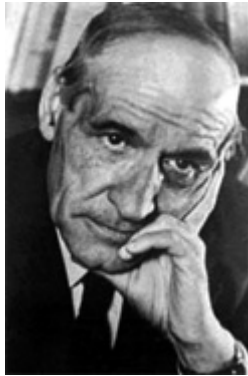


“Man, as Project,” by Ortega y Gasset—trans. Samuel P. Moody

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José Ortega y Gasset, Nueva Acropolis

About the author. . .

After receiving his doctorate at the Complutense University of Madrid, José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) read philosophy in Germany, most notably at the University of Marburg where he studied under the neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen. Returning to Madrid, he taught philosophy at the Complutense University of Madrid. He wrote, edited, and published work in cultural and political thought until the devastating eruption of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Having served as a member of Parliament and a civil governor, Ortega left Spain, not to return until 1948 when he established with Julián Marías The Institute of Humanities and sparked the resurgence of contemporary Spanish

philosophy. In his *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Ortega writes, “I am I and my circumstances”¹ the world in which I live is “the other half of my personality.” The activity of living is a synthesis of self and the world. Unlike most philosophers, Ortega, himself, lived his project; his life is a vital part of the historical drama of world events in the first half of the twentieth century.

About the work...

In his essay “Meditación de la técnica” appearing in *Ensimismamiento y alteración*,² from which this reading is excerpted, Ortega seeks to answer the question, “¿Qué es la técnica?”³ Human beings, unlike other living things, are not limited by natural circumstance because they can, so to speak, reform nature through technical invention and accomplishment. The essence of being human is this adaptation of an environment to the individual—not the adaptation of the individual to the environment. The attainment of such practical technicality is not based on the instinct to live so much as it is based on the necessity to live well, even though these extra-natural ideals of well-being develop in different ways in different historical periods. Since man’s being diverges from his nature, to live authentically, Ortega writes, each person must uniquely construct his life’s aspirations through “historical reason.” An authentic life is one where a person becomes his mission in life; an inauthentic (and consequently immoral) life is a life where a person avoids his vital project by taking refuge in happenstance.

From the reading...

“Could man be a type of novelist of himself...?”

1. “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia.” José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas*, 1914, (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), I, 319.
2. José Ortega y Gasset, *Ensimismamiento y alteración* Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1939. 157 pp. Also in *Obras completas*, 1933-1941, (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), V, 319.
3. In all translations of which we are aware, this question is translated as “What is technology?” Literally, the question is better put as “What is technique?” although this translation is somewhat misleading also. Ortega’s use of the term *técnica* is perhaps best viewed in the phenomenological sense of technological ideation and practice, or perhaps simply the range of human action in construction of a project of life: man’s “technique of beingness” beyond biological adaptation to circumstances. *Eds.*

Ideas of Interest from “Meditación de la técnica”

1. Clarify as carefully as possible Ortega’s distinction between the innate or biological nature of human beings and the invented or extra-natural life of human beings. Does this distinction rest on the difference of man’s self-awareness?
2. Explain what Ortega means when he states human beings are given “the abstract possibility, but not the reality, of existence”? How does Ortega define “existence”?
3. Why does Ortega think that the transcendent or extra-natural aspect of a human being is not self-aware but is authentic, whereas the natural or biological aspect is self-aware but is not authentic? What do you think Ortega means by “authenticity” in this regard?
4. Why does Ortega reject the term “spirit” to denote the transcendent or extra-natural aspect of human existence?
5. How does Ortega distinguish between human beings and all other things in the universe? What does Ortega say it *means* for a human being to exist? Explain this meaning in terms of the “constitutive instability of being.”
6. What does Ortega characterize as the immediate and present crisis facing contemporary man, *i.e.*, the “sickness of our age”?
7. What does Ortega mean when he writes that man is a secondary *causa sui*? Analyze Ortega’s “vital program” for life in terms of the possibilities of being. What is the one limit to authentic being?
8. Explain Ortega’s conception of an individual’s life in terms of his historical dialectic of a program of life. What does he mean when he writes, “man goes about accumulating being.”?

