

The Collective Mind Approached Through the Prism of Beliefs

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijhphr.13/vol12n14557>

Published June 11, 2024

Citation: Luiz M. (2024) The Collective Mind Approached Through the Prism of Beliefs, *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, Vol.12, No.1, pp.45-58

ABSTRACT: *This article aims to bring to the forefront the approach to the concept of faith from a philosophical and psychological perspective in order to unravel the functioning mechanism of the collective mind as a tool for interpreting reality. The problem raised by the study of beliefs is an area of research that could shed a lot of light on the analysis and knowledge of human behaviour within collectivities in order to unravel the mysteries that led to the emergence of totalitarianism. In order to analyse the concept of faith from a philosophical perspective, this paper will approach a synthetic analysis through three great thinkers: David Hume, Gustave Le Bon and José Ortega y Gasset, authors who have glimpsed the immense potential offered by understanding these levers for deciphering historical events.*

KEYWORDS: *collective mind, beliefs, knowledge, reality, human condition*

INTRODUCTION

The current study focuses on the analysis carried out by three great thinkers who had the courage to take a detour along the path opened by their predecessors to demonstrate the ontological necessity of the human being to appeal to beliefs, the only means by which it can interpret its reality. The article aims to understand the functioning of the collective mind starting from the concept of faith, in order to unravel the mysterious springs that have given rise to the most abominable forms of manifestation of man towards his fellow man, since the 20th century, despite the immense scientific discoveries, has remained in the collective memory as a period of the denial of conscience and the loss of values of everything that defines the human being as a rational and moral being. The whole of society seemed to be contaminated by a value pandemic whose first symptom was a devaluation of physiological life, and spiritual values were gradually replaced by practical and material values under the fascination created by the myth of progress, capable of transforming modern man into the creator of a utopian world. Man breaks away from the mystical, losing his connection with transcendence, being concerned only with the conformity of a contingent present. There is a loss of values and the meaning of life translated by a feeling of desacralization of the world caused by the fracture

between tradition and modernity, which will induce deep convulsions in the collective mind and in the new social order.

The novelty of the 20th century was that the scope of belief had widened from the religious to the political, demonstrating that modern man had the same need to believe as in previous centuries despite the cognitive autonomy that he attributed it. The old religious beliefs, which once offered the promise of a heavenly afterlife to the multitude, were being replaced by beliefs that promoted equality for some nations or superiority for others. The Christian morality was gradually replaced by various forms of entertainment, which kept the human being in a mental anaesthesia, dictating and shaping his present form of life with Edenic projections for the very near future. The collective mind is being restructured and reformulated, and reality is being interpreted through new thought patterns induced by new totalitarian ideologies with a pronounced religious character. The collective imagination took on a new connotation and content, populated by repeated myths that induced a sense of salvation and protection, and these ideological upheavals induced a series of social phenomena unprecedented in human history, through the disorientation and antagonism they brought with them. This is why the beginning of the new era in human history remains in the collective consciousness as a decisive moment of an existential crisis. The synthesis of the mechanism of formation and functioning of the collective mind aims at establishing the precarious limits within which the human spirit falls, despite the attributed omnipotence, a precariousness that will generate major changes in the internal structure of the human being.

The first great thinker to understand the mechanism of formation and functioning of the human mind was David Hume, who pointed out the lack of rationality in the creation and preservation of beliefs, followed by Gustave Le Bon, who analysed social-political phenomena seen through the prism of mental contagion, which had already taken on a threatening character for European civilisation. The last thinker our study stops at is José Ortega y Gasset, who analysed the collective mind through circumstance to decipher the algorithm of the historical crisis already in place. The crisis that Ortega identifies was the result of an annulment of old beliefs that were part of the collective mentality generated and transmitted by previous eras. Ortega y Gasset observes how beliefs have the power to create realities that are considered by those who master them as true and how they acquire a truly utopian character by being assimilated with man's aspiration towards the ideal. However, the negative aspect of beliefs is that they can form the breeding ground for dogmatic ideologies that are not easily removed, because they have a much more stable foundation and a much broader reach. The new beliefs have been at the basis of the formation of nationalism and totalitarianism of the 20th century, in all its three forms (communism, fascism and Nazism), and the disadvantage of beliefs turned into dogmas is that they leave no room for reason and implicitly for doubt, creating so-called truths that take on the character of value.

