INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s thought is to focus on life as the fundamental ground for a reflection which can be understood as a phenomenology of life.

The return to life was also the aim of philosophical approaches such as vitalism and some forms of irrationalism which developed, as is known, in the second part of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, these approaches emphasized the vital phenomenon at a high price: often relinquishing reason in favour of intuition as the cardinal basis of philosophy. Immersed in a suffocating ambiance where a dogmatic, ‘closed’ reason excluded any possibility of considering the non-rational experience seriously, vitalist and irrationalist thinkers sought for a philosophical path away from the nineteenth century’s scientistic and positivist rationalism. They considered reason to be an enemy of life. This is the reason why the Spanish predecessor of existentialism, Miguel de Unamuno, contemplates reality, at the beginning of twentieth century, as being sundered into two opposing and irreconcilable realms:

Any position of persistent agreement and harmony between reason and life, between philosophy and religion, is impossible. The tragic history of human thought is not anything different from a struggle between reason and life; the first pledging itself to rationalize the latter, causing it to resign itself to mortality; the latter, life, pledging itself to vitalize reason, compelling it to function as a support for its vital yearnings. History of philosophy, inseparable from history of religion, consists precisely in this conflict.¹

Unamuno, Dilthey, Ortega y Gasset and even Husserl in some respects, were confronted with this conflict, and they all tried to rediscover life as the root of true philosophical reflection or as its fundamental theme. Nevertheless, as they undertook this task they followed different paths. Unamuno practically renounces systematic discursive reflection and centers on an original poetic expression as the fundamental means for apprehending the complex and profound experience of life. Dilthey poses
the problem in adequate terms – in fact, his central theme was the creation of a true philosophy of life – but he is far from solving it through a rational procedure. That is the reason why Husserl opposed his project of philosophy as *strenge Wissenschaft* to Dilthey's *Weltanschauung*, a world-outlook in which philosophy was reduced as much it was by Unamuno. For Husserl the fundamental aspiration of philosophy is that of translating profound suppositions or intuitions – expressed by Unamuno by means of poetic images – into unequivocal rational forms, but these supposition are ultimately rooted in the Life-World. Ortega y Gasset goes even further in this attempt to establish life as the radical reality in which is rooted all other reality, and any serious philosophical reflection as well. He tries to resolve the conflict between reason and life, an approach contrary to Unamuno's, given that the latter explicitly abjures any kind of synthesis, assuming that precisely conflict is the essential feature of human life. Ortega partially agrees with him, in recognizing that life is the fundamental theme of Philosophy. But he looks for a harmonious solution by means of his concept of “vital reason” and his theory of “ratio-vitalism” (*raciovitalismo*). He attempts to integrate rationalism and vitalism by assuming that human life is the “radical reality”, the basis for any other reality. In this sense, reason is not something alien to life, as it is for Unamuno. On the contrary, it has the crucial function of helping the human being in his task of orienting himself in the world, a task which constitutes human life in its own process of being, and is indispensable for dealing with the world. Philosophy is thus an activity rooted in human life, but inevitably rational.

This is also the starting point for Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka: focusing on life without relinquishing philosophical rationality. Tymieniecka recognizes that she shares many of Unamuno's and Ortega's intuitions, although she explains that her approach concerning the three main points of her phenomenology of life differ from the perspective of the Spanish thinkers.

Although both of these thinkers emphasize in many ways that it is the human being who creates either his own *circunstancia* and/or his own legend – that is, the meaning of his existence – an emphasis which puts man's inventiveness to the fore, they did not bring forth the essentially creative nature of the human being. The crucial difference between my phenomenology of life and the thought of both of these great thinkers lies in my exfoliating in its full extent the creative/inventive essence of the human being and recognizing it consequently as the Archimedean point for the phenomenology of life. With this full exfoliation and philosophical thematization of the creative nature of