The Reading Selection from “Meditación de la técnica”

Meditation on Technique

I am now to consider how meditation on technique has us come across the mystery of man’s existence, just as we come across the seed in a fruit. Be-

cause man is a being forced, if he wants to exist, to exist immersed in nature; he is an animal. Zoologically, life means everything that must be done in order to exist in nature. But man arranges things in order to reduce to a minimum such a life, in order not to have to do all that the animal does. In the void left by advancement beyond the animal state, man vacillates in a series of non-biological duties which are imposed upon him not by nature, but which are invented by himself. And it is precisely this invented life, invented just as one invents a novel or a play, that man calls human life, well-being. Human life, then, transcends natural reality. It is not innate to him as falling is to the rock or the rigid repertoire of natural acts—eating, escaping, nesting, *etc.*—is to the animal, but rather he does them to himself, and this doing so ends up being the invention of human life. How? Human life: could it therefore be, in its specific dimension. . . a product of imagination? Could man be a type of novelist of himself, one who forges the fantastic figure of a personality with its unreal types of pastimes and which, in order to obtain life, does all that he does, namely: is he a technician? . . .

From the reading. . .

“[B]eing the project is not being the ‘idea’”

Man’s existence, his being in the world, is not a passive one, but rather it has, by obligation to fight constantly against the difficulties that oppose it being in the world. Observe carefully: to the rock is given its existence, it does not have to fight to be what it is: rock in the landscape. But for man, being means having to fight incessantly with the difficulties which his surroundings present to him, therefore it means having to make existence for himself at every moment. We could say, then, that to man is given the abstract possibility, but not the reality, of existence. He must conquer reality for himself, minute by minute. Man, not only economically but also metaphysically, has to earn his living. And all of this, to what end? Evidently—which is no more than saying the same with different words—because man’s being and nature’s being do not completely coincide. Evidently, man’s being possesses the strange quality of being partly kindred to nature, but partly not, which is at the same time both natural and extra-natural, a type of ontological centaur, of which a half portion is immersed, of course, in nature, but the other part transcends it. Dante would say that he is in it as boats are tied to the marina; with half the keel on the beach and the other half on the coast. The natural element is self-aware: there is no question about it. What’s more, in the same way, he does not feel that it is his authentic being. On the other hand, his extra-natural component is not, of course, and quite simply, self-aware, but rather it consists, in the meantime, in a mere aspiration of being; a life project. This is what we feel to be our true being, what we call our personality, our ego.

This extra-natural and anti-natural portion of our being should not be interpreted in the sense of the old spiritualism. I’m not interested in little angels, or in that which has been called spirit, a confused idea which connotes *magic* undertones.

From the reading...

“Man, not only economically but also metaphysically, has to earn his living.”

If you reflect a little on this you will see that that which we call life is nothing but the zeal to undertake a certain project or program of existence. And the *ego* of each one of us is only this imaginary program. Everything that you do is in service of this program. And if you are now listening to me it is because you believe, in one way or another, that doing so serves you to come to be, privately or socially, this *ego* that each one of you feels the need and desire to be. Man is, then, above all, something that has neither corporeal nor spiritual reality; he is such a program to be; therefore, he is something of which he is not yet, but that which he aspires to be. It can be said that there can be no program if someone doesn’t think of one, if there is, therefore, an idea, mind, soul or whatever it may be called. I cannot discuss this in depth because I would have to give a philosophy course. I can only make the following observation; although the program or project of being a great financier must be thought of as an idea, *being* this project is not being the “idea.” I can think of this idea without difficulty and, nonetheless, I am very far from being this project.

I will now consider the extraordinary and unequalled condition of being human, a quality which makes him unique in the universe. Note how strange and upsetting the case is. An entity whose being consists, not in what it is, but in what it is not yet, a being which consists in not yet being. Everything else in the universe consists in what it is already. The star is what it already is; nothing more and nothing less. Everything whose form of being consists in being what it already is and in which, therefore, of course, whose potentiality coincides with its reality; that which can be with that which, effectively, already is, is what we call a *thing*. The thing’s being has already been given and achieved.

In this sense, man is not a thing but a pretension; pretension to be one thing or another. Each epoch, people, and individual modulates general human pretension in a different way.

