THE POLITICAL THEORIES OF JOSÉ ORTEGA

Y GASSET

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THE POLITICAL THEORIES OF JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most Americans, if they have heard of him at all, know José Ortega y Gassett as the author of a single distinguished volume, The Revolt of the Masses, which was translated into English and published in the United States in 1930 to great critical acclaim. Yet few realize that he was the intellectual leader of Spain during the first half of the twentieth century and that, perhaps more than anybody else, he was chiefly responsible for the abdication of the monarchy and the institution of the Spanish Republic. Further, his influence extended far beyond the shores of the Iberian Peninsula to the Universities of Central and South America where he inspired several generations of young intellectuals. His magazine, Revista de Occidente, was one of the great cultural forces in the Spanish-speaking world until its suppression after General Franco took the reins of government in 1936.

But Ortega's importance transcends the Spanish-speaking world. As an acute social observer he has pinpointed the ills that plague Western Civilization today. America today can learn much from Ortega. His concept of history as an

ever-changing state of dynamic flux belies our almost naive belief that somehow all history has been nothing more than a yearning toward "the American way of Life," and that no more changes will occur now that man has reached the apex of his development. His concept of the influence of the social structure of nations on political structure says philosophically what we have learned empirically from recent events: that all the world does not necessarily desire to adopt our form of life and that, further, many of them could not do so even if they wanted to.

The times call for a reappraisal, a new perspective; Ortega has provided this. Whether or not his answers will prove, in the final analysis, to be the right ones is immaterial. The significant fact is that he has raised the questions--the first step toward solving the problems.

Ortega's father, José Ortega Munilla (1856-1922) was, like his father before him, a newspaper man and political writer. He wrote several novels and short stories as well as some dramas, but he was above all a newspaper man in the original sense of the term: a periodical essayist. When Ortega Munilla was fourteen years old he founded a literary review, La Linterna, and a taurine magazine, El Chiclanero. From this ambitious beginning, Ortega Munilla went on to a lifetime of newspaper work in which he edited some of the most influential papers of the day, including La Iberia (a magazine published by Ruiz Zorilla y Sagasta), La Patria,

El Debate, El Parlamento, El Conservador, La Ilustracion Artistica, La España Moderna, and, in the last years of his life, on the Conservative Madrid daily A B C. From 1879 on he was associated with El Imparcial, directing the literary section Los Lunes and, after 1910, the entire paper. Ortega y Gasset's maternal grandfather, Eduardo Gasset y Artime, was the founder of El Imparcial, which later passed through inheritance to his son, Rafael Gasset, Ortega y Gasset's uncle, a distinguished newspaperman who became quite famous with his pen. This background was, certainly, a determining factor in Ortega's choice of the newspaper as a means of presenting his ideas--a factor he alluded to in his often-repeated remark that he had been "born on a rotary printing press."[1]

The Spain into which José Ortega y Gasset was born on May 9, 1883, was in the throes of a long period of political turmoil and unrest. Isabela II had gone into exile in 1868 and a Republic had been declared. The Republic lasted unconvincingly until 1874 when the country fell back into the antiquated shelter of a Bourbon monarchy and Alfonso XII ascended the Throne of Spain. When Ortega was two years old, Alfonso XII died, leaving his pregnant wife, Maria Cristina de Habsburgo Lorraine to rule over the country. In 1886 Maria

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[1]Fernando Salmerón, Las Mocedades de Ortega y Gasset (Mexico, 1959), pp. 14-15.

Christina gave birth to a son, who was declared of age in 1902 and assumed the Throne as Alfonso XIII. Twenty-eight years later, largely through the efforts of Ortega and his friends, Alfonso XIII went into voluntary exile and the new Republic of Spain was declared.

Ortega was an eager student and at an early age began to manifest the interest in intellectual matters that was to characterize his lifetime. At the age of seven, during a siege of illness, he was given a copy of Cervantes' famous classic, El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha, the first chapter of which the young Ortega committed to memory in three hours.[2] Twenty-four years later, in Meditaciones del Quijote, Ortega used Cervantes' hero to examine the Spanish soul and the universality of the human condition. Ortega's first teacher was don Ramón Mingue, a priest. After his early training with don Ramón, he went to study at Malaga in the Colegio de los Padres Jesuítas de Miraflores del Palo, where, in addition to his studies in letters, he became proficient in Latin and Greek under the tutelage of Father Gonzalo Coloma. After receiving his degree he went to the Central University of Madrid, where he studied philosophy and letters, receiving his doctorate in 1904. From Madrid he went to Germany where he did post-graduate work

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[2]"Ortega y Gasset, José," Enciclopedia Universla Ilustrada, Tomo XL (Barcelona, 1922), p. 705.

first at Leipzig, then at Berlin, and finally at Marburg, where he studied under Hermann Cohen and, although not a neo-Kantian himself, was greatly influenced by Cohen's neo-Kantian philosophy. In 1909 Ortega returned to Madrid, and when Nicolas Salmeron's death vacated the Chair of Metaphysics at the Central University in 1910, Ortega sought the appointment.[3]

However, to get the appointment Ortega had to take a competitive oral examination before a panel of scholars from the university. The examination consisted in giving a lecture on philosophy. María de Maeztú, a student of Ortega who was present at the examination gives the following account:

> It is a brief, precise oration, adjusted to imagery, to poetic symbols. The philosophical content, rigorously girt to thought, appears as something new, distinct. The judges of the tribunal, old men, listen to him with the same delight as the boys, his desciples. The lesson, the exercise--a new spiritual exercise--, lasts one hour. Ortega, upon finishing, does not show any sign of fatigue. He has won his first battle as if he had not entered the ring. Elected from among the contestants, a few days later he makes his debut as a professor in the Central University of Madrid. He is twenty-seven years old.[4]

With the exception of a short sabbatical in the winter of 1916, when he went to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to lecture at the invitation of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and the Cultural Association of Buenos Aires, Ortega kept the Chair of Metaphysics until 1936.

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[3] Ibid., p. 705.

[4] María de Maeztú, Antología-Siglo XX, Prosistas españoles (Buenos Aires, 1943), p. 68.

In addition to his teaching duties at the University, Ortega continued to write and publish articles; he founded Revista de Occidente, and took an active part in politics as one of the founders of the Spanish League of Political Education, for which he delivered numerous lectures. When, largely through the efforts of this group, Alfonso XIII went into voluntary exile and the Republic of Spain was formed, Ortega was elected a deputy to the Cortes. Almost from the first, however, he was critical of the turn the Republic had taken. He was disturbed by the fact that the Republic was trying to copy and transplant other governmental forms instead of working with the materials at hand and forging its own destiny. Further, he was completely lacking in partisanship, and was dismayed at the political feuds that kept the Second Republic from realizing its potential. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, Ortega went into exile, living first in Argentina, then in Peru, and finally, in Portugal before returning to Spain in 1949, when he resumed his teaching, publishing, editing, lecturing, and writing duties. He died in Madrid on October 18, 1955.

Ortega is not, in the strict sense of the term, a systematic philosopher. He did not construct abstract theories, maintaining that there is no life in the abstract and that the philosopher must concern himself with concrete problems, with the day-to-day business of the world. For this reason, the bulk of Ortega's works are either essays or lecture notes--and his books are taken from the same sources, most

of them being either collections of essays or collections of lecture notes. He wrote for the periodicals because in this manner he was able to discuss the issues of the day while they were still issues. The topics of his lectures and essays, covering a period from 1902 until his death in 1955, indicate the scope of his intellectual activities. His interests have included aesthetics, sociology, politics, etymology, ethnology, literary criticism, history, philosophy, and a series of lectures on love. It would, however, be inaccurate to say that Ortega's thought lacks continuity. To be sure, he changed his mind on many points during the course of his long career, but throughout the Complete Works we find his major themes repeated time and again.

It is paradoxical to speak of Ortega's "political theory" if by the term we mean a systematic exposition on politics and government which weighs judiciously the merits and demerits of each form, analyzes the relationship between the people and their government as it ought to exist, and, perhaps, constructs ethereal forms of society as it exists among the "noble savages." Ortega does none of this, yet it would be inaccurate to say that he is not a political theorist.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the complete writings of Ortega, bringing together the recurring themes in his works as they relate to politics and political theory, and describing them in systematic form. To this end, the

variations that some of his ideas underwent during the course of time are ignored, since they are relatively minor and insignificant to an understanding of Ortega's main theory. The next two chapters will describe Ortega's theory of man--first as an individual, and then as a member of society. Chapter IV will examine man's development through technology and the importance of history as a determining factor in man's circumstance. Chapter V will consider the historical development of the State, and man's relationship to the State in history. The last chapter will synthesize Ortega's thesis that modern man has entered a state of historic crisis epitomized by the revolt of the masses.

With the exception of the sources used for biographical material in the first chapter, I have relied entirely on the Spanish edition of the collected writings of Jose Ortega y Gasset, the Obras Completas, collected in seven volumes. Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis in the quoted material is Ortega's. All translations are the author's.

At the basis of Ortega's "political theory" is his belief that politics and the political structure of a country are determined by the overall nature of the society. Politics, although it plays a significant part in the individual's life, remains only a part of man's life, and is an effect, not a cause, of the nature of his society. If man is to understand politics he must understand the society with which he is dealing, and he must examine it in the light of historical reason as only a moment in the panorama

of history; a continuously changing flux that will not be exactly the same in the next moment.

But in order to understand the collectivity of individuals known as "society," it is first necessary to understand the individual who is the basic unit of this society. Unlike the inanimate and animate things man encounters in this world, man is not a static being. His life is not given to him ready-made; he must continually define himself to himself; he must make decisions concerning who he is and what he is, and what he is going to be at the next moment. If one understands this state of flux that is the individual, it is absurd to maintain that the aggregate of individuals can remain in a static state.

Man, in Ortega's philosophical system, is endowed with both destination and free will. He has at any given moment the choice of what he will do with his life, but he cannot act independently of his circumstance. For example, a man born into one of the Stone Age tribes in the wilds of Australia cannot, without further ado, become a professor of Philosophy at Harvard or a member of Parliament with the Labour Party. He is limited in his choice of future by what he is in the present and by what he was in the past.

In the same fashion, the primitive political association that characterizes the Stone Age tribe cannot, without further ado, become a parliamentary democracy. Both man and his social institutions evolve, but it is not man who evolves

because his institutions do. On the contrary, man's intrinsic characteristics require him to change, dragging his institutions behind him as it were. Hence it is with man that we must begin our investigations.

CHAPTER II

MAN AND CIRCUMSTANCE

The fundamental concept in Ortega's philosophy is the idea of circumstance as a condition of human life. Strictly speaking, man has never done anything at all in the world that was not circumstantial, because man cannot separate himself from his circumstance.

> To say that we live is to say that we find ourselves in an atmosphere of determined possibilities. This atmosphere we generally call our "circumstance". All life means finding oneself in "circumstances," or the world. For this is the original meaning of the idea "the world". The world is the repertoire of our vital possibilities. It is not, then, something apart from and foreign to our life, but it is its actual periphery.[1]

Each man is half what he is and half the circumstance in which he lives. In Ortega's words, "I am myself plus my circumstances, . . ."[2] As Ortega understands the word, the circumstance is not merely our immediate environment, the things we can see, touch, and hear, but all that surrounds us.