The Theme of Belief in David Hume

Empiricism, initiated by John Locke and continued by George Berkeley, would be perfected by David Hume, whose aim was to establish a science of man, inspired by Isaac Newton, who had already revolutionized knowledge of the natural sciences. This philosophical trend

emerged in the 17th century as a response to the rationalism initiated by René Descartes, who described the human capacity for knowledge as being made up of innate ideas, placing it exclusively in the realm of the rational. For empiricists, knowledge is acquired through the accumulation of past experience by means of sensations, which memory uses in the various situations to which reality, in perpetual change, forces the human being to react.

David Hume (1711-1776) was the first philosopher to place beliefs in the realm of the affective, and his revolutionary approach to human knowledge made his thought a turning point in the evolution of modern philosophy. Until him, human knowledge was either in the realm of the mystical and religious, or in the realm of the excessively rational, being situated between the grace attributed by God or the gift given by nature and developed by man. The Scottish philosopher vehemently opposed both the rationalism initiated by René Descartes and the scholasticism that had dominated the entire Middle Ages, considering these two philosophical currents ineffective for defining human knowledge because they were not based on facts experienced through the senses. Through his original approach, the Scottish philosopher contributed to the understanding of the origin of ideas generated by impressions and experience, thus offering a redefinition of the human cognitive process. He will show that both ideas and beliefs are based on affectivity and habit-generating experience because "all conclusions from experience are effects of habit, not of reasoning"¹, the Scottish philosopher wrote. David Hume introduces a distinction of great importance between types of knowledge, separating them into knowledge of the relations existing between ideas and knowledge of facts. The latter is a knowledge that comes from experience through impressions under the influence of habit, being obtained by induction, by observing particular facts and following the principle of causality to determine results. Knowledge by association of ideas, on the other hand, is obtained by logical deduction, without the help of experience, and thus acquires the value of universal truth. Through these two kinds of knowledge, Hume makes us understand how truth is portrayed in the human mind.

For the Scottish philosopher, human knowledge is limited to impressions, from which first ideas, and then beliefs, are derived, thus making impressions the source and limit of knowledge: "By the term *impressions*, therefore, I understand all our more vivid experiences, which we have when we hear, see, or feel, love, or hate, or desire, or will. The impressions are distinct from ideas, which are less vivid experiences, of which we become aware when we reflect on any of the sensations or impulses mentioned above."²

Hume analyses the causal relationship that generates the concept of faith determined by habit, which he classifies as the engine of human knowledge, stating that "habit is that principle by which that correspondence so necessary to the maintenance of our species and the regulation of our conduct in every circumstance and occurrence of human life has been effected."³ Thus,

¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, translation by Mircea Flonta, Adrian-Paul Iliescu, Constantin Nita, introductory study by Mircea Flonta, Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, Bucharest, 1987, p. 121.

² *Ibidem*, p. 99.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

Humean belief derives from an impression transformed into an idea, which, through habit, becomes a certainty. The Scottish philosopher intuits the irrational forces hidden in the concept of faith and expresses his inability to comprehend and explain this cognitive phenomenon on the verge of strangeness, but he succeeds in providing a description of its working mechanism, stating that "this act of the spirit, which makes realities, or what is taken for reality, more present to us than fictions, has a greater weight in thought and a superior influence on the affections and imagination."⁴ *Belief*, for D. Hume, indicates a belief in a reality that otherwise cannot be known, and represents the accumulation of past experiences, by means of habit, which is impressed on the collective mind as a form of evidence. If certainty concerns mathematical knowledge, *faith*, on the other hand, defines and encompasses knowledge based on individual and collective experience by means of habit because "the influence of habit is such that, where it is strongest, it not only covers up our natural ignorance, but also hides itself and seems not to interfere, precisely because it acts to the highest degree"⁵, and the habits of a collectivity become immutable laws embodied in beliefs. Hume understands that the act of belief arises in such an inscrutable form that we are not even aware of it because it has the manifestation of a physiological function, comparing the functioning of a belief to the activation of an instinct.