I think that now all the terminology of the radical phenomenon which is our life, is understood. *Existence* for us, means finding ourselves suddenly having to carry out the pretension that we find ourselves in particular circumstances.

We are not permitted to choose beforehand the world or circumstances in which we must live but rather, we find ourselves, without our prior consent, submerged in our surroundings, in a world of the here and the now. This world or circumstance in which I find myself added is not only the surroundings in which I find myself, but also my body and soul. I am not my body; I find myself within it and with it I must live, be it in health or in sickness. But nor am I my soul: I also find myself with it and must use it in order to live, although, because it has little will and no memory, at times it does me a disservice. Body and soul are things, and I am not a thing, but a drama; a fight to become that which I must be. The pretension or program that we are, with its particular profile, presses upon the world around us, and the world responds to this pressure by accepting or resisting it, that is, facilitating our pretension in some facets and making it more difficult in others...

From the reading...

“[M]an is not a thing but a pretension; pretension to be one thing or another.”

That is how it can be explained that the world is somewhat different in each age and for each man. Faced with our personal profile; a dynamic and determined profile which oppresses circumstance, circumstance responds with another particular profile formed of peculiar means and difficulties. The world of the merchant is evidently not the same as that of the poet. Where the latter encounters difficulty, the former gets by comfortably, that which is repugnant to the latter makes the former rejoice. Of course the world of each will have many elements in common: those which respond to the generic pretension that is man as a species. More precisely because man’s being is not given to him but rather is, at that exact moment, pure imaginary possibility, the human species has an instability and variability which is incomparable with that of the animals. Summing up, men are enormously unequal, despite that which the sponsors of equality of the last two centuries affirmed and those of archaic mentality of the present continue to affirm...

Life as a Fabrication of Itself

In this perspective, human life, the existence of man, appears consisting formally, essentially, in a problem. For the rest of the beings in the universe, existence is not a problem—because *existence* means validity, achievement of an essence—; for example, “being a bull” verifies itself; it happens. Now, the bull, if he exists, exists already being a bull. On the other hand, for man, existence isn’t simply existing as the man he is, but merely the possibility of

such and the drive to achieve it. Who among you is actually someone who feels that he should be, that he must be, that which he desires to be? Differently, then, from everything else, man, upon existing, has to make his own existence, has to resolve the practical problem of achieving the program in which he, at any given moment consists. From that, we can deduce that our lives are pure work and inexorable duty. The life that each one of us leads is something which is not given to us already made, awarded, but rather something which must be done. Life gives us much to do; but in addition, it is nothing but the duty that is given to each one of us, and a duty, let me repeat, is not a thing, but rather an active entity, in the sense that it transcends everything else. Because in the case of the other beings, one may suppose that something or someone that already is, acts; but here we are dealing precisely with the fact that in order to be, one must act, which is nothing but such acting. Man, whether he wants to or not, must make himself. This last expression is not completely inappropriate. It points out that man, in the very root of his essence, finds himself, before any other state, in that of a technician. For man, life consists in, of course and above all, making an effort to bring into existence that which is not. That is, he, himself, takes advantage of what he has in order to do so. Summing up: it is production. With this I mean to say that life is not fundamentally as it has been believed to be for many centuries: contemplation, thinking, theory. No. It is production, construction, and only because these require such; therefore afterwards, and not beforehand, it is thinking, theory and science. Living... is finding the means to achieve the program that one is...

The Sickness of Our Age

Perhaps the basic sickness of our age is a crisis of desires, and because of this all of the astonishing potential of our technique⁴would seem not to serve us at all...

From the reading...

“For man, life consists in, of course and above all, making an effort to be that which is not.”

Because this is the incredible situation to which we have arrived and which confirms the interpretation that we sustain here: the estate, that is, the repertoire available to the modern man, is not only incomparably superior to that which he has ever had at his disposition... but we have the clear knowledge that they are so incredibly abundant, and yet, there is an enormous uneasiness

4. *I.e.*, technique in “reforming” nature. *Eds.*

“*Man, as Project,*” by Ortega y Gasset—trans. Samuel P. Moody

which consists in the fact that contemporary man does not know what to be: he lacks imagination to invent the plot that in which his own life consists...