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[1] José Ortega y Gasset, Las Obras Completas de José Ortega y Gasset, Vol. IV (Madrid, 1961), p. 165.

[2] Ibid., Vol. I, 322.

> What are circumstances? Are they only these hundred people, these fifty minutes, this immediate question? Every circumstance is encased in a more ample one. Why think that I am only surrounded by ten meters of space? What about those beyond these ten meters? What a serious oversight, what wretched stupidity it is to take into account but a few circumstances when in reality everything surrounds us?[3]

Nor should circumstance be understood in only a geographical way, a physical way, or even in a merely organic way. The imperceptible world, the so-called "inner world," or soul, is external to the ego, hence it also forms a part of man's circumstance. Further, man's past history, heritage, and language, as well as his perspective, must also be considered an integral part of his circumstance.

In Meditaciones del Quijote Ortega refers to circumstance as:

> . . . the mute things which are all around us. Very close, very close to us they lift their tacit features with a gesture of humility and eagerness, as if necessitous that we accept their offering, and at the same time were ashamed of the apparent simplicity of their gift.[4]

Thus we see that the circumstance is voiceless and meaningless; yet there is no question, either, of its just being in the world passively, since it is both an "offering" and a "gift" to mankind.

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[3] Ibid., pp. 563-564.

[4] Ibid., p. 319.

The circumstance nearest to man, the one with which he must exist in his surroundings, is the body and soul that have fallen to him by chance. Both the body and the soul are "things" and are external to life. What is human in man is neither his body nor his soul; it is his life.

> This "I" which is yourself, my friend, does not consist in your body, but neither does it consist in your soul, conscience, or character. You have found yourself with a body, with a soul, with determined characteristics, just as you found yourself with a fortune left by your parents, with the country in which you were born, and the human society in which you move. Just as you are not your liver, whether healthy or sick, neither are you your memory, good or deficient, nor your will, strong or lax, nor your intelligence, large or small. The "I" which is you has found itself with these corporeal or physical <u>things</u> upon finding itself living. "You" is what must live <u>with</u> these, <u>among</u> these, and perhaps you will spend your life protesting the soul with which you have been gifted--of your lack of will power, for example--, just as you protest of your upset stomach or the cold weather you find in your native land. The soul, then, remains as <u>outside</u> of the "I" that is you as the landscape surrounding your body.[5]

The body is more than man's habitat, it is also his prison. Ortega notes the essential truth in the Pythagorean play on the words <u>soma</u> (body) and <u>sema</u> (tomb), saying that life is, indeed, <u>soma-sema</u>.

> The body in which I live infused, reclused, inexorably makes me a spatial person. It puts me in a place and excludes me from all other places. It does not permit me to be ubiquitous. At every moment it fixes me like a nail in one spot, and exiles me from everything else.[6]

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[5] <u>Ibid</u>., Vol. IV, p. 339. [6] <u>Ibid</u>., Vol. VII, p. 125.

Since I am nailed by my body to a particular space, it follows that the things with which I come into contact in the world will be seen from this particular space. The world thus becomes, automatically, a perspective. Strictly speaking, no two individuals see exactly the same thing. Each individual's perspective is a different point of view directed at the universe. Further, the individual's perspective is governed by three laws relating to the structure of his environment or circumstance. We live in a three-dimensional world, and every corporeal body has two faces. Only one of these faces is ever present to us at one time. For example, if we examine an orange we will, at first glance, see only half of it: the half that is facing us. To be sure, we can turn it around and look at the other half and, by remembering the first half, get a concept of the totality "orange". But the addition of the remembered half to the half that now faces us does not enable us to see all the sides of the orange at once. Thus Ortega's first law concerning the structure of environment is:

> . . . the vital world is composed of a few things that are present at the moment and countless things that are latent, hidden at the moment, that are not in sight, but we know, or believe we know--in this case it makes no difference which--that we could see them, that we could have them present.[7]

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[7] Ibid., p. 119.

The second law of structure, which is self-evident enough not to require detailed elucidation, is that the things we see in the world are never seen by themselves, isolated from all other phenomena, but rather, we see them in their context, against a background of the other things in the world. The individual's perspective, then, has three planes or distances in it: as foreground the thing that is seen, as middle distance and background against which it is seen, and beyond that the latent world of remembered things. We may now define perspective as ". . . the order and form that reality takes for him who contemplates it."[8]

A further element of perspective is the value each individual places on the object seen. The object "dog" will not look the same to an individual who prefers cats as it will to a dog lover.

> The proof that things are no more than values is obvious: take anything and apply to it different things instead of a single one. Compare what the earth is for a farmer and for an astronomer: the farmer is satisfied with stepping on the reddish skin of the planet and scratching it with the plow; his earth is a road, some furrows, and a grain field. The astronomer needs to determine exactly the place that the globe occupies at each instant within the vast supposition of sidereal space; from the point of view of exactness he is obliged to convert it into a mathematical abstraction, into a case of universal gravitation. The example could be continued indefinitely.
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> There does not exist, therefore, that supposed immurable and unique reality . . . there are as many realities as there are points of view.[9]

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[8] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 236. [9] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 475.

If it were possible to set everyone's fragmentary vision side-by-side, man would have a complete panorama of absolute and universally valid truth.

A reality which would remain constant, even when seen from different points in space, is an absurdity. A forest seen from its southern edge in springtime will not look like the same forest if seen from its northern edge in the middle of winter; nor will it look exactly the same to another observer occupying the same point as the original observer. Had the universe presented an identical appearance to an Athenian of the fifth century and to a New Yorker of the twentieth century, we would not believe that the universe has an objective reality. On the contrary, this would indicate that there is no question of any objective reality at all, but rather the universe would seem a mere image which happened to occur in the minds of the two persons concerned. Thus the divergence between the worlds seen from different perspectives is not a contradiction, but a complement. "Reality, precisely because it is reality and exists outside of our individual minds, can only reach our individual minds by multiplying itself into a thousand faces or surfaces."[10]

Reality, then, is not subjective in a universal sense. Reality exists as an objective entity; it is particular reality that is necessarily subjective. If I did not exist,

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[10] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 19.

reality (i.e., reality as seen from my unique perspective, my reality) would also be non-existent. If I am not present to look at our forest the reality of that forest from my perspective, the forest as I would see it, does not exist. Yet the objective fact remains that the forest does exist independent of my cognizance.

There is a whole portion of reality that is revealed to us without any effort on our part. Ortega calls this the "patent world" or the world of mere impressions. These impressions are the sights and sounds that strike our senses without our actually seeing them or hearing them--that is, without our being congnizant of them. An example of this patent world would be the roar of a waterfall that is not really "heard" by the people who live close to it. Another would be the blur of color that strikes our eyes as we drive rapidly down a country road: since our eyes are focussed on the road ahead, we are only dimly aware of the blur of scenery. The patent world is not really seen. As man contemplates reality (as opposed to the patent world) he must also interpret it, since a purely passive way of seeing would not give him a world but only a chaos of bright dots. Thus the active observing--the only real seeing--is interpretation: determining size, shape, and spatial distance.

It follows, then, that although there are as many realities as there are points of view, all realities cannot be said to have equal value on an objective scale. The

individual's reality has value for him as an individual: the farmer's conception of the earth suffices for his purposes. But it must not be supposed that it is as objectively valuable as the astronomer's. Consider the Hindu tale of the blind men and the elephant: each of these men had a concept of reality as seen from his unique perspective and, as such, each concept was valid for each individual. Yet the concept of an individual who could, through the use of his intellect, conceive the totality "elephant" would obviously be a truer concept. True reality, then, can only be conceived by a few men.

> To perceive a reality it is first necessary to convert oneself into a competent organ so that the reality can penetrate. The authentic physiognomy of things is only come upon from a certain point of view, and whoever is incapable of reaching it should not pretend to supplant reality with his turbid vision. The most substantial realities are only scrutinized by a few men. If this irritates you, hang these priviledged beings in the public plaza; but don't say that your reality is the true one and that we are all equal. Hang them honestly, with a prior declaration that you are strangling them for being better than you are.[11]

In short, the act of interpretation that is, by definition, involved in the act of seeing, eliminates any claim that one man's opinion is as good as another's: that the idiot and the genius both hold equally valid concepts of reality.

Circumstance is an inseparable condition of human life, and each man's circumstance and perspective is unique.

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[11] Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 133-134.

Suddenly and without knowing how or why, man finds himself in the world and comes face to face with a set of circumstances. Man's life, the human aspect of man, is not a thing; it is not even a state of being. It is, rather, a _becoming to be_, a task in which man is constantly bringing into existence something that did not exist before: himself.

> Our life, then, is given to us--we have not given it to ourselves--but it is not given to us ready-made. It is not a thing whose being is fixed once and forever, but a task, something which has to be created--in short, a drama. Thus it is that man must very speedily create ideas about his circumstances, must be able to interpret them, in order to be able to decide on all the other things that he has to do. Hence the first response which man makes, whether he wants to or not, on becoming aware that he is living, that is to say, submerged in circumstance, is to believe something about it.[12]

Man meets with illness, hunger, sorrow, thunderbolts, fire, torrential rains, and drought--the myriad enigmas that comprise the objective world.

> Faced with things as they are, as he finds them in his circumstance, man does not know what to do because he does not know on what he can depend in regard to them, or, as it is usually said, he doesn't know what they are. Life is, for the time being, radical insecurity, the feeling of being shipwrecked in a mysterious, strange, and frequently hostile element.[13]

Thus life is, at first, essentially insecure, and because of this insecurity man finds it necessary to think, to define himself and his circumstances.

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[12] _Ibid._, Vol. V, pp. 123-124.

In order to be what he is, man needs first to find out what he is. The essential difference between a man and, say, a rock, is not that man has understanding or intelligence while the rock lacks it.

> We can imagine a very intelligent rock, but as the inner being of the rock is given it already made, once and for all, and it is required to make no decision on the subject, it has no need, in order to go on being a rock, to pose to itself each moment the problem of self . . .[14]

Unlike the rock, man's being does not fully coincide with nature's. Man is at once natural and extranatural, a kind of "ontological centaur," half immersed in nature, half transcending it. Thus we are faced with the fact that an entity in the universe, man, has no other way of existing than by being in another entity, nature or the world; yet the two are not wholly congruent. This relationship might take on one of three possible aspects: Nature might offer man nothing but facilities or, conversely, it might offer him nothing but difficulties. If the first were the case, man's being would coincide with nature's, as does the stone's. Man would have no perspective, indeed, no existence. If the second were the case, it would be impossible for man to survive in the world and he would long since have joined the dodo and dinosaurs in extinction. The third possibility is the circumstance in which man actually finds himself.

> Man, having to be in the world, finds that it surrounds him like an intricate web woven both of facilities and difficulties. There are

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[14] Ibid., p. 22.

> few things in it which potentially aren't both. The earth supports him with its solidness, and enables him to lie down when he is tired or run when he must flee. One who is shipwrecked, or one who falls from a roof, will take notice of the firm earth, a thing grown humble from habit.[15]

Since man finds facilities on earth, his existence is possible. However, since he also finds difficulties, his existence is continually challenged.