Imagination has power over ideas, but it becomes powerless in the face of faith, which is the very reflection of reality, because beliefs "give ideas more weight and influence, make them seem more significant, engrave them in the spirit, make them the principle that governs our actions."⁶ For D. Hume, this principle of custom is of cardinal importance, because its power is transformed into a control of reality by the certainty created by beliefs that constitute forms of truth. Hume's reasoning is based on the idea that the effect of faith in the plane of knowledge is nothing more than the elevation of a simple idea to the same level as that of our impressions, which become the most direct form of knowledge of reality. The originality of David Hume was that, in spite of the conviction already installed in the collective mind of his time that the human intellect has unlimited resources, he would demonstrate its precariousness by showing the "weakness of human reason"⁷ and "the narrow limits within which it is confined in all its operations."⁸

The quality of a profound thinker cannot be denied to D. Hume of whom Immanuel Kant said that, by his approach to the forms of human knowledge, he "*woke him from his dogmatic sleep*", confessing that "it was the memory of Hume that first woke me, many years ago, from my dogmatic sleep and gave my researches in the field of speculative philosophy an entirely different direction."⁹

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Immanuel Kant *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ALL Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 55.

Opinions and beliefs in the vision of Gustave Le Bon

At the beginning of the 20th century, the French-born psychologist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) began to unravel the mysterious mechanism of belief, which acts with unsuspected force on the collective mind, placing it categorically in the realm of the irrational in his work *Opinions and Beliefs*, published in 1911. The work can be considered a milestone in the field of social and cognitive psychology, as it sheds light on the phenomenology of the collective mind through a synthetic analysis of the ideas and beliefs that become the driving force behind historical actions and events.

The beliefs have always been surrounded by an aura of mystery, which is why few authors have had the courage to venture into the study of this phenomenon on the edge of strangeness. For Gustave Le Bon, faith and science are antagonistic, stating that the transition from faith to scientific knowledge has followed an arduous path, because *believing* and *knowing* are two cognitive activities that do not cover the same domain within the theory of knowledge. Beliefs and ideas dictate our attitude to life on an individual level, and on a collective level, they have the capacity to establish a worldview adopted by an entire society. Le Bon illustrates the characteristics of these psychosocial phenomena, which constitute the very reality of a collectivity, showing that they are generated and governed by psychological laws that are difficult to identify because of their contagious nature and the high degree of certainty with which they are endowed.

For Le Bon, the reason is at the opposite pole from faith, which is experienced as an expression of feelings and located in the area of affectivity or even mysticism. The clear result is a total independence of one from the other, and faith and knowledge are acquired by totally different methods. Despite the advance of science, the human mind is unable to free itself from the need for mysticism offered by beliefs, be they religious, political or social, because "beliefs have the miraculous faculty of creating chimeras, to which they then subject the spirits of men. Sometimes we escape the domination of tyrants, but never that of beliefs. Thousands of people are always ready to get killed to defend them."¹⁰ The inability to reconcile individual reason and collective belief provides the author with the key to interpreting certain unprecedented historical events, which seemed to have inexplicable causes: "all these beliefs, being elaborated in the unconscious, escape not only our reason, but necessarily also our will. They are the result of suggestions analogous to those that hypnotists now know how to produce."¹¹ The social mechanism put in place to protect the majority or the group, whatever its size, is materialized, in the first instance, in the rejection of any dissenting opinion. Thus, what Le Bon called "the dissolution of the individual soul into the collective soul"¹² is achieved, and by absorbing the individual into the mass we witness the disappearance of critical thinking, which definitely leads to a spiritual and moral regression of the whole society.

¹⁰ Gustave Le Bon, *Opinions and Beliefs*, translation, foreword and notes by dr. Leonard Gavrilu, Editura Stiintifica, Bucharest, 1995, p. 167.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 131.

The collective mind acts on the members of the collective through the valves provided by the unconscious in an invisible way, and only very strong personalities have the ability to form their own opinions, while the majority has to constantly rely on beliefs generated by the social environment, which become cognitive and behavioural benchmarks. By dissociating the elements generating beliefs, the author will prove that they are contained in the unconscious human side and appear only under the influence of affective and mystical elements, independent of reason and will.