This is to say that in this day and age man, in essence, is upset precisely by the consciousness of his basic limitlessness. And perhaps this contributes to his not knowing who he is, because finding himself, in principle, capable of doing anything imaginable, he then does not know practically what something that is, is...

Of Historical Reasoning as a New Revelation

At every moment in my life various possibilities open up before me. If I do *this*, I will be *A* at a given moment. If I do *something else*, I will be *B*. At this moment the reader may cease or may continue the reading of my writings. And though the importance of this essay may be slight, according to whether the reader does *this* or *something else*, the reader will become *A* or *B*; he will have made of himself an *A* or a *B*. Man is a self-making being, a being which traditional ontology only encounters when, concluding and refusing to understand the *causa sui*⁵ with the difference that the *causa sui* only needed to exert itself in being the *causa* of itself, but not in determining what itself it were to cause. It has, therefore, a previously determined *itself*, invariable and consistent with, for example, infinity.



Madrid: La plaza mayor, Library of Congress

But man must not only make himself, but also must confront also the most serious of undertakings: determining *that which* he is going to be. This is a

5. *Causa sui* means literally “cause of itself” or “self-caused.” *Eds.*

secondary *causa sui*. By a non-chance coincidence, the doctrine of the living being only finds in the tradition certain concepts of general utility; those which the doctrine of the living being attempted to consider. If the reader decides to continue reading, he will be doing so at the last moment, because this decision is that which best behooves the general program which he has adopted for his life and therefore the determined man which he has resolved to make of himself. This vital program is the *ego* of each man, which has been chosen from among various possibilities of being, which in each moment open up before him.

Regarding these possibilities of being it is important to comment upon the following:

First: That they are not given to me, rather I must invent them for myself, be it in an original manner or by transmission of other men, even in the ambience of my life. I plan projects of being and doing in light of the circumstances. Circumstance is the only thing that I find which is given to me. It is too often forgotten that man without imagination is impossible without the capacity of inventing for himself a life-figure, and of idealizing the person which he will become. Man is the novelist of himself, be he original or a plagiarist.

From the reading...

“Body and soul are things, and I am not a thing, but a drama; a fight to become that which I must be.”

Second: I must choose among these possibilities. Therefore, I am free. But understand well: I am free *by obligation*. I am free whether I want to be or not. Liberty is not an activity exercised by a being which, apart from and before exercising it, already has a fixed being. Being free means lacking constitutive identity, not pertaining to a determined being, being able to be something other than that which one was, and not being able to adhere oneself finally and eternally on any determined being. The only thing that must be fixed and stable in the free being is constitutive instability...

Life's Program—Historical Dialectic

Man invents for himself a life program, a static figure of being, which responds sufficiently to the difficulties presented by circumstance. He rehearses this life-figure and tries to fulfill this imaginary *persona* which he has resolved to be. He sets out very willing and hopeful in this endeavour and experiences it to the utmost, meaning that he ends up *believing* profoundly that this *persona* is his true being. But upon experiencing this, the insuffi-

ciencies; the limits of this vital program, appear. He doesn't resolve all of his difficulties and produces new ones. The figure of life appeared first in front, by his luminous face. The excitement, enthusiasm and delight of promise are due to this. Later, his limitation is shown: his back. Then man plans another vital program. But this second program is conformed, not only in light of circumstance, but in consideration of the first as well. It is aspired that the new project avoids the inconvenience of the first. Therefore in the second, the first, which is conserved in order to be avoided, continues to act. Inexorably, man avoids being that which he once was. In the second project of being, in the second profound experience, a third project is forged in light of the second and of the first, and so on successively. Man “goes about being” and “un-being” by living. He goes about accumulating being—the past goes about forming a being in the dialectic series of his experiences. This dialectic isn't of logical, but rather of historical reason—the *Realdialektik* about which, somewhere⁶ in his papers, Dilthey—the man to whom we most owe our idea of life and who, for my tastes is the most important thinker of the second half of the nineteenth century—dreamed.

From the reading..

“The life that each one of us leads is something which is not given to us already made, awarded, but rather something which must be done... Man, whether he wants to or not, must make himself.”