> Hence man's existence, his being in the world, is no passive being; it is an unending struggle against the difficulties that oppose his accommodation in it. The rock is given its existence ready made, it does not have to fight to be what it is: a rock in the landscape. But for man, to exist is to have to fight incessantly with every difficulty that his environment offers him; thus he must make his own existence at every single moment. We might say, then, that man is given the abstract possibility of existing, but he is not given the reality. This he must conquer, minute after minute: man must earn his life, not only economically but metaphysically.[16]

Man has no choice but to be continually doing something, continually defining his circumstance. Having fallen into his environment man must make the effort to maintain himself in it, he must at every moment be deciding what he is going to do, what he is going to be. Yet man is not a mere slave to his environment. Since his being does not fully coincide with nature, he is able to withdraw from nature into himself and contemplate his existence. This--the possibility of meditation--is man's essential attribute. If we examine

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[15] Ibid., p. 337.

[16] Ibid., p. 337.

other members of the animal kingdom, like our cousins the monkeys, we find that they are always on the alert, perpetually uneasy as they listen and look for all signals that might spell danger from their environment. They live, as it were, in perpetual fear of the world. At the same time they have a perpetual hunger for the things of the world. Both of these--fear and hunger--discharge themselves without any possible restraint or inhibition.

Like the monkey, man lives, to a greater or to a lesser degree, in a struggle with his environment. The essential difference is that man can, from time to time, suspend his direct concern for his environment and detach himself from it--ignoring his surroundings and turning within himself. It is when he withdraws into himself that man creates.

Man cannot be defined in terms of the talents or skills he possesses, because the skills he possesses at any given time are determined by the type of circumstance in which he finds himself. The Stone Age savage had a talent for chiseling stone hatchets that the twentieth century American lacks. Nor can man be described in terms of a propensity to reason. Man's destiny is primarily action; he does not live to think, but rather the other way around. The stone does not run the risk of being de-stoned, man lives in a perpetual danger of being dehumanized: he can never be sure that his reason will be right. Thus Plato was correct in defining man precisely by his ignorance. Ignorance is man's privilege, and is a

privilege denied to both God and beast--God because he possesses all knowledge, and the beast because he needs none. Man does not reason because, through the workings of chance, he finds himself left with a little bit of spare time in which to indulge himself. Finding himself both within and without nature there is no other choice for man: he must, whether he wants to or not, try to comprehend the things about him. He must define his circumstance.

Since man cannot escape his circumstance, the two being inseparable, man must, consciously or unconsciously, take account of his circumstance in all that he does.

> We should find for our circumstance, such as it is, precisely in its limitation, its peculiarity, its appropriate place in the immense perspective of the world. We must not stop in perpetual ecstasy before hierarchic values, but must conquer for our own individual life its right place among them. In sum: the reabsorption of circumstance is the concrete destiny of man.[17]

If the world is, as we have noted, the repertoire of our vital possibilities, it follows that it must be reduced to the concrete in order to be realized in the individual. Thus this reabsorption is accomplished through the humanization, the particularization of circumstance by its incorporation in the individual man, who absorbs it by coming to know it. Thus, "Man reaches the maximum of his capacity when he acquires complete consciousness of his circumstances. Through them he communicates with the universe."[18]

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[17] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 322.

[18] Ibid., p. 319.

Circumstance in man is not a concrete, never-changing reality, but rather a continuously changing flux. Life, whether of a person or the universe, is not a definite situation: it consists of an incalculable series of circumstances.

> The definitive, the finished, the perfect, does not consist in a determined reality that by itself is elevated over the rest and annuls them. Rather, all circumstance and all reality contains the possibility of perfection, and this margin of perfectionability of circumstance is what the good vital artificer calls ideal, and strives to attain.[19]

Ortega has said that life always presents itself as an effort. However, this effort can present itself as one of two possible kinds. The first of these is compulsory, an exertion in which we are urged on and worn out by a necessity imposed on us. The other type of effort is the one made for the sheer delight of doing it. The first of these is what has come to be called work, the other becomes most manifest in sport. Of the two types of effort, sport is the more sublime; it is the basis of all invention. Ortega rejects the utilitarian concept of invention. Life is more than a response to and satisfaction of imperative needs. It is not a movement enforced by an exigency, but rather, free occurence. Invention happens in the world capriciously rather than through any fundamental biological need. Darwin to the contrary notwithstanding, the eye did not come into being because

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[19] Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 493-494.

sight is necessary or convenient in the struggle for existence. The eye appears, capriciously as it were, and the species in which eyes appear change the environment by creating its visible aspect. Man, during his lifetime, performs myriad useless actions through sheer exuberant action. From these he selects a few and converts them to useful habits.

> We thus feel induced to invert the inveterate hierarchy, and consider sportive activity as the primary and creative activity, the most exalted, serious, and important in life, and the laboring activity as a derivative of the first, as its decantation and precipitate.[20]

Sportive activity, then, is the truly creative activity of man. It is not utility, or work, that creates. Utility appears after someone has had an idea for the sheer enjoyment of having the idea, and finds a use for it. In order for man to become aware that knowledge brings dominion over things it was first necessary for knowledge to exist; after it has been brought into being, man discovers that it yields utility.

> Thus we can distribute organic phenomena--animal and human--into two great classes of activity: one activity is original, creative, vital par excellence--that is, spontaneous and disinterested; the other takes over and mechanizes the first, and is of a utilitarian character. Utility does not create, it does not invent; it simply employs and stabilizes what has been created without it.[21]

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[20] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 609. [21] Ibid., p. 610.

Life resides in the sportive activity. Work is relatively mechanical. The eye comes into being capriciously, but it sees in accordance with optical laws. However, the distinguishing factor is that one cannot make an eye with optical laws. Again, the utilitarian aspect follows the sportive. This is not to say that utility does not inspire sportive action; it is merely to point out that in every vital process the first impulse is given by an energy of free and exuberant character. The symptom of a thriving life is an abundance of possibilities. Utilitarianism, in that it is an attitude of confining oneself to the strictly necessary, is like a sick or dying man who begrudges every expenditure of weakness.

> In the history of all living beings we always find that life is at first prodigal invention of possibilities, and that then a selection among these possibilities becomes fixed and solidified in useful habits.[22]

Given the premise that each man's circumstance is unique, it follows that, in the final analysis, he is the only one that knows his circumstance, the only one who can live his own life.

> Human life is a strange reality concerning which the first thing to be said is that it is the basic reality, in the sense that to it we must refer all others, since all others, effective or presumptive, must in one way or another appear within it.[23]

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[22] Ibid., p. 610.

[23] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 13.

Human life is the basic, radical reality in that it is the primary and primordial reality in which all others must appear if they are to be realities to us. This is only to say that they have their root in it, and must not be understood as meaning that human life is the only reality, or even the most important reality, or the most sublime. The individual's life is his basic reality, then, in that all of the things he sees from his circumstance and perspective, have their meaning in their relation to him. What we call "other people's lives" are, in the final analysis, only a projection of our own in the same sense that our perspective of the forest must be uniquely our own. To continue being, man must always be doing something; yet this condition is not imposed on man or predetermined for him. This is something that man must decide for himself. Nobody can be responsible for another man in that the individual must make his own decisions. Nobody can take his place in deciding what he is going to be or what he is going to do. Even when man submits to the will of another man, he has perforce made the decision to do it himself. Man even has a choice concerning the ultimate end of all men, death. He can choose the pattern of his own death: the death of a coward or the death of a hero. But he must make the choice himself: life is essential alone-ness.

Thus <u>man creates his life</u> from moment to moment. At any given instant he is faced with a limited number of possibilities. Having chosen one of them, he is again confronted

with a limited number of possibilities. Many of these decisions are, of course, minor ones concerning whether to cross the street here or at the corner, what kind of cereal one will have for breakfast, etc. However, man must also make the major decisions; he must plan an over-all program of life which will condition his response to most of the smaller decisions. "But man must not only make himself: the weightiest thing he must do is to determine what he is going to be. He is causa sui to the second power."[24]

It might be argued that man does not have to make continual decisions, that he can elect to leave the world through suicide rather than submit to this continuous process. But if he does this, he is making a decision; after the decision has been made and carried out he is no longer living--no longer in a state of becoming to be. Hence Ortega's assertion that living means to be forced to decide constantly among several limited possibilities remains valid. Man is a creator like God inasmuch as he is a being creature "Whence, literally, what I am bold to affirm: that man makes himself in the light of circumstance, that he is a God as occasion offers, an occasional God."[25]

The implication of this doctrine is far-reaching, as will be noted later on. Man, faced with his circumstance, is forced, by his basic insecurity, to think, to define this

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[24] Ibid., p. 33. [25] Ibid., p. 36.

circumstance he finds, to imagine himself and what he is going to be.

> It is too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a conception of life, to "ideate" the character he is going to be. Man is the novelist of himself, whether he is original or a plagiarist.[26]

However, man is to a certain extent limited in what he can make of himself. The solutions he will select will depend on the type of problems he encounters, since his circumstance will vary according to the degree of technical ability he finds about him at birth. Thanks to man's power of memory and his ability to transmit information, man accumulates his past. Individual man is not made to go through the entire process of defining his situation to himself from scratch. He always begins his life on a certain level of accumulated past, and it is this accumulation that enables him to find other problems to solve, other things to think about, since it enables him more and more to withdraw into himself, to create.

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[26] Ibid., p. 38.

CHAPTER III

MAN AND SOCIETY

Man's circumstance, then, involves all of the things that surround him. However, man's world is composed of more than the things he finds in it. As soon as man finds himself living he finds himself among men as well as among things. In his contacts with the things of the world man has noted that they fall roughly into two classes, animate and inanimate. His contacts with these things cannot in any sense of the term be called social. Man sees the rock and notes that it is very hard. He learns that it is not as hard as steel and that he can break the stone into pieces by hitting it with a hammer. But the stone is not aware of man's action, and its behavior while man is breaking it up is reduced to splitting, to disintegrating, because that is its inexorable mechanical reaction. It has no capacity for action, so our action upon it evokes no corresponding reaction: the stone neither hits back nor whimpers. Hence in man's relation with inanimate things his action has only one direction.

In man's dealings with animals the relationship changes somewhat. Man's action toward the animal is conditioned by the conviction that the animal is aware of his existence. Man in the presence of a tiger conducts himself differently

from man in the presence of a squirrel. Hence man's relation with animate objects is not unilateral. Instead, man's action regarding the animal reckons with the probably reaction on the animal's part. Man sees the mule and, in anticipation of his kick, keeps a respectful distance. Man and animal coexist, but this relation still cannot be called "social."

> After all, it is only to a small number of my acts that the animal responds, and at that with only a small repertoire of acts of its own. Further, I can establish a scale that will register the extent of the repertoire for each species. This scale will therefore also tabulate the amount of coexistence that I can enjoy with the animal. It would make manifest the point that even at best, this coexistence is slight.[1]

Thus we see that it is only among men that a social relationship can exist. As a presence, the only thing that man knows of the "other" man is that he has a body that displays a certain form, that moves and exhibits a certain visible and external behavior.

> But the surprising, strange, and ultimately mysterious thing is that, although there is present to us only a figure and some bodily movements, we see, in or through this presence, something that is essentially invisible, something that is pure intimacy, something that each of us knows directly only of himself: his thinking, feeling, desiring, operations that, by definition, cannot be presence to other men; that are non-external, that cannot be directly exteriorized, because they do not occupy space

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[1]José Ortega y Gasset, Las Obras Completas de José Ortega y Gasset, Vol. VII (Madrid, 1961), pp. 135-136.