In his view, beliefs are like a living organism, which has certain phases of evolution, but they also need a favourable environment to maintain themselves. The twentieth century had become that period in human history when there was a shift from faith in God to faith in the boundless power of the human being, a power given exclusively by reason, so that "having become political faith, religious faith has not changed much. The belief in miracles, the mystical worship of supernatural powers remained the same. Etatist providence inherited the old divine providence."¹³ The reality of the 20th century showed that no other historical epoch has proven to be the fertile ground for so many political and social beliefs, and the author dwells on the mechanism of formation and establishment of the new ideologies, which showed a strong religious character, noting that "socialist dogmas borrowed from the early Christians, along with their mysticism, the need for equality, altruism and hatred of the rich"¹⁴, because "the apostles of the socialist faith also have the fiery and prophetic tone of the early defenders of Christianity."¹⁵

The vast field of faith, from religious to political, social or moral, is generated and maintained by the human being's primary need to believe in something, the only cognitive activity that can interpret its reality. Although knowledge, through scientific advancement, is the fundamental element in the constitution of the progress of our civilization, the universe of beliefs has its laws and its logic through the power to create a vision of the world and to sow hope in the soul, through the illusions it raises. If for the acquisition of knowledge, man is subject to eternal effort, for the possession of a belief, on the other hand, he does not have to waste the slightest effort, because it carries within it the certainty that creates the feeling of security and protection. A belief has, by definition, the character of absolute truth, and its unconscious origin forces the mass admission of a current of thought.

The human mind has a horror of doubt and, despite his moments of scepticism, man has a constant need to believe in something, be it religious, political or moral, which gives him a guide for his conduct and relieves him of uncertainty. This truth explains why one belief, which had become non-conforming, was gradually replaced by another, which acts according to the same mechanism and thus has the same effect on the collective mind. Opinions, on the other hand, are generally weaker beliefs, more or less transient, even if their genesis is of the same type as that of beliefs.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 176.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

The author establishes the mechanism generated in the collective mind by identifying the psycho-linguistic components that support the establishment and implementation of a belief: suggestion, affirmation, repetition, contagion and prestige, elements that he will analyse to show how their fusion creates beliefs that are impossible to prove or change rationally. Le Bon considers that "the vast majority of our opinions, as well as our political, religious and social beliefs, are the result of suggestions"¹⁶, and "the ways of suggesting are extremely varied (...). The word is one of the most active means. To speak is already to suggest, to assert is to suggest even more strongly, and to repeat the assertion with passion is to take the act of suggestion to the maximum."¹⁷ The statement does not need a rational basis, verifiable by common cognitive processes, but must be "short, forceful and impressive"¹⁸, but it must necessarily be accompanied by repetition in order to fulfil its role: "repeated enough, the statement ends up creating first an opinion and later a belief."¹⁹ On the other hand, mental contagion is a psychological phenomenon that immediately results in the unconscious acceptance of the current of opinions circulating on the surface of the mass, gradually spreading within it and becoming the main factor in the spread and maintenance of opinions and beliefs. This manifestation of mental life is accentuated as the means of mass communication multiply, and there is undoubtedly a standardization of thought, whereby "the individual mentality easily takes on a collective form."²⁰ Contagion, the element that helps propagate religious and political beliefs, increases exponentially with the size of the mass, and the importance of the rational disappears giving way exclusively to the unconscious side. Prestige, too, has an undeniable power, being a generator of opinions and taking individual wills under its control, because "example is a powerful form of suggestion, but to really influence it must be impressive."²¹ Example, along with prestige, are the two elements that "determine the vast majority of our opinions."²²

Another problem with beliefs is that they generate an unshakeable sense of certainty, which, over time, has led to the most dramatic changes on the stage of human history. This certainty creates a set of principles of conduct, which will be able to generate a new consciousness and implicitly a new human behaviour. But mystical certainties, whether religious or political, seem to have as their sole purpose the need to impose them on others as the supreme truths of human existence.