In what does this dialectic, intolerant of the easy anticipations of logical dialectic, consist? Ah! That is what one must figure out about the facts. One must figure out which is the series, which are the states, and in what the nexus between the successive states consists. This investigation is that which one could call history, if history proposed to find this out, that is, to convert itself into historical reason.

There it is, awaiting our study: man's authentic “being,” stretched out along its past. Man is that which has happened to him, that which he has done. Other things could have happened to him, other things he could have done, but I affirm that that which has truly happened to him and that which he has done constitutes an inexorable trajectory of experiences which he carries on his back, just as the vagabond carries the pouch with his belongings. This pilgrim of being, this substantial emigrant, is man. For this reason it makes no sense to put limits on that which man is capable of doing. In this principal infinity of possibilities, characteristic of those without nature, there is only one limit: that of the past. Life experiences restrict man's future. If we do not

6. William Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1935), VII, 287-288. *Eds.*

“*Man, as Project*,” by Ortega y Gasset—trans. Samuel P. Moody

know what is to be, we know what will not be. Life is lived in view of the past.

In summary: *man, who is without nature, does have...history*. In other words: that which nature is to things, history—as *res gestae*⁷—is to man.

From the reading...

“... that which we call life is nothing but the zeal to undertake a certain project or program of existence.”

Related Ideas

1. *The Expository Philosopher* (http://www.ferratermora.org/expo_ort.html).

Ortega Y Gasset. Two selections from José Ferrater Mora’s book *Ortega y Gasset* are provided by Sandra H. Conder, Marta Masergas, and P. Cohn in honor of Josep Ferrater Mora. The first selection outlines three stages of Ortega’s philosophical formation and the second discusses Ortega’s characterization of human life as biographical drama.

2. *José Ortega y Gasset* (<http://kirjasto.sci.fi/grasset.htm>).

Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Petri Liukkonen’s *Books and Writers* Webpage summarizes the life and works of Ortega in the historical context of the social and political movements in the early twentieth century.

3. *What is Knowledge?* (<http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=1225>)

Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert provides a summary review of Ortega’s anti-Cartesian existentialism, his political activity, and an outline of his personalized view of the historical nature of knowledge.

4. *George Milkowski’s “Thoughts on Technology / Ortega y Gasset”* (<http://www.cs.brown.edu/people/rbb/TechEd/TechEd.gml.html>)

Technology and Education Seminar: Readings. George Milkowski’s two paragraph concise statement of Ortega’s “Thoughts on Technology” is

7. “Things done” as opposed to “somethings said or thought”; or the “deeds, themselves.” *Eds.*

“Man, as Project,” by Ortega y Gasset—trans. Samuel P. Moody

accompanied with a number of critical questions raised about that work with respect to Ortega’s definition of nature and technology, and the possibility of the addition of a fourth technological period. The notes were prepared for Roger Blumberg’s Technology and Education Seminar at Brown University in 1998 from Ortega’s essay “Thoughts on Technology,” Helene Weyl’s translation in *Toward a Philosophy of History*, rpt. 1961 (New York: Norton, 1941).

From the reading...

“Man is the novelist of himself, be he original or a plagiarist.”



Ortega’s home in Madrid, philosophy.lander.edu

Topics Worth Investigating

1. Ortega distinguishes between the biological nature and the extra-natural aspect of man by describing the latter as the “well-being” of human life. Discuss whether or not Ortega would agree that the invented, extra-natural life might result in despair rather than human well-being in some instances since human beings have no external standard by which to judge the effects of their inventions and cannot know the future ad-

vantageous or deleterious consequences of those inventions. As Sartre writes, “. . . [N]o God, no scheme, can adapt the world and its possibilities to my will. When Descartes said, ‘Conquer yourself rather than the world, he meant essentially the same thing.’ that ‘. . . we should act without hope.’”⁸

2. Ortega raises the question whether man is a type of novelist of his life. Do you think he means this analogy should be taken literally or do you think he intends this analogy to be thought of as a literary metaphor? In what (similar) respects is man the novelist of his life and in what (dissimilar) respects is man not the novelist of his life? Is Ortega’s notion of the extra-natural aspect of human life, “man’s being the novelist of his life” related to André Maurois’ insight of objective-subjective dimensions of human existence revealed in this quotation: “It is in this impossibility of attaining to a synthesis of the inner life and the outward that the inferiority of the biographer to the novelist lies?”⁹
3. First, compare Ortega’s description (in 1939) of human life as “nothing but the zeal to undertake a certain project or program of existence. . . he is such a program to be.” with Jean-Paul Sartre’s statement (in 1945) that “Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life.”¹⁰ Similarly, consider that Ortega writes in this essay, “Man, whether he wants to or not, must make himself,” whereas Sartre writes, “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.”¹¹

Second, both philosophers recognize that choosing not to choose is a choice. In this regard, compare Ortega’s characterization of freedom as
...

