledge with true justified belief. Ironically, true justified belief is not knowledge for Zubiri, but dual truth (in sentient logos). Knowledge of X involves something more: it means knowing what X *really* is (e.g., knowledge of a colour currently involves discussion of photons and lightwaves). Although science is a good example of knowledge, scientific knowledge is not the only form of knowledge, nor does it enjoy priority over other forms of knowledge. Zubiri is very adamant about this: “Knowledge is not just science, nor is it principally science. There are other modes of knowledge, for example poetic knowledge, religious knowledge, etc. ... *knowledge is not principally theoretic.*”³¹ Since knowledge is the result of thinking about real things in their ownmost reality, and reason is defined in terms of a searching, method (not exclusively the scientific method) is discussed. It is in method that sentient intelligence progresses from logos to reason. Zubiri outlines three essential steps of any method. First, one needs a *system of reference*, or canonical principle: a decision about what “counts” as an in-depth account. The second step is the determination of the *formal terminus of the methodical activity*, which Zubiri calls “the sketch” (in mathematics, e.g., mathematical models). The final step is *experience*, a word that Zubiri has saved for the final stages of his noology. “Experience” is not used by Zubiri to mean “sensing.” Sensing X is not the same as experiencing X. For example, sensing green is not the same as the experience of bending light beams with prisms. Experience is gained by testing and discerning, the search for the “what for” and “why” of that which was first apprehended *as real* in primordial apprehension and named by sentient logos. There are several ways to test and discern: (1) experiment (e.g., science), (2) compenetration (e.g., history), (3) verification (e.g., math and logic), and (4) self-appropriation (e.g., philosophy). Finally, Zubiri discusses rational truth in terms of verification, scrutiny, refutation, and progress. Rational truth, Zubiri writes, is “truth as sketched out.”³² These sketches are submitted to the community of inquiry, which can scrutinize, affirm, refute, or adopt the sketch.

Zubiri ends *The Trilogy* with an examination of the unity of all three modes of sentient intellection. Akin to Peirce, Zubiri writes that “[p]rimordial apprehension is formally present and included in the logos, and both intellections are formally present and included in reason. They are not three unities but a single unity ... They are three modes and not three planes.”³³

31 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 314, emphasis mine.

32 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 350.

33 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 357.

This unity of intellection is given the title *comprehension*, the co-apprehension of reality in all three forms of sentient intellection. To comprehend X is to apprehend X as a reality, to apprehend what X is in field-reality, and to apprehend X as grounded in its ownmost world-reality. We can now see that actually—and this requires a certain meekness—we as sentient intelligence comprehend *so little* of what we are impressed by. Zubiri puts it best at the end of *Inteligencia y razón*: “one stands unmistakably in and by reality; one stands in it, knowing it. Knowing what? Something, very little, of what is real. But, nonetheless, one is retained constitutively in reality. How? This is the great human problem: knowing how to be in the midst of reality.”³⁴

This essay has not done sufficient justice to Zubiri’s life, teaching, or writings. The hope is that this small account will inspire us all to continue studying this thinker, and, if we are lucky, continue his line of thought in our own intellectual developments. Zubiri expressed throughout his life that philosophizing is the most important thing; merely writing “about” Zubiri, although important, should be done only so as to lead us to our paths of thinking.

34 ZUBIRI, *Sentient Intelligence*, p. 367, translation slightly modified.