The mechanism of belief formation and the role of collective suggestion and contagion is based on the power to create Utopian realities designed to promise man the primary satisfaction of his need for protection, because "(...) an illusion becomes, in certain determined circumstances, strong enough to be mistaken for reality."²³ As beliefs are elaborated in the dark areas of the unconscious, they will act through mysterious forces maintained by hope: "With certainty we

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

can only say that the masses pool their feelings and not their intelligence. The contagious nature of feelings explains why people gathered together immediately take on the characteristics of a crowd. A collective soul is immediately formed, a leader and led."²⁴ The necessity of the existence of beliefs in the collective mind of any nation or collectivity is an undeniable reality, because it is on their structure that the entire social body functions, becoming a spiritual heritage that gives the whole nation the power to create a collective identity or self-consciousness.

The dynamics of opinions definitely shape and coagulate the collective mind of an age, often reflected in art, literature or science that is based on the prestige of certain theories or certain people under the relentless empire of mental contagion, because "faith seems a mental food, as necessary to the life of the spirit as material food is to the maintenance of the body. Civilized man, like the savage, could not do without this spiritual food."²⁵

Ideas and Beliefs in Ortega y Gasset's philosophical system

Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) clearly saw the seismic movements in the public life of all Europe and dedicated his entire existence to trying to change outdated mentalities, but also to warning of the immense dangers that the new ideologies proposed under the guise of the protection given to his generation. Thus, his entire social and philosophical thought is circumstantial, ready to plumb the depths of human consciousness, sensing the existence of substrata in the collective unconscious, concretized in the collective mind which, having become captive in the hands of demagogues, has assimilated a series of beliefs that are not in line with reality, beliefs that have generated a shift in the value scale throughout Western civilization.

The Spanish philosopher approaches the problem of the social from multiple perspectives in which the historical takes precedence, including political and social realities as well as mental ones and, like other great philosophers, he understands that what human beings call knowledge of reality is only the result of perceptions, which can sometimes become contagious, transforming into unshakeable beliefs. The purpose of his forays into the collective mind is to bring to the forefront critical thinking that activates true knowledge and freedom through his philosophical system, called ratiovitalism.

Ortegian ratiovitalism pursues the idea that the human being faced with his circumstances, with all that this implies, historically and mentally, both individually and collectively, has a permanent obligation to decide within himself in order to save them. The concept of *circumstance*, through his worldview explained through beliefs and ideas as singular tools for interpreting reality, became central to his philosophical system because it is history, translated through an accumulated past in the collective mind, that defines and shapes our circumstance, but which constantly forces us to transform, adapt and evolve.

The irrational and affective nature of beliefs had been partially demonstrated by analysing this phenomenon from both a philosophical and psychological perspective, but Ortega y Gasset

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

approaches the subject of ideas and beliefs from an anthropological perspective, embodied in a heritage accumulated over time and stored in the collective mind throughout history, whose first manifestation becomes the cultural aspect of society. He considers that human life, both individual and collective, is made up of a constitutive historicity, which makes the vital journey of each of us to be positioned on a certain "*historical height*", from where we must build our own project within a circumstance, necessarily under the seal of authenticity. He understands that his historical circumstance is dominated by the political aspect that invades the whole vital space, being formed by the impurities left by the lack of freedom of thought of the individual in a mass state. Circumstance is the sum of both the past and history, in a word the knowledge resulting from the experiences of our ancestors, embodied in the collective mind. All of us, whether we are talking about the whole of humanity, a nation or an individual, are born into a circumstance that is already the result of a past materialized in a ready-made toolbox through which we interpret reality.

José Ortega y Gasset approaches the problem of beliefs from the perspective of anthropological philosophy, starting from the clear distinction between knowledge based on beliefs (*knowing*) and rational knowledge based on ideas (*getting acquainted*), which he classifies as cognitive mechanisms necessary in the translation of reality or circumstance. In his work, *Ideas and Beliefs*, Ortega wrote about these two attitudes towards reality, always conditioned by doubt: "*To acquaint (conocer)* is what man does because he has fallen into doubt about something and in order to become sure of it, that is, to be acquainted"²⁶ creates his own ideas, but belief derives from *knowing (el saber)*, which "is that placing of man in front of something that is no longer an unknown, knowing precisely what he has to do with it."²⁷

The process by which an individual idea becomes a collective belief is an accumulative one, which requires society to verify for a long time the correspondence between idea and reality, through repetition that induces habit, thus certifying the installation of a belief in the collective mind. The habit of receiving an expected answer favours the emergence of a mental comfort based on certainty, which confirms that the obtained result always fits into the mold of the formulated idea. Thus, the mechanism of faith formation, in the Ortega's view, is very close to the Humean one, in the sense that it becomes the product of an idea consolidated through habit.