> or possess sensible qualities, so that, over against all the externality of the world, they are pure intimacy.[2]

In the other man, then, man senses a self like his own. The other man, too, has his "here," but the other man's here is not the same as mine. We are mutually exclusive in our "heres" and the perspective in which the world appears to him is different from mine. However, if I should point a finger at an object and see the other move toward the object, pick it up, and hand it to me, I can infer that our mutually exclusive world perspectives nevertheless have a common element.

> And as this occurs with many things, although at times he and I make mistakes in supposing that our perception is common regarding certain objects, and as it occurs not only with one other man but with many other men, there arises in me the idea of a world beyond mine and his, a presumed, inferred world common to everybody. This is what we call the "objective world" in contrast to the world of each of us in his private life.[3]

But it is not the existence of the objective world which enables man to coexist with other men but, on the contrary, it is man's ability to have a social relationship that makes it possible for him to find the areas of agreement. Life remains, as we have noted, basically solitude; but from the ultimate solitude that is the essential condition of human existence, man constantly emerges with a no less basic

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[2] Ibid., p. 138.

[3] Ibid., p. 151.

longing for companionship. The most basic attempt to escape from this solitude is love. One person loves another to the degree that he feels the other's being as inseparable from his own, as though the two beings were one. All human relations, insofar as their living is a living with, are based to a greater or lesser degree, on this feeling. Man, in seeking companionship and society, must be open to other men.

> Being open to the other, to the others, is a permanent and constitutive state of Man, not a determined action in respect to them. The definite action--doing something with them, be it _for_ them or be it _against_ them--supposes that previous and inactive state of openness.[4]

This state of openness, then, concerns something previous to any good or bad feeling toward the other. Robbery and murder imply being open to the other man neither more nor less than love and sacrifice. It is this state of openness that makes the objective world possible between men; it is the basic starting point for all social relations, good or bad.

The original sin of liberalism was the doctrine of _laissez-faire_, in assuming that society is a beautiful thing that marches prettily along with the precision of a Swiss watch. "There will be no healthy public body in the world until it is seen that society, far from being a beautiful thing, is a terrible thing."[5] Yet terrible though it is, society is also the inexorable condition of man; it is the

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[4] _Ibid._, p. 150. [5] _Ibid._, Vol. VI, p. 72.

inexorable condition of man; it is the social, as opposed to the physical, world in which man moves. It is not enough to say that man is a social animal: man is also an antisocial animal.

> For I have learned from experience that man is capable of everything--certainly of the egregious and perfect, but also and no less of the most depraved conduct. I have known the kind, generous, and intelligent man, but, beside him, I have also known the thief--thief of objects and thief of ideas--, the assassin, the invidious, the nefarious, and the imbecile.[6]

Hence, "society" is actually a misnomer, since the term implies sociability, a state which mankind approaches only asymptotically. Men do coexist, this we call society; but this coexistence is never effectively society. It is, rather, a striving to become society. Nor can it be said that society is a triumph over man's antisocial nature because, in the final analysis, no such triumph has occurred. The only thing that can be said about the battle between man's social instincts and his antisocial instincts is that it is still going on.

> The reality "society" signifies, in its very root, both its positive and its negative meanings, or, as I say for the first time in these lectures, every society at the same time, to a greater or lesser degree, dissociety--which is a coexistence of friends and of enemies.[7]

Society corresponds in the collective life to the function filled by work in the individual life: it is never

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[6] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 182.

[7] Ibid., pp. 182-183.

creative, but simply takes created things and organizes them and administers them. Thus society might be referred to as the petrification of personality.

The human world occupies the first distance or foreground in the individual's perspective. Contrary to the manner in which we have had to present man's awareness of society for the sake of clarity, the individual is the last to appear. Man sees the other man external to himself before be becomes aware of his own form, and he sees all the rest of the world, including his own life and himself, through others, through Them.

> And since They never cease to act all about me, manipulating things and above all talking about them, that is, operating on them, I project upon the radical reality of my life what I see them do and hear them say--whereupon my radical reality, which is so much mine and mine alone, becomes concealed from my own eyes by a crust made up of what I have received from other men, from their doings and their sayings, and I habituate myself to living normally in a presumed or probable world created by them, which I ordinarily accept as authentic without further question and consider as reality itself.[8]

Society is not an unqualified good. At the same time that it is necessary for mankind, it can keep him from realizing his fullest potentiality by hampering him in his knowledge of his individual circumstance. "In solitude man is his truth; in society he tends to be his mere conventionality or falsification. In the authentic reality of human life

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[8] Ibid., p. 178.

is included the duty of frequent retiring to the solitary depths of oneself."[9] There are, then, men who live nothing more than the pseudo-life of convention without ever stopping to examine themselves or the convictions that they hold. Such men are incapable of reabsorbing their circumstance, of reaching the maximum of their capacity by acquiring complete consciousness of their unique individual circumstances. There are other men who carry this quest to its logical extreme and are energetically true to their genuine selves as constantly as is humanly possible. The rest of mankind falls in varying degrees between these two extremes. But given the radical solitude of life, such a withdrawal into self is imperative if man is to be more than a mindless robot parroting inherited phrases.

> What it comes down to, then, is man's need for a periodical going over and clarifying the accounts of the enterprise that is his life, and for which only he is responsible, retiring from the perspective from which we see and live things as members of society, to the perspective in which they appear when we <u>retire</u> to our solitude.[10]

This periodic withdrawal is not necessary only for the individual to come to a complete consciousness of his circumstances; it is at the same time essential to the furthering of mankind.

> Without a strategic retreat into oneself, without alert thought, human life is impossible.

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[9] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 144.

[10] <u>Ibid</u>.

> Remember all that man owes to certain great withdrawals into self! It is not an accident all of the great founders of religions preceded their apostolates by famous retreats. Buddha withdraws to the forest; Mohammed retires to his tent, and even there he withdraws from his tent by wrapping his head in his cloak; above all, Jesus goes apart into the desert for forty days.[11]

So far we have considered society from the standpoint of an interaction between individuals. There is, however, another side to society. Suppose an individual desires to cross the street in the middle of the block instead of at the corner. As he procedes to put this desire into action, he finds that the traffic policeman stops him and tells him he can only cross the street at the corners, and there only when the traffic light assures him it is all right to do so. Granted, this is an interaction between two individuals, the pedestrian and the policeman. But who has given the command not to cross the street in the middle of the block? If it were only the policeman, we might well question why he elected to detain the individual. If we follow this action up the chain of command we find it is not the superintendent who commands this action, nor is it the chief of police, nor even the chief of state. The forbidding action comes from the State. The State is not an individual, Louis XIV to the contrary notwithstanding. The "who" that did the forbidding is . . . nobody in particular.

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[11] Ibid., p. 92.

Let us suppose that the individual, while pondering the impersonality of the state, should take it into his head to walk through the city streets in a suit of armor, complete with sword and lance. There is certainly no law against this, yet the chances are that this individual will spend the next few hours answering questions at police headquarters or, perhaps, undergoing observation in the psycho ward of the local hospital. On the other hand, if he were to wear this same outfit in the streets during a carnival, he might be awarded a prize. The reason for this discrepancy is quite simple: it is one of our usages that it is not customary to wear medieval dress in the course of everyday life, while the wearing of costumes during a carnival or festival is a customary usage.

> And this leads us to the reflection that an enormous portion of our lives is composed of things that we do neither through wanting to, nor inspiration, nor on our own account, but simply because people do them; and, like the State, people force us into human actions that proceed from them and not from us.[12]

Thus we see another dimension of "society" that goes further than the actions between individuals. It is the vague "collective concept" that comprises what might be called the "Spirit of the Times." It is not held by individuals _in toto_, yet it does have an existence. However, it must not be assumed that this collective concept is in any way a

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[12] _Ibid._, p. 198.

collective soul; it does not exist above and beyond, independently of the individuals that comprise it.

> But this business of the collective soul, of the social conscience, is arbitrary mysticism. There is no such collective soul if by soul is meant--and here it can mean nothing else--something that is capable of being the responsible subject of its acts, something that does what it does because what it does has a clear meaning for it.[13]

The collective soul is not a reasonable entity. On the contrary, it is completely lacking in reason; it is arbitrary and impersonal. It is the "They" of the expression "They say . . ." an unseizable, indeterminate subject. Yet this is not to say that it is not human:

> . . . the collectivity is, yes, something human; but it is the human without man, the human without spirit, the human without soul, the human dehumanized. . . .
>
> It is, then, a human action; but irrational, without spirit, without soul, in which I act like the gramophone on which someone puts a record that it does not understand, like the planet circling blindly in its orbit, . . .[14]

Like the physical world, society imposes rules on the individual. The fact that these are, for the most part, invisible since they are made up of uses, customs, and rules of habit does not make them any the less burdensome.

But society did not originate in such community of feeling. Men did not form in societies because they agreed as to the validity of certain opinions and values. This basic

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[13] Ibid., p. 199.

[14] Ibid., pp. 199-200.

agreement must perforce come after man joins man to form the most primitive society for the simple reason that, in order to agree on any system of values, man must first join with other men to form a society.

> Society is not originally the community of sentiments, of likes, of affections: if it were not essential to man to obtain certain products that can only be obtained by communal effort, society would not exist and the world would be inhabited by solitary men who, upon passing each other in the world, would not be aware of their existence, like the tree in the middle of a clearing in the forest finds itself isolated and without suspecting that its leaves interweave with those of its brother tree.[15]

Society, then, has as its basis the efforts of individuals to achieve a common goal. As Ortega notes, the obtaining of certain products is essential to man; hence man cannot exist apart from society. It is his natural condition. However, man's natural tendency toward society and companionship is not in itself enough to bring about the formation of society, since there can be no society, however elementary, without some form or structure.

Society is born of the superior attraction that one or several individuals exert over the others. It is the superior individual who can organize the communal effort, indeed, see the necessity of joining together in such a communal effort. The superiority, the excellency of the individual produces in others the impulse to adhere to the excellent

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[15] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 515.

individual as a bulwark against the mysterious enigma that is life in nature and the basic insecurity of all life. The mannerisms of the superior individual are taken over by the people who follow him; his usages become the social norm. From this, the feeling of group solidarity begins to arise. Given the original economic basis of society, we may now define society as:

> . . . a group of individuals who know themselves to be mutually subject to the validity of certain opinions and values. Thus, there is no society without the effective existence of a certain conception of the world, which may be referred to in case of conflict.[16]

This society of agreement on basic values is culture, the definition man gives to his circumstance. It is handed down from generation to generation to form the mores of the community; it is modified, sometimes gradually and sometimes suddenly as we shall have occasion to note later; but without this basic agreement society, any society, will disintegrate. There can, of course, be differences of opinion on the superficial or intermediate strata of belief. These disagreements produce beneficial dissensions because they remain within the limit of the basic agreement and hence confirm and consolidate it. But when the disagreement concerns the ultimate convictions of the society, it has ceased to be a society to the extent that the disagreement has split it. Instead of a single society, it becomes two or more societies, that is,

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[16] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 297.

two or more groups of persons who know themselves to be mutually subject to the validity of their basic values. But two societies within the same space formerly occupied by one society is an impossibility, and one of them will be annihilated.

It is this inherited society, rather than a brand new beginning, that is man's actual condition when he falls into this world: he is born among men.

