Spanish Philosophers Termed ‘Existential’

By ROBERT ZELENSKA

Wednesday evening, September 25, Dr. Julian Marías, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Madrid gave a lecture on the backgrounds of contemporary Spanish philosophy. He followed Wednesday’s lecture with a seminar conducted Thursday afternoon, and gave his concluding lecture in Spanish on Friday evening.

“There is no formal Philosophical School of Madrid,” said Dr. Marías, “nor is there a continuous sequence of philosophical movements.” Rather, there appear individual philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno y Jugo, each with his own, relatively self-contained philosophical system.

THE IMPORTANT creative genius of the early part of this century was Unamuno. Though not a technical philosopher himself, his ideas on reality are intimately involved in the existentialist structure, which characterizes modern Spanish philosophy. For Unamuno the task of philosophy was to investigate life and history, and not engage in the explanation and reduction of first principles, since that is the task of science. When science begins to resolve the patterns of behavior, the object itself is often lost.

Like Bergson, Unamuno believed that reason is useless in knowing what life is. The philosopher’s search is for the suitable method by which life may be known.

Unamuno insisted upon an imaginative reality. His novels and plays dealt with the existential problem of life, whose resolution was to be found in intuition and direct experience, rather than in rational analysis.

Man is not a thing; philosophy errs when it asks “What is man?” The question, “Who is man?” should be asked. This question is answerable in terms of man’s creative capacity, and can be answered by each man, only for himself.

ORTEGA CONTINUED the task of understanding initiated by Unamuno. Writing up into the middle part of this century, Ortega is perhaps the most important of all Spanish philosophers. He approaches a “radical reality” independent of the observer’s previous conceptions, yet dependent on his momentary observations of objects and ideas. “The radical reality,” states Marías, is “I and my circun- am doing something with things; thus life is taken in a biographical rather than in a biological sense.”

Reason is bound to life, binding the moments of life to one another. The mechanism of life is to think a child, or a madman borrows reason from others; they cannot live by themselves.

When a people stops thinking its life becomes narrow, and the people dies. This is the “history of stupidity.” Biological man is always the same.

THINGS ARE the social interpretations of reality. The meaning of a term is determined by its use. Objects have structure in themselves and their uses are thus limited to a finite set of actions. Vital reason is the addition of reason to life. Without it there is no way that man can relate to the universe.

Thus Dr. Marías was given to define philosophy as “the search for a radical certitude concerning radical reality, that is, my life.”