According to him, beliefs cannot be thought, because they act within our being, coordinating our entire existence, because "beliefs are the basis of our life, the ground on which it unfolds. Because they put in front of us what for us is reality itself. Our entire behaviour, including our intellectual behaviour, depends on our authentic belief system. In them we "*live, move and exist*". This is why we are not usually aware of them, we do not think about them, but they act latently, with implications for the way we act or think. When we truly believe in something, we have no '*idea*' of it, we simply '*count on it*'."²⁸ However, if we become conscious of a belief, in other words, if a certain belief is thought, it ceases to be a belief and loses its status of reality.

²⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, *Ideas and Beliefs and Other Essays on Philosophy*, translated from Spanish by Doina Lincu, Editura Stiintifica, Bucharest, 1999, p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 27-28.

In such a way they hold us that they are the content of our whole life without us having to think about them, constituting our own reality.

Thus, for Ortega, ideas are a product of our mind, resulting from interaction with circumstance, which reveals an always problematic and changing reality, to which man must constantly seek a solution, and the source of ideas is man's imperative need to know, to know what he can expect within his circumstance. The beliefs, on the other hand, are not a personal creation, but are the result of a collective effort, handed down over time, to translate reality, a result that each of us takes as such from our own circumstances, thus acquiring the value of certainty.

It is worth noting that, in the Spanish philosopher's view, the shape of the reality of the external world is entirely based on faith, which becomes a form of aprioric knowledge. Faith, in the view of Ortega, has not only the role of making possible the continuous effort to live, but that of giving it the security contained in the formula "*to count on*" things, which becomes a form of knowledge. Certainly, beliefs of Ortega do not have as their main function only the knowledge of reality, but they become reality itself, and the knowledge derived from beliefs is not a reflexive one, but a total knowledge in which doubt has no place. It is from beliefs that our outlook on life, attitude and worldview stems, with effects in the chaining of social and historical events in the daily life of each of us and our society as a whole. The certainty and truth of a belief must be sought in the vital environment, because *being in a belief* is a way of being in the world, a way that becomes reality and therefore a circumstantial truth, we could call it.

The Spanish philosopher understands that his era is the result of a historical crisis that he will analyse through the collective mind, through the ideas and beliefs that his generation held. Through this analysis, Ortega y Gasset tries to detail each rational or affective mechanism that led to this historical reality in an attempt to find its origin and algorithm, and develops the hermeneutical and epistemological aspects of *historical reason* by which he tries to understand human life as a sum of the self with circumstance in a permanent connection with reality. Ortega will show that there is a pattern of historical crises in which reality has always been interpreted through collective beliefs and every historical crisis is based on a radical change, a revolution that only occurs through the appearance of *doubt* in the mental layer that had provided stability to previous generations. The result of a historical crisis has always been a profound transformation of the world through the establishment of historical periods in which tolerance is lacking and extremism takes hold.

The 20th century has remained in collective memory as the century of the loss of individual and collective consciousness, of the suspension of rationality and the homogenisation of individuals, and in his seminal work, *Revolt of the Masses* (1930), Ortega y Gasset analyses historical realities by offering saving solutions brought about by the activation of reason to acquire individual and collective consciousness. Seen from this perspective, *The Revolt of the Masses* becomes an analysis of a scheme that can be applied to any historical crisis, which Ortega y Gasset had intuited from the beginning of his career as a social pedagogue of a nation and an entire generation, in earlier works such as *Invertebrate Spain* (1921) or *The Theme of*

Our Time (1923), an idea that he continued and developed later in works such as *About Galileo. Outline of crises* (1933), *Ideas and beliefs: on historical reason* (1940), *History as a System* (1941) or *Man and people*, published posthumously.