> And those men, that society in which we have fallen through living, already has an interpretation of life, a repertoire of ideas about the universe, convictions in force. Thus what we call the "thought of our time" enters to form part of our circumstance, envelops us, penetrates us, and carries us.[17]

From the very moment of birth, at home, in school, through reading and through social intercourse, we absorb these ideas--almost before we become aware of the problems for which they are, or pretend to be, solutions. "The very language in which we will have to think our own thoughts is in itself an alien way of thinking, a collective philosophy, an elementary interpretation of the life which so closely imprisons us."[18]

In this manner man absorbs the basic values of his society and is thus enabled to live within the society. The "thought of the times" has a peculiar characteristic that is not found in the world of individual beliefs: it is valid

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[17] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 25. [18] Ibid.

for itself regardless of (and sometimes in spite of) the individual's acceptance of it. An individual's conviction, no matter how firm it may be, has validity only for the individual. But the concepts, the ideas, of his time are held by an anonymous subject who is no one in particular: society.

> And those concepts have validity even though I may not accept them--that validity makes itself felt on me, even though negatively. They are there, ineluctable, just like that wall is there; and I must take account of them in my life, whether I like it or not, just as I have to take account of that wall that will not let me pass through it and obliges me to seek docilly for the door or else to spend my life demolishing it. But it is clear that the major influence that the spirit of the times, the world in force exerts in each life, is not exerted by the simple fact of being there . . . but because, in reality, the major portion of my world, of my ideas, arise out of that collective repertoire, and coincide with it.[19]

Society is not a constant thing; it is a concrete living reality which, like the individual, is in a state of flux, of becoming to be. Hence it, too, has no fixed nature, but only a history. Man cannot exist independently of his past any more than he can exist independently of nature. The ideas of his time are what they are partly because of what they were in the past. Man's heritage, his accumulation of past knowledge, forms a vital part of his individual as well as his collective circumstance. But the past is not an iron mold that predetermines man's life. "Our past, undoubtedly,

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[19] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

weighs on us; it inclines us to be this rather than that in the future, but it does not chain us, nor does it drag us."[20]

The past will not predict what man will be in the future, but it helps him to define himself to himself in the present, and points out to him what mistakes he might avoid in the future. Since it forms a vital part of his circumstance, man must understand his past, must maintain a continuity with the past, in order to attain full consciousness of his circumstance. It is man's accumulated past that enables him, indeed, to have a circumstance instead of starting over. "Breaking the continuity with the past, wanting to begin again, is a lowering of man and a plagiarism of the orangutan."[21]

Man's natural inclination is toward evolution rather than toward revolution. His study of the past is not a veneration of the past for the sake of the past; but rather, for the sake of the present and the future. Evolution is defined by Ortega as " . . . the method of continuity. . .the only one that can avoid in the course of human events that pathological aspect that makes of history a notorious and perennial battle between paralytics and epileptics."[22]

Just as there are dangers inherent in the fact that man can lose himself, can falsify himself in the social atmosphere and never come to grips with the radical solitude that

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[20] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 187. [21] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 138.

[22] Ibid., p. 138.

is true human life, an inherited past also has its drawbacks. Culture is only the interpretation which man gives to his life, the series of more or less satisfactory solutions which he invents in order to handle his problems and the needs of his life. When originally created, they arise in answer to some specific and genuine need, hence they are genuine solutions. As they are passed down to subsequent generations, which do not have to create them but, rather, to inherit and develop them, they tend to solidify, to lose their meaning. Further, they are an invitation to inertia: the inheritor will be disinclined to ask himself questions about things, since he has a repertoire of "solutions" that have been handed down to him. Now society is not a state of being but, like man, is a state of becoming.

> Culture is labor, production of human things: it is to make science, make morals, make art. When we speak of a major or minor culture we mean a major or minor capacity to produce human things, or work.[23]

It follows, then, that if the inheritor of culture merely accepts it passively, does not work at it, society, or culture, will stagnate and eventually disappear. "Inheritance . . . is not only a treasure; it is at the same time a charge and a bond."[24]

As Fichte has said, "Those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it." Man cannot, if he hopes

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[23] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 516. [24] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 28.

to survive, cut himself off from knowledge of his antecedents.

> To comprehend anything human, be it personal or collective, it is necessary to tell its history. This man, this nation does such a thing and is in such a manner _because_ formerly he or it did that other thing and was in such another manner. Life only takes on a measure of transparency in the light of _historical reason_.[25]

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[25] _Ibid._, VI, p. 40.

CHAPTER IV

TECHNOLOGY AND HISTORY

In order to come to know his antecedents and come to a complete consciousness of his circumstance man must study history and learn how human lives have been lived in the past. He must take the things that have happened to man in the past and consider how they apply to him in the present. Strictly speaking, however, the only thing that happens to man is living--the act of becoming. Everything else is within his life, and happens to him because, no matter how adverse or desperate it may be, he desires it, that is, because he wants to go on living. Viewed in this manner, we see that life is more than the basic reality; it is the only necessity. All other necessities are derived from life.

> Life--necessity of necessities--is necessary only in a subjective sense; simply because man decides autocratically to live. It is the necessity created by an act of volition, an act whose meaning and origin we shall consider no further, but shall take as a crude fact from which to start. For whatever reason, man happens to have a keen desire to go on living, to <u>be</u> in the world, in spite of the fact that he is the only being that has the faculty--so strange, paradoxical, and confusing, ontologically or metaphysically--of being able to annihilate himself and voluntarily renouncing his existence in the world.[1]

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[1] Ortega y Gasset, José, <u>Las Obras Completas de José</u> Ortega y Gasset, Vol. V (Madrid, 1961), p. 321.

But man does not decide to live because he has any basic "instinct to survive." Man does not, Ortega maintains, live by his instincts, but rather by means of other faculties such as will and thought. These other faculties control his instincts. If the instinct for survival was strongest in man, Ortega argues, there would not be in the history of mankind the myriad examples of people who preferred death to life, for whatever reason. This is not to say that man has no necessities: he is aware of objects in his life, and recognizes some of these as being more "necessary" than others.

> But, be it noted, that their necessity is purely conditional. The rock suspended in the air falls necessarily, with a categorical and unconditional necessity. But man may decide against meeting his need--of food, for example, as Mahatma Gandhi does from time to time.[2]

Man's desire to live is such that, if nature does not grant him the means of maintaining his life, he will not resign himself to die as does the animal. Rather, he comes forward with a new type of activity, he produces what nature has not given him: he lights a fire, builds a shelter, cultivates food, domesticates animals. But these are not activities by which we satisfy our basic needs. That is to say: if we feel a "need" to eat, it is the act of eating that satisfies that necessity--not the act of cultivating wheat. These actions satisfy our needs indirectly, they are a secondary set of actions.

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[2]Ibid., p. 321.

> To be sure, it is to the satisfaction of these needs and not to something else that this secondary set of actions is concerned, but--and this is the crucial point--it supposes a capacity which is precisely what is lacking in animals. It is not so much intelligence that is lacking . . . as it is the possibility of disengaging oneself temporarily from these vital urgencies and remaining free to engage in activities which in themselves are not satisfactions of necessities.[3]

We have noted that it is when man retires into himself that he creates, that there can be no creation without this withdrawal. In being able to forget his environment momentarily man is able to see beyond his immediate needs and invent and carry out this secondary set of actions. The improvement brought about on nature by man is accomplished through these secondary actions, which are called technology. The essence of technology is that it adapts the medium to the individual rather than vice versa.

Technology, then, is used, albeit in secondary action, to satisfy what may be regarded as "necessities"--things needed to maintain life. However, technology involves much more than that. There are many inventions, both of tools and of procedures, for things that are unnecessary in the sense that we have been using the term, that are as ancient as any of the utilitarian inventions.

> For example, as old and as widespread as the act of making fire is the act of getting drunk. I mean here the use of procedures or

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[3] Ibid., pp. 322-323.

> substances that put man in a psychophysical state of delightful exultation or delightful stupor. The drug is as early an invention as any. So much so, that it is not clear, for example, if fire was first invented to avoid cold . . . or to get drunk. The most primitive peoples have caves in which they light a fire to make them sweat in such a manner that from the smoke and excessive heat, they fall in a trance of quasi-drunkeness. These are the so-called sweathouses.[4]

Many primitive inventions also have an unclear origin. Ethnologists are not sure, for example, whether the most archaic form of the bow came into being because it was necessary for war or hunting, or whether it was adapted to these utilitarian pursuits from the musical bow. In short, we are not sure which of the two is older. All of these non-utilitarian inventions indicate that primitive man feels that a pleasurable state of mind is necessary to his life just as does modern man. Man, then, does not conceive life as mere being, but as well-being. "There is no doubt: man is the animal for which only the objectively superfluous is necessary. . . . Technology is the production of the superfluous--today as in the paleolithic age."[5]

Technology presents us with the paradox of man in its most confusing perspective. Technical acts are not, as we have seen, those through which we strive to satisfy our necessities. Nor are they, really, even those through which we strive to achieve the frankly superfluous. Rather,

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[4] Ibid., p. 327.

[5] Ibid., p. 329.

technology involves those acts through which we strive to achieve such satisfaction through the least possible effort. It is the means by which we shun, entirely or in part, the efforts which would have occupied our time under natural circumstances. But the enigma comes in when we consider what man does with the energy he has saved. Instead of merely relaxing man invents other superfluities; he devotes himself to a series of nonessential occupations which are not imposed on him by nature, but are invented by himself. From this we may infer that to do nothing is not in man's nature; man must have his "something-to-do" (quehacer).

Technology evolves through three stages, which Ortega chooses to call "Technology of Chance," Technology as Craftsmanship," and "Technology of the Technician." Contrary to popular folklore, says Ortega, it is not the fact of a single invention which changes the face of technology; what is important is a fundamental change in the general character of technology. Individual advances have been made only to be lost and rediscovered at a later date. Further, an invention can be made that does not take on its technical significance until a much later period--for example, both the printing press and gunpowder were known in China for centuries before they made their impression on Europe, yet they were not significant until they were applied in the particular manner that the Europeans applied them. There is a great historical difference between the cannon and the firecracker.

Technology of chance is so called because it is strictly through chance that the individual responsible for the invention discovers it. This is the technology of primitive man. He is not aware of technology as such, and sees very little differentiation between his natural acts and his technological acts. His repertoire of technical acts does not stand out from his purely natural acts: the ability to make fire and the ability to walk are not seen as two different kinds of acts. Further, primitive man does not see himself as the inventor of his inventions. Through the machinations of chance, he finds that an object at hand works well in performing a specific task. We might refer to technology of chance as "aha technology" after the exclamation of surprise at seeing a startling new relation between things.

The second stage of technology, the technology as craftsmanship, is the technology of Greece, pre-Imperial Rome, and the Middle Ages. In this stage, man does not yet know that there is a technology, but he sees that there are technicians who perform certain activities not common to all men. There is in this period actually less sense of invention than there was in the more primitive period, because of the belief that man must bow to tradition and the corresponding long apprenticeships. This stage is further separated from modern technology in that it has produced only tools, no machines.