I must choose among these possibilities. Therefore I am free. But understand well: I am free by obligation.

with Sartre’s version that ...

We are alone, with no excuses. . . . [M]an is condemned to be free.¹²

4. George Milkowski raises the following question with regard to Ortega’s definition of nature and the extra-natural aspect of man:

Gasset’s definition of nature *vis a vis* man is extremely narrow and therefore his definition of technology as it pertains to man is extremely broad.

8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Citadel, 1957), 29-30.

9. André Maurois, *Aspects of Biography* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 167.

10. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 32.

11. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 15.

12. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 23.

If we accept his definition of technology as that which is not related to animal nature then all human thought and intellectual endeavors which are products outside of natural needs are technology. Do you feel that such uniquely human characteristics such as language, emotions, psychological characteristics (e.g., the search for beauty, loyalty, human sacrifice, cruelty), religious beliefs also are technology?¹³

Examine carefully how “unique” are these characteristics of human beings by researching studies in ethology. Do you think there is a difference in degree or a difference in kind with respect to human characteristics and characteristics of other animals? Specifically, address Niko Tinbergen’s fourth question concerning the development and function with respect to human behavior: how adaptive function and behavioral development originate.¹⁴ Also, discuss whether or not you think there are any unique characteristics of human beings which in principle could not be acquired by other life forms or whether or not these psychological attributes exist to some extent in other animals also. For example, Charles Darwin writes

If no organic being excepting man had possessed any mental power, or if his powers had been of a wholly different nature from those of the lower animals, then we should never have been able to convince ourselves that our high faculties had been gradually developed. But it can be shewn that there is no fundamental difference of this kind. ...[T]here is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.¹⁵

Anthony Serafini continues, “Recent experiments with chimpanzees and language-learning inform us that Darwin’s thinking here was both lucid and profound.”¹⁶

5. With respect to Milkowski’s statement in the previous question that Ortega’s definition of technology is extremely broad, discuss whether or not Milkowski’s use of the term “technology” adequately reflects Ortega’s notion of “*técnica*” as explicated in this essay or whether Milkowski’s use of the term might be an instance of equivocation arising from the difficulty of finding a suitable English synonym or paraphrase for “*técnica*”.
6. Immanuel Kant argues in his *Critique of Practical Reason* that man uses his reason to meet the needs as well as the well-being of life in accordance with natural instinct. Where human beings achieve a higher purpose is in the use of pure reason to choose the good:

13. George Milkowski, “Thoughts on Technology / Ortega y Gasset” in Robert Blumberg’s *Technology and Education Seminar: Readings*, Spring 1998, <http://www.cs.brown.edu/people/rbb/TechEd/TechEd.gm1.html>, (2 February 2008).

14. Niko Tinbergen. *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie*, 1963, 20, 410-463.

15. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection In Relation to Sex*, (1871; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger’s Rare Reprints, 2004), 62.

16. Anthony Serafini, *The Epic History of Biology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 222.

Man is a being who, as belonging to the world of sense, has wants, and so far his reason has an office which it cannot refuse, namely, to attend to the interest of his sensible nature, and to form practical maxims, even with a view to the happiness of this life, and if possible even to that of a future. But he is not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to what reason says on its own account, and to use it merely as an instrument for the satisfaction of his wants as a sensible being. For the possession of reason would not raise his worth above that of the brutes, if it is to serve him only for the same purpose that instinct serves in them; it would in that case be only particular method which nature had employed to equip man for the same ends for which it has qualified brutes, without qualifying him for any higher purpose. No doubt once this arrangement of nature has been made for him he requires reason in order to take into consideration his weal and woe, but besides this he possesses it for a higher purpose also, namely, not only to take into consideration what is good or evil in itself, about which only pure reason, uninfluenced by any sensible interest, can judge, but also to distinguish this estimate thoroughly from the former and to make it the supreme condition thereof.¹⁷