The work *About Galileo. Outline of crises* is an aid to the interpretation of historical events that have induced major changes in the internal structure of the human being by recalling the historical moment of the trial of the scientist Galileo Galilei, in order to demonstrate the fracture that occurred at that time in the theocentric faith, which induced the beginning of the Modern Age, but also the beginning of the present crisis. Starting from the moment of the great scientist's accusation, the Spanish philosopher considers it of extreme importance to analyse the events that allowed the emergence and development of rational thought, initiated with the "revolt of the sciences", in the face of the previous domination of religious thought. He also studies the evolution of Christianity as a form of life, questioning the necessity of its emergence through historical justification, and its transformation into the central element of Western culture. By commemorating this historical figure, Ortega wanted to commemorate the three hundred years since the great scientist was condemned before the Inquisitorial Tribunal, showing the irreparable rupture that occurred in the religious beliefs of those times and the undeniable realities that scientific discoveries have demonstrated, thus making way for modern thought. The personality of Galileo Galilei is, in fact, the symbol of a new faith, that in pure reason, but also in the power and self-determination of the human being. The work details the functioning of beliefs which, through their contagious nature, constitute the mental substrate of generations accumulated and transmitted over time through which the individual receives vital landmarks and insights into realities of all kinds (historical, political, religious and individual). However, when *doubt* sets in, these beliefs lose their validity, and the human being seeks to replace them with others because otherwise he would no longer be able to translate his reality, because "to live is already to be forced to interpret your life. Always, irrevocably, at every moment we find ourselves with certain radical beliefs about the things around us and about us among them: this set of firm beliefs makes our chaotic circumstance the unity of a world or universe."²⁹

For Ortega y Gasset, individual and collective beliefs define a reality, that of circumstance, and their undermining or loss leads to a sense of disillusionment and wandering, forcing human beings to make projections, to accept empty promises promising an Edenic time, and the effects of these mental changes are reflected in cultural forms, induced by historical crises. He develops on the theory of history the theory of generations necessarily interwoven with the set of beliefs and ideas that make up *the vital sensibility* of a historical period, noting that "each life is immersed in a particular circumstance of a collective life - . And this collective, unknown life that each of us encounters has its own world, its own repertoire of beliefs that, like it or not, the individual is forced to depend on. Moreover, this world of collective beliefs - which

²⁹ „vivir es ya encontrarse forzado a interpretar nuestra vida. Siempre, irremisiblemente, en cada instante nos hallamos con determinadas convicciones radicales sobre lo que son las cosas y nosotros entre ellas: esta articulación de convicciones últimas hacen de nuestra circunstancia caótica la unidad de un mundo o universo.” (José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas*, Tomo V (1933-1941), *En torno a Galileo, Esquema de las crisis*, Sexta Edición, Revista de Occidente, Madrid, 1964, p. 24.)

are usually called "*ideas of the age*", "*spirit of the time*" - have a special character that the world of individual beliefs does not have, (...) the ideas of its age, its beliefs are held by an anonymous subject, which is nobody in particular, which is society³⁰ because "most of my world, my beliefs, come from that collective vital repertoire."³¹ This observation, seemingly so simple, humble even, gives us an insight into the changes that have occurred in the collective mind over time, leading to the emergence of historical crises.

In his work *History as a System*, Ortega y Gasset stated that "there is always a collective state of belief. This social belief may or may not coincide with how this or that individual feels. Decisive in this matter is that, whatever the faith of each of us, we find before us constituted, collectively established, with social validity in short, a state of faith."³²

In the same work, the Spanish philosopher goes on to analyse the collective mind in an attempt to understand the diagnosis of the state of drift and uncertainty that has led to the sense of dehumanisation felt throughout the continent. He recommends the adoption of a *historical reasoning* to the detriment of the physical-mathematical reasoning that had settled in the collective mind as the only way of interpreting reality, because "the diagnosis of a human existence - of a man, of a people, of an epoch - must begin by identifying the repertoire of his beliefs. They are the soil of our lives. That's why they say the man is in them. Beliefs are what truly constitute the state of man. I have called them "*repertoire*" to indicate that the plurality of beliefs in which a man, a people or an epoch exists never has a completely logical articulation."³³ However, this collective vision of reality through the totality of beliefs transmitted from generation to generation, from one epoch to another, can turn into a historical crisis through the antagonism that the creeping of doubt brings, which causes the change of beliefs.