The repertoire of technical acts has grown enormously. However--it is important to point out--a crisis and setback, or even the

> sudden disappearence of the principal industrial arts, would not yet be a fatal blow to material life of these societies.[6]

In the stage of technology of the technician man becomes clearly aware that there is a capacity in him which is different from his natural capacities. His new insight into technology puts man in a situation that is new in history. Prior to this time he has been conscious of the things he is unable to do. But now, what he is capable of inventing is in principle unlimited.

But man's life is more than just a struggle with nature. It is also a struggle with his own soul. Hence technology carries many social considerations. The first of these is the question of what man will do with his increasing spare time. If he is unable to continue inventing new occupations he is likely to find himself with nothing to do--a condition which, as has been noted, is not natural to man.

Further, man today is frightened by his own omnipotence. Having the capacity for either good or destruction, and possessing the means of accomplishing either, man finds himself increasingly possessed with a vague feeling of apprehension.

There is, however, another aspect of technology that needs to be touched on at this point, and that is that, while technology does, to a certain extent, shape the society, it is the nature of the society that actually determines the type of technology that the people will have. We have seen

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[6]Ibid., p. 363.

that man creates himself in accordance with the type of man he wants to be. Among the vital projects realized by man in the course of history we can count:

> . . . the Hindu bodhisattva; the athletic man of the Greek aristocracy of the sixth century; the good republican of Rome and the Stoic of of the epoch of the empire; the medieval ascetic; the hidalgo of the sixteenth century; . . . the English gentleman of 1850, etc.[7]

It seems self-evident that a nation where the ascetic is regarded as man's true being cannot develop the same technology as one in which the people want to be gentlemen.

> The gentleman ideal inverts the terms within human life itself, and proposes that man should in his forced existence of battle with his environment, behave as though he moved in the unreal and purely imaginative corner of his games and sports.[8]

In this state of mind man is magnanimous; he will defend his causes, but will stand up for the other fellow's rights. He knows life is hard, serious, and difficult; and just because he knows this fact, he is anxious to secure control over circumstances. This, Ortega maintains, is how the British grew to be great engineers and great politicians.

We have seen that man, both as an individual and as a society, is in a constant state of flux. What is human in man's life is not his body, nor is it his soul; it is his life. It is the province of history to examine and explain the changes through which man has gone in the past; history

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[7] Ibid., pp. 346-347. [8] Ibid., p. 351.

proposes to find out how human lives have been lived. Yet the lives of mankind present what seems a series of separate, disjointed facts which swarm about in a fortuitous mass.

> If this were the case, man would have no other role than to act as a handball court against which bounce the fortuitous balls of an extrinsic destiny. History would have no other mission than to record these bouncings one by one. History would be pure and absolute empiricism. The human past would be a basic discontinuity of loose occurrences without structure, form, or law.[9]

However, such is not the case. We have noted that the only thing that happens to man is the act of living, all else being within this framework. Hence the reality of the facts with which history deals lies not within the facts themselves, but in the indivisible unity of every life, in the significance these facts have in that individual's life.

The proper sphere of history, then, is interpretation. History must take into account not a raw and isolated happening as such, but must consider the significance of that happening in that man's life. Ortega uses the example of a brick falling from a second story window, hitting a passerby and breaking his neck. If this brick were to fall on a despairing man who was on his way to the bridge to commit suicide, the brick would seem an act of salvation. If, however, it should fall on an empire building, a young genius, it becomes a universal catastrophe.

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[9] Ibid., p. 18.

Further, although the individual man's perspective is unique to himself, and although each age sees reality from what we have called the thought of the time, the historian's task is not impossible, because under the wide variety exhibited by the human animal, the underlying structure is identical.

> Without having done more than approach the matter we find ourselves, then, with these clear truths: first, all human life begins with certain basic convictions about what the world is and man's place in it--he starts with these and moves within them; second, all life finds itself in surroundings which include more or less technical skill or dominance over the material environment.
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> I have here two permanent functions, two essential factors of all human life which are mutually influential: ideology and technique.[10]

Psychological factors are historically unimportant. Ortega uses the example of two men: both happy in temperament, yet one lives in a pre-technical society and the other in a technical society. They both enjoy the same temperament, but their lives differ far more than the lives of two other men who differ in character, but are in the same world. "The basic question of history, then, is this: What changes have there been in the vital life structure? How, when, and why does life change?[11]

There are two ways of approaching this problem: from within and from without. The historian can adopt an "impartial observer" attitude, and examine the facts objectively.

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[10] Ibid., p. 26.

[11] Ibid., p. 27.

However, since each age sees reality in a different light, the reality of an age does not consist in what it is for him who sees it from the outside, but what it is for him who is within it. It follows, then, that an historian who is going to understand an age must see it from within insofar as possible.

When Ortega refers to man as a drama he is not speaking metaphorically. Drama is not something that happens in life. On the contrary, life itself is essentially and solely drama because everything else that occurs happens to us because we are living. And living involves, as we have noted earlier, defining circumstance, creating one's life.

> This permits us to formulate two fundamental principles for the construction of history: first, man is continually making a world, hammering out a horizon; second, every change in the world, in the horizon, brings with it a change in the structure of the vital drama. The psychophysiological entity which has life, the soul and the body of man, cannot change; nevertheless, his life changes because his world has changed.[12]

Thus the problem of history is to study the forms or structures which the world has taken. This structure is always changing; the historian's task is to account for these changes. Ortega accounts for these changes in his concept of the generation as the modifying force of history.

It has been noted earlier that man is never born into the world alone, but that he falls into a particular society

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[12] Ibid., p. 34.

and absorbs what may be called the "spirit of the times." Man ordinarily does little but learn from the time of his birth until he is about twenty-five years old. His world, then, is composed of the system of convictions in force at that time. This system has been developed over the years, some of its customs and conventions may go back to prehistoric times. But it has been given its particular shape by the men who represent the maturity of that period.

As the young man begins to take his place, to earn his way in the world, he finds that the problems and situations that confront him are in some ways different from the problems that had confronted the mature men of his age when they were young, because the younger men see the world in a little different perspective. Further, the problems confronted by today's mature men when they were young were different from the problems faced by the men who are now very old. If this were a matter of a difference in perspective in only one or two young men, there would probably be no change in the world.

> But the fact is that this is not a matter of just a few young men, but concerns everyone who is young at a certain date, who are more numerous than the mature. Each young man will act on one point of the horizon or world--that is to say, some will act on art, others on religion, or on each one of the sciences, on industry, on politics. The modifications that they produce at each point have to be minimal; but nevertheless we must recognize that they have changed the whole face of the world so that years later, when another crowd of young men begin their life, they will find themselves with

> a world that is different from the world their elders met.[13]

We have noted that the problems faced by the young differ from the problems their elders faced when they were young. Yet the elders are alive at the same time that the young are, and most of their elders are still living. From this we can infer that the historic present is a three-sided thing; there are three distinct times, three different "todays," incorporating the reality of the boy, the mature man, and the old man.

Now all three of these individuals, the boy, the man, and the old man, are contemporaries; but they are not coevals. If all who were contemporaries were coevals, history would become paralyzed since reality would present only one aspect, leaving no possibility of innovation. The group of coevals at any given time Ortega chooses to call the generation. The boy devotes his time to absorbing the established world he finds at birth. As he reaches his thirties he begins to change the world and eventually finds that his world has become the established one. However, at sixty, he finds he must now defend this world, because there is another group of thirty-year-olds who is beginning to remake the world. It is, then, the man between thirty and sixty who changes the world; the boy does not intervene in history, nor does the old man.

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[13] Ibid., p. 37.

> Historic reality is, then, in each moment constituted of the lives of men between thirty and sixty years of age. And here comes the most important point of my doctrine. This stage between thirty and sixty, that period of man's fullest historic activity, has always been considered as a single generation, as a type of homogeneous life.[14]

The fact of the matter, however, is that the generation of historic reality is actually subdivided into two parts of fifteen years each. The period between thirty and forty-five years of age is the time when man normally finds the ideas, or the first principles of the ideology, that he is going to make his own. Between the ages of forty-five and sixty he devotes himself to the full development of the inspirations he has had during the first period. Thus the decisive thing about Ortega's concept of the generation is that the generations not only follow each other in successive waves, but also overlap, or are spliced together, in the generation that dominates the age.

The basis of Ortega's concept is his contention that the face of the world changes every fifteen years. However, this change is not a radical one, but rather a gradual, almost imperceptible change.

> . . . normally the figure of the world which is valid for one generation is succeeded by another figure of the world that is slightly different. Yesterday's system of convictions is succeeded by another today, with continuity, without a jump; this assumes that the principal framework of the world remains valid throughout that change, or is only slightly modified.[15]

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[14] Ibid., p. 48.

[15] Ibid., p. 69.

There is another type of change that differs from the normal change. This change produces what Ortega calls a "time of crisis." History enters a time of crisis when, instead of being only modified, the system of convictions belonging to a generation gives way to a state in which man remains without these convictions. The traditional norms are destroyed, and man does not know what to believe since they have not been replaced by new norms and ideas. We have seen that man's inherited culture tends to degenerate because he does not continue to replenish it. As culture becomes less and less genuine, man becomes socialized and culture replaces the individual.

> This, then, is an inexorable process. Culture, the purest product of vital authenticity since it proceeds from what man feels with an awful anguish and a burning enthusiasm the inexorable needs of which his life is composed, ends by becoming a falsification of life. Man's authentic self is choked by his cultured, conventional, social self. Every culture or great phase of culture ends with the socialization of man and, vice versa, socialization yanks man from his life in solitude, which is his real and authentic life. Note that man's socialization, his absorption by the social self, appears not only at the end of the cultural evolution, but also at the beginning. Primitive man is a socialized man, without individuality.[16]

The historical crisis gives rise to extremism as a form of life. Man gives up in the face of hopeless complexity and begins to seek simplicity, withdrawing into a corner of the world and reducing life to a fragment of what it was formerly.

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[16]Ibid., p. 78.

In his confusion man concentrates on one single aspect of the vital reality and mistakes it for the totality.

> As men have lost confidence in their culture and enthusiasm for it, they are hanging in the air and are incapable of opposing anybody who affirms anything, who makes himself solid in something--whether it be true or said in jest. Hence there are times in which it is enough to give a shout, however arbitrary its content, for everyone to deliver themselves to it.[17]

Thus we can see through the myriad facts of history three main historical moments which are repeated cyclically throughout the course of human history; each time manifesting themselves more complex and rich. In the first of these, man feels himself lost; a shipwreck. Then man, by an energetic effort, withdraws into himself to form ideas about things and possible ways of dominating them. The third stage finds man again submerging himself in the world, acting in it according to his preconceived plan. When this plan loses its originality man encounters the time of crisis and again feels himself a shipwreck in a hostile sea.[18]

As the period of crisis draws to a close, it is not accomplished suddenly, a generation arises which replaces the chaos with a new set of values. These values are built up gradually as the generations of the crisis period cast about for a solution. There is a decisive date in this process.

> A generation lives at this date which, for the first time, thinks the new thoughts with

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[17] Ibid., p. 113.

[18] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 88.