Do you think that Kant would argue man’s technical inventiveness is part of attending “to the interest of his sensible nature”? Then it would seem Ortega’s extra-natural ideals of well-being, to Kant, would be essentially instinctual since, for Kant, the extra-natural part of human beings is not happiness or attending to the future but the use of pure reason to judge of good and evil. How do you think Ortega would respond to Kant’s distinction of two purposes of reason?

7. Ortega writes in the reading that “Man is the novelist of himself, be he original or a plagiarist.” Undoubtedly, he implies here that an individual’s project of life involves an aesthetic dimension of creativity. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche indicates something like this aesthetic notion of self when he wrote, “One thing is needful—‘to give style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art.”¹⁸ And, in another place, Nietzsche declaims, “. . . for only as an aesthetic phenomenon can existence and the world be eternally justified.”¹⁹ To what extent do you think Ortega’s notion of “vital project” extends beyond Nietzsche’s aestheticism to involve an individual’s reconstruction of the circumstances of life?
8. In the reading, Ortega characterizes Dilthey as “the man to whom we most owe our idea of life.” In H.P. Rickman’s chapter which arranges Dilthey’s final theories of history entitled, “Individual Life and Its Meaning,” Dilthey describes how meaningful experience is possible:

17. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbot (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), 181.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 290.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage: 1967), sec. 5.. A similar quotation in sec. 24 reads “. . . seem to be justified” rather than “. . . be eternally justified. (Emphasis added, Eds.)”

The past lures us mysteriously on to try to understand the web of meaning of its elements. Yet interpretation remains unsatisfactory. We never master what we call chance [*sic*] the wonderful and dreadful that become significant for our lives always seem to enter through the door of chance²⁰

and continues . . .

In the present we feel the positive or negative value of the realities which fill it and, as we look towards the future, the category of purpose arises. We see life as the achieving of over-riding purposes to which all individual purposes are subordinated, that is, as the realizing of a supreme good.²¹

Explain in some detail how Dilthey’s account differs from Ortega’s historical dialectic of life’s program.

9. Morris Berman explains the development of the self in Jungian terms:

Central to Jungian psychology is the concept of “individuation,” the process whereby a person discovers and evolves his Self, as opposed to his ego. The ego is a *persona*, a mask created and demanded by everyday social interaction, and, as such, it constitutes the center of our conscious life, our understanding of ourselves through the eyes of others. The Self, on the other hand, is our true center, our awareness of ourselves without outside interference, and it is developed by bringing the conscious and unconscious parts of our minds into harmony.²²

Do you think Ortega’s view of the self in his essay could accommodate Jung’s conception of self and individuation as life’s vital project? Would Berman’s description of the ego represent in Ortega’s terms man’s biological nature rather than that which transcends the natural order of things?

10. In a passage at the beginning of Ortega’s “Meditación de la técnica,” a passage not translated in this reading, Ortega explains that the essence of being a human being is his ability to adapt the environment to himself through *técnica*. Interestingly enough, John Postgate points out man is not the only species with the ability to shape the environment:

The persistence of sulphate-reducing bacteria, for example, throughout geological æons of time undoubtedly depended on the fact that they grow best in an environment that is lethal to most present-day creatures. Successful evolutionary types not only develop characters which suit them to their environment, they also modify the environment to suit themselves. The reader may care to reflect that this is as true of man as of microbes.²³

20. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History*, ed. H.P. Rickman, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 100-101.

21. Dilthey, *Pattern*, 103.

22. Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 77.

23. John Postgate, *Microbes and Man*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 256.

“Man, as Project,” by Ortega y Gasset—trans. Samuel P. Moody

What do you think Ortega would say is the essential difference between human beings modifying the environment as their extra-natural character and bacteria modifying the environment in keeping with their biological nature? In light of this example, is the distinction between man’s biological nature and his extra-natural nature tenable?

*

Revision History

Revision 0.64 02.22.08

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