The Spanish philosopher aims to use philosophy to awaken the consciousness of the dormant spirit of an entire generation and, like Socrates, tries to prepare a new elite, capable of thinking

³⁰ „que cada vida está sumergida en una determinada circunstancia de una vida colectiva -. Y esta vida colectiva, anónima, con la cual se encuentra cada uno de nosotros tiene también su mundo, su repertorio de convicciones con las cuales, quiera o no, el individuo tiene que contar. Es más, ese mundo de las creencias colectivas – que se suele llamar «las ideas de la época», «espíritu del tiempo» - tiene un peculiar carácter que no tiene el mundo de las creencias individuales, (...) las ideas del tiempo, las convicciones ambientes son tenidas por un sujeto anónimo, que no es nadie en particular, que es la sociedad.” (*Ibidem*, p. 35.)

³¹ „la mayor porción de mi mundo, de mis creencias, proviene de ese repertorio colectivo.” (*Ibidem*, p. 36.)

³² „hay siempre un estado colectivo de creencias. Esta fe social puede coincidir o no con la que tal o cual individuo siente. Lo decisivo en este asunto es que, cualquiera sea la creencia de cada uno de nosotros, encontramos ante nosotros constituido, establecido colectivamente, con vigencia social en suma, un estado de fe.” (José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas*, tomo VI (1941-1946), *Historia como sistema*, sexta edición, Revista de Occidente, Madrid, 1964, pp. 18-19.)

³³ „el diagnóstico de una existencia humana – de un hombre, de un pueblo, de una época – tiene que comenzar filiendo el repertorio de sus convicciones. Son éstas el suelo de nuestra vida. Por eso se dice que en ellas el hombre está. Las creencias son lo que verdaderamente constituye el estado del hombre. Las he llamado «repertorio» para indicar que la pluralidad de creencias en que un hombre, un pueblo o una época está no posee nunca una articulación plenamente lógica.” (*Ibidem*, p. 14.)

for itself in accordance with the spirit of its time, in other words, capable of acquiring both individual and collective self-awareness.

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that there is a correspondence between the two philosophers analysed within the concept of the collective mind. David Hume brings faith to the closest form of knowledge of reality, identifying it with our impressions or perceptions and placing it in the realm of the affective by excluding the rational, while Ortega y Gasset considers it to be the highest form of knowledge through which we identify so deeply with reality translated exclusively through beliefs. The Scottish philosopher makes perception the starting point for understanding the workings of the human intellect, thus fulfilling the premise he started from in constructing his reasoning to explain "the nature and principles of the human mind."³⁴ The Ortegian approach is also very close to the perspective of the psychologist Gustave Le Bon who, after a thorough analysis, managed to understand the exclusively affective and irrational character of beliefs based on a series of combined actions acting on the collective mind under the auspices of contagion. The originality of the Spanish philosopher lies in the fact that he approaches the theme of ideas and beliefs from an anthropological perspective, interpreted through the vital sensitivity of the generations that make up each era. Starting from the launching of the concept of the *spirit of time* made up of the ideas and beliefs of a generation, which becomes the main ingredient of circumstance, Ortega y Gasset concludes that important changes in the structure of human life depend on the change in the way of thinking of the surrounding world, more than the change of characters and other psychological conditions, because "each generation represents an essential, non-transferable and irreparable piece of historical time, of the vital trajectory of humanity."³⁵

Whatever the approach to beliefs, from a philosophical, psychological or anthropological perspective, the conclusion is undeniable, all thinkers have shown the precariousness of the human spirit despite the belief that it has unlimited powers given by reason. Certainly, intelligence has undeniably developed, but human nature has ultimately remained the same, and the belief in a certain thing creates a magical power through the hope it sprinkles with illusion that becomes stronger than reality itself.

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³⁴ David Hume, *On Ideas*, All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, p. 16.

³⁵ „Cada generación representa un trozo esencial, intransferible e irreparable del tiempo histórico, de la trayectoria vital de la humanidad.” (*Ibidem*, p. 45.)

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