> full clarity and in complete possession of their meaning; a generation which is neither still the precursor nor yet the follower. That generation I call the decisive generation.[19]

It is this decisive generation that enables us to determine where one generation ends and another begins. The decisive generation that set the theme for the modern age was the generation that existed sometime between 1600 and 1650. In order to isolate the decisive generation it is necessary to identify the figure who represents the character of the period, in this case, Ortega feels, Descartes. The year in which Descartes ended his thirtieth year was 1626, hence his generation falls between the years 1619 and 1634. By either adding or subtracting 15 years from 1626 we can, Ortega maintains, derive the median year for each prior or subsequent generation. He points out that on his scale, Hobbes falls within the generation of 1611, having missed Descartes' generation by one year. His contention is further supported, he claims, by the fact that Hobbes' works show that, indeed, he does belong to another generation from Descartes, but that he is right on the borderline.

Unfortunately, Ortega never developed a comprehensive study of history based on this historical yardstick. It might prove an interesting study to make such a survey.

At any rate, for Ortega man's progress through history proceeds in an orderly fashion, one form issuing from the

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[19] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 51.

previous form with exemplary continuity. However, this progress, he hastens to warn us, is not necessarily up to something higher and better. Man in capable of anything, sublime good and abysmal bad.

It is important to distinguish between the material events, or events that change the physical aspect of the world, and historical events, or events that alter the world's definition of its circumstance. A conquest may bring about a material change in the way of life of the conquered, but unless it subsequently brings about a change in the conquered people's definition of their circumstance, it is not a true historical event.

> In order for anything important to change in the world it is necessary that the type of man--and, it is understood, woman--change; it is necessary that throngs of children appear with a vital sensibility which is distinct from that which is old and homogeneous. This is the generation; a human variety in the strict sense in which naturalists use the term. Its members come into the world dowered with certain typical characteristics, certain dispositions and preferences which give them a common physiognomy that marks them off from the previous generation.[20]

> In sum, historical reality, the human destiny, advances dialectically, although that essential dialectic is not, as Hegel believed, a conceptual dialectic composed of pure reason, but the dialectic of a broader, deeper, and richer reason than pure reason--the dialectic of life, of living reason.[21]

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[20] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 290. [21] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 135.

CHAPTER V

MAN AND THE STATE

As primitive man emerges into a formal type of society he begins to develop the forerunner of the modern state. In this action we find a proof of Ortega's concept of the creating force of the sportive side of man.

The formless human society that exists prior to the organized tribe is, according to Ortega, the horde; man as a solitary individual is mythology. For untold thousands of years the various hordes of men roamed about the earth without coming into contact with one another. However, as man begins to develop more vitality, more means of coping with his environment through elementary technology, the population begins to rise. As the population rises and the horde begins to spread out into heretofore unsettled regions, the hordes begin to make contact for the first time. The initial social contact between the hordes is, according to Ortega's hypothesis, not the contact between the wise old elders of the hordes, but between the young men of two or more neighboring hordes who, driven by the desire for companionship with people of their own age group, and led by the suggestions of a superior individual, decide to unite

and live together. Obviously, this decision is not made with the intention of remaining idle. They find, says Ortega, a strange fascination for the women of other hordes as opposed to the women of their own horde. At the instigation of one or more excellent individuals in the group the young men decide to abduct the girls of distant hordes. However, this is no easy matter, since the other hordes will not tolerate the abduction of their women without raising their hands to protect them in one way or another.

> To rob them it is necessary to fight, and war is born as a means of serving love. But war calls for a leader and requires discipline: with war, which love inspired, rises authority, law, and the social structure. But unity of leader and discipline bring with them, and, at the same time, forment, the unity of spirit, a common concern for all of the great problems. And, in effect, in these youth associations begin the cults of magic powers, ceremonies, and rituals.[1]

Gradually man's system of life is altered. The life in common lived by these young men leads to the idea of building a place for them to live, a place that is different from the rough shelters and caves that they have known in the horde.

> Thus it happens that the first house that man builds is not a home for the family, still nonexistent, but a casino for young men. In it they prepare their expeditions, perform their rites; here they indulge in song, in drinking, and wild banquets. That is to say that the club is, whether we like it or not, older than the domestic hearth, just as the casino is older than the house.[2]

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[1]Ortega y Gasset, José, Las Obras Completas de José Ortega y Gasset, Vol. II (Madrid, 1961), p. 616.

[2]Ibid.

This casino is the institution ethnologists have noted among very primitive tribes called the bachelor house. As in these societies, the first society so formed kept the young men's club as a secret place, taboo, and mature men, women, and children were prohibited on penalty of death from entering. Thus the original political association can be said to be the secret society which, through iron discipline born of the necessity of war, requires of its members a severe training to develop their prowess in war and hunting. Thus, directly or indirectly, the young men's clubs introduce into history exogamy, war, authoritative organization, training or asceticism, the law, cultic associations, the festival of masked dances or carnival, and the secret society. All of these things merged into one phenomenon provides us with an explanation of the origin of the state; produced by vigor, not by utility.

> It has not been the worker, nor the intellectual, nor the priest, properly speaking, nor the businessman who iniciates the great political process; it has been youth, preoccupied with women and resolved to fight; it has been the lover, the warrior, and the athlete.[3]

Yet this is not entirely an hypothesis: there are historical facts that support the theory. Ortega points out that in Greece the names of the political institutions before the development of the polis were phyle, phratria, and hetairia.

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[3] Ibid., p. 619.

> Phyle signifies tribe, but not as a unity of blood relations, but as an organized corps of warriors. Phratria means brotherhood, and hetairia company. . . . The Phratria or brotherhood, which corresponds to the sabha of the Asiatic Aryans, is nothing more than the age-class of the young organized for feasts and war. We must bear in mind that, as I said before, in primitive times youths called father all members of the class of those more advanced in age, and brother all members of their own age group. Hetairia, or company, clearly reveals in its name the associative principle of the secret society which unites young men around a chief.[4]

These institutions are not apparent in Attica by historic times, but they survived well into historic times in Lacedæmon. Here the military organizations retained their primitive character, with the warriors living apart from their families and eating together in clubs of about fifteen warriors each. Nor was this form of organization unique in Sparta.

> A comparison of the facts we know about military life in Lacedæmon with the customs of any youthful associations in contemporary so-called savage tribes--the Masai of East Africa, for instance--will reveal a surprising resemblance between the two.[5]

We find, too, that the founding of the City of Rome is interwoven with the tale of the rape of the Sabine women, one of the first exploits undertaken by Romulus and his comrades.

Further, the young men's associations introduce, indirectly, other aspects of the state. The rest of the social mass,

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[4] Ibid., pp. 619-620.

[5] Ibid., p. 620.

being prohibited on penalty of death from entering the communal hall, and finding that it must form some sort of defense against the martial and political associations of the young, it forms an association of the old--the senate.

> The mature men live with the women and children of whom they are not, or do not know they are, husbands and fathers. The woman seeks the protection of her brothers and her mother's brothers, and becomes the center of a social group opposed to the club of young men; this is the first family, the matriarchal family, originating, in effect, in reaction and opposed to the state.[6]

From these most primitive origins, the state begins to develop, growing in size and complexity until it becomes the modern nation state. The first step above this primitive stage, the _polis_ began to develop in the Mediterranean world. Originally the _polis_ was simply a public meeting place where the people from the countryside around could gather for talk and companionship, the _agora_.

> . . . in effect, the most certain definition of the _urbs_ and the _polis_ is much like the one that is jestingly given of the cannon: you take a hole, wrap it tightly with wire, and you have a cannon. In the same way, the _urbs_ or _polis_ begins by being an empty space, the _forum_, the _agora_, and everything else is a pretext for assuring that empty space, for limiting its boundaries. The _Polis_ is not originally a group of houses for habitation, but rather a meetingplace for citizens, an empty space set aside for public functions.[7]

Heretofore all that has existed has been open countryside, broken by occasional habitations. Thus the _polis_ implies a

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[6] _Ibid._, pp. 618-619. [7] _Ibid._, Vol. IV, p. 250.

new kind of space, an enclosed space that separates man from nature.

> The plaza, thanks to the walls that enclose it, is a piece of countryside that turns its back on the rest, that prescinds the rest, and opposes it. This minor rebel field which seceeds from the infinite field and keeps to itself, is a space sui generis, of the most novel kind, in which man liberates himself of all community with the plant and the animal, leaves them outside and creates an environment apart, purely human. It is a civil space.[8]

Gradually the polis begins to have houses, then merchants, and the city as we know it today begins to take form. The vegetative dispersion of man over the countryside is succeeded by the civil concentration within the town. Just as the house formerly incorporated its inhabitants as members of the same "family," the city confers upon its inhabitants membership in the polity and makes them citizens. A new dimension is introduced in man's life: a loyalty not based on consanguinity or on common language.

> . . . the State begins when man strives to escape from the natural society of which he has been made a member by blood. And when we say blood, we also mean any other natural principle; for example, language. Originally the State consists in the mixing of bloods and of tongue. It is the superation of all natural society. It is crossbred and multilingual.[9]

The State, then, is not a natural form of society that man finds from his very beginnings in the world. Man, as we have noted, does not exist as an individual but as a social

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[8] Ibid., pp. 250-251.

[9] Ibid., p. 252.

being, but this natural society is the horde, not the State. The state does not appear until relatively late in the development of mankind.

> If we observe the historical situation immediately preceding the birth of the State, we will always find the following scheme: various small collectivities whose social structure is such that each lives within itself. The social form of each serves only for a common internal existence. This indicates that in the past they lived effectively isolated, each one by itself and for itself, without other than exceptional contacts with its neighbors. But to this effective isolation has succeeded an external coexistence, above all in the economic sphere. The individuals of other collectivities, with whom he is in commercial or economic relations.[10]

Thus there arises a duality of existence that was not present in the old form of society. Gradually the exclusivistic social forms that were the mark of the older form give way to a social form composed of the relations between the groups in their common effort. If this common effort is to be successful these older forms must be abandoned.

> There is no state creation if the minds of certain peoples are incapable of abandoning the traditional structure of one form of coexistence, and further, of imagining another that has never existed. For this reason the State is authentic creation. The State begins by being a work of absolute imagination. Imagination is the liberating power that man has. A people is capable of being a State insofar as it knows how to imagine. Hence it is that with all peoples there has been a limit to their statal evolution, precisely the limit placed by Nature on their imaginations.[11]

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[10] Ibid., pp. 252-253.

[11] Ibid., p. 253.

It must not be supposed, however, that the appearance of the polis or City State is anything more than a moment in the history of the State. The State is not a static entity, and cannot be defined, strictly speaking, in the terms we ordinarily use to speak of the State: a people occupying a definite geographical area, usually under one sovereign government, etc. The State, like human life, is a process of becoming; it is a dynamic, not a static concept. The usual definitions hold true, then, only in the sense that they describe the state at any given point of time.

> But soon we see that this human group is doing something communal--conquering other peoples, founding colonies, federating themselves with other states; that is to say, at every hour it is going beyond what seemed to be the principal material of its unity. This is the terminus ad quem, the true State, whose unity consists precisely in superceding any given unity. When this impulse toward something farther on stops, the State automatically succumbs, and the unity which previously existed and appeared its physical cement--race, language, natural frontier--becomes useless: the State disagregates, disperses, atomises.[12]

We have seen that the State cannot come into being unless peoples have the capacity for abandoning traditional norms and the capacity to dream of new forms that have not yet existed. The same requirement holds true for the development of the State into a larger unit: the individual State cannot be a successful partner in a federation of

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[12]Ibid., pp. 258-259.

States if its people are not willing to have a loyalty that supercedes their loyalty to the individual State. As in the origins of the State, it is the superior, the excellent individual who leads the way in the enlarging of the State. This is the historical significance of the power struggle between Caesar and the republicans: the men who remained loyal to the idea of the City State. For Caesar, folklore to the contrary notwithstanding, was not a carbon copy of Alexander the Great. Had Caesar aspired to be another Alexander, he would have projected his empire toward the East.

> The idea of a universal kingdom is the only thing that makes them alike. . . . But besides, it is not a universal kingdom that Caesar proposes. His proposition is more profound. He desires a Roman Empire that does not live on Rome, but on the perifery, on the provinces, and this implies the absolute superation of the City State. . . . Not a center which orders and a periphery which obeys, but a gigantic social body in which each element is at once an active and a passive subject of the State. Such is the modern State, and such was the fabulous anticipation of Caesar's futurist genius.[13]

Thus man and the State, in becoming to be, must never be taken as they are at any given historical moment and said to be the ultimate, the pinnacle toward which all previous history has been striving. It is absurd, Ortega argues, to speak of "the history of Spain" in the sense of meaning that Spain had a history as "Spain" before the national entity "Spain" existed; as though Spain had existed as a unity in

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[13] Ibid., p. 257.

the depths of the Spanish soul before coming into being. This is to suppose that Spain is the achievement toward which all history of the Iberian Peninsula has been striving since the beginning of time, and that now it has been reached and the people can rest on their laurels.

> The pure truth is that present-day nations are merely the present-day manifestation of that variable principle, condemned to perpetual supersession. That principle is not now blood or language, since the community of blood and language, in France or in Spain, has been the effect, and not the cause, of the unification of the State; the principle at the present time is the "natural frontier."[14]

But the term "natural frontier" is itself as temporary as unity of blood and language. It is a relative term that indicates the economic and/or war-like resources of the period rather than any divinely pre-ordained boundary. As men in various nations get together in cooperation for a mutual goal these boundaries will be superceded in favor of a larger national community of men. In 1928 Ortega maintained that this inexorable process would eventually bring about a unification of the nations of Europe--first in economic cooperation (the Common Market) and then in a political association of some sort. This was considered rather Utopian at the time it was predicted, given the chaos in which Europe found itself after the Treaty of Versailles. Today it is accepted pretty generally as the eventual outcome of European cooperation. All of these facts seem to

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[14] Ibid., p. 260.

support the validity of Ortega's theory of the birth and growth of the State. If Ortega's theory is correct, as it seems to be, it seems inevitable that the United States will eventually join in an Atlantic Community--The EurAmerica that seems as idle a thought today as Ortega's prediction must have in 1928.

Ironically, it seems now in the light of what has been said, men often refer to the State in terms of a common heritage. The fallacy of this contention can be proved, says Ortega, simply by looking at the state of affairs we find in the world today: the United States and England share a common heritage, just as they do a common language. The peoples of Central and South America have a common language, common race, and a common heritage with either Spain or Portugal. Yet none of these peoples form a common nation with the other. It is, then, absurd to speak of the nation in terms of a common past. "On the contrary, before it could have a common past, the nation had had to create a common existence; and before it could create it, the nation had to dream it, to want it, to project it."[15] Further, if a common past were all the claim a nation had to hold its people, it would soon disintegrate just as the British Nation composed of the British Isles and the American Colonies disintegrated. It is just as absurd to think in terms only of

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[15]Ibid., p. 267.

a common present, because human life is a preoccupation with the future. Man is always in the process of becoming, he is continually confronted with possibilities, and these possibilities are his future, not his past or his present.

> If the nation consists only in a past and a present, no one would trouble himself with defending it against an attack. Those that affirm the contrary are hypocrites or lunatics. What happens is that the national past projects its attractions--real or imaginary--into the future. It seems desirable to us to have a future in which our nation will continue to exist. For this reason we mobilize in its defense; not because of blood, nor language, nor the common past. Upon defending the nation we defend our tomorrow, not our yesterday.[16]

Up to this point we have discussed Ortega's ideas concerning the State and its development without making note of his distinction between the State and Society. Ortega points out that the concept of a collective will that is more than the sum of its component parts is pure mysticism; it is equally mystic to equate the State and Society. Society consists primarily in a repertoire of usages, intellectual, moral, technical, of play and pleasure, and political; the State is only a portion of the Society as a whole. However, the State is a very important portion of the society because it is always, in its very essence, the pressure that society exerts on the individuals that compose it. It is the State that rules over men through force, and, in this sense, the State could be said to be anti-liberty. To so describe it,

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[16] Ibid., p. 266.

however, would be merely playing with words. Man finds in the physical world objects that impede his movement, as do trees; but to say that the tree is anti-liberty because it compels us to go around it instead of through it is an obvious absurdity. In the same fashion it is absured, Ortega maintains, to speak of the objects that impede man in the social world as being, in their essence, anti-liberty. The pressures that man encounters, the things that impede him in both the physical and social worlds are natural to man. Man does not exist individually in a state of nature, he is always a member of a society regardless of the particular form that society may have at any given historical moment. Liberty for man does not consist in being entirely free to do exactly as he pleases; it does not consist in his being completely free from any form of social pressure. On the contrary, without society man has no rights: he cannot be free except within the context of human society. Human rights require as a substratum the unity of human coexistence. Right is a younger brother to usage and custom, albeit a more energetic brother. Rights are not a product of the State, because the State is not produced in a society until a very advanced stage in its evolution. The State may well, in some instances, impart certain perfections to Right, but Right exists without the State and its statutory activity. "Political liberty does not consist in man not feeling oppressed, because such a situation does not exist, but rather, in the

form of that oppression."[17] In short, it is not the pressure that the State and society represent that determines whether we feel free or not, but rather, the form that that pressure takes.

> Because the Statal pressure always manifests itself in a concrete form which we call "institutions." . . . Man isn't free to elude the coercion of the collectivity over his person, which coercion we designate with the inexpressive name of "State," but certain peoples, in certain epochs, have given to this coercion the institutional figure that they preferred--they have adapted the State to their vital preferences, they have imposed upon it the model proposed by their free will. This and no other thing is "life as liberty."[18]

The State will either protect, secure, and further man's Rights, or it will crush them; but the State, considered abstractly, is not anti-liberty simply because it exercises a rule over man.

> By "rule" is not understood here primarily the exercise of material power, of physical coercion. Because here we are trying to avoid stupidities, at least the more gross and evident ones. Now, this relation, the stable and normal one between men that is called "rule" never rests on force, but rather the contrary: because a man or group of men exercise command, he or they have at their command that apparatus or social machine that is called "force."[19]

Force in itself can never be properly called rule. All rule rests, in the final analysis, upon the consent of the governed.

> As Talleyrand said to Napoleon: With bayonets, sire, one can do everything except one

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[17] Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 88. [18] Ibid., p. 89.

[19] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 232.

> thing: sit on them." and command is not a gesture of grabbing power, but the tranquil exercise of it. In sum: to command is to sit down, be it on a throne, curule chair, front bench, or bishop's seat. Contrary to the unsophisticated suggestions of melodrama, to rule is not so much a question of the heavy hand as of the firm seat. The State is, by definition, the state of the opinion; a situation of equilibrium, static.[20]

History shows us that men have lived under despotisms, and one does well to question whether these governments rested on public opinion. The answer will, of course, vary with the individual circumstance, but despotic governments fall generally into one of three categories. In the first of these, a despotism can enjoy real popular support because it has substantially increased the economic life of the individuals in the country. Modern Russia is a case in point: life under its form of government might be unthinkable for an Englishman or an American yet be perfectly acceptable to a Russian who can see the progress made since the days of the Mir. In the second category we might place all military occupations; here it is necessary to distinguish between a process of rule and a state of aggression. In the third case,

> What happens is that at times public opinion does not exist. A society divided into discrepant groups, whose force of opinion is reciprocally annulled, leaves no room for a rule to be constituted. And since Nature abhors a vacuum, the empty space left by the absent force of public opinion is filled by

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[20] Ibid., p. 233.

> brute force. At the most, then, the latter presents itself as a substitute for the former.[21]

Public opinion is analogous to "the spirit of the times." Every historic period has in force certain ideas, preferences, and ideals that make up its definition of the circumstance. Before anything important can take place in the world it is necessary to bring about a change in the spirit of the times. Before the doctrine of "Natural Rights" came into being, before man believed that he had any such rights, the populace was content with seeing the glory and grandeur of the king and the nobility. While Nathaniel Hawthorne was the U. S. Consul at Liverpool, England, he commented incredulously in his notebooks on the elation the people, particularly the poorest, felt when the King of England rode by in his finery. But as the doctrine of "Natural Rights" began to be believed by the people, when men believed they were free and started acting accordingly, no power on earth could stop them. In the final analysis, then, the form of government a society assumes depends on the society's state of mind. "Believe" comes from the Anglo Saxon _belefan_ - to act as if something is true, to accept something as true. Hence when man _believes_ he has certain rights he is acting as though they were self evident. "Rule is the normal exercise of authority. It is always based on public opinion, today as it was ten

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[21] _Ibid_.

thousand years ago, among the English as among the bushmen."[22]

It has been noted that human rights do not exist without society, and that men must believe they have these rights before they can be exercised. There is no better example of this theory than the state of international anarchy known as war. All human things have a double perspective: the aspect they present when they arrive on the human scene and the aspect they present when they depart. Slavery, for example, was at the time of its invention a marvelous advance for mankind. It was a step ahead when a man had the good idea of conserving his prisoner's life and utilizing his labor instead of butchering him on the spot. However, as man progressed in other areas, slavery began to take on the abhorent aspect it wears today--hence it is less prevalent than it has been in times past. War, too, was a good thing when it first appeared.

> The pacifist sees in war a harm, a crime, or a vice. But he forgets that, above and beyond this, war is an enormous effort that men make to resolve certain conflicts. Was is not an instinct, but an invention. Animals do not know it: it is purely a human institution, like science or administration. War has brought to man one of the major discoveries, the base of all civilization: the discovery of discipline.[23]

It has remained the method by which men settled their differences until the present day. Yet the increasing horror of war has begun to bring voices of protest against it. It is

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[22] Ibid., p. 232.

[23] Ibid., p. 287.

the pacifist's error not to see the double perspective of human activities.

> For not knowing all of this, which is elemental, the pacifist has made his task too easy. He thought that to eliminate war it was enough to stop making war, or, at the most to work toward that goal. Since he saw in war only a sickly and superluous excrescence that had appeared in the way of man, he believed that it sufficed to extirpate it and that it was not necessary to substitute for it. But the enormous effort that is war can only be avoided if by peace we mean an effort that is even more enormous, a system of extremely complicated efforts that, in part, require the venturous intervention of the genius.[24]

Peace is not the hole that is left when war is removed, it is a right that is formed between peoples. The error of pacifism is in assuming that such a right exists.

> For the right or a branch of it to exist, it is necessary: First of all, that some specially inspired men discover certain ideas or principles of right; second, the propagation and expansion of these ideas of right among the collectivity in question . . . and third, that this expansion reach to the point of becoming predominant, that those ideas of right consolidate themselves in the form of "public opinion." Then, and only then, can we talk, in the fullest meaning of the term. of right, that is, as a norm in force.[25]

Further, a right referring to the materials that inevitably originate war does not exist at all, not only in the sense that it has not yet come in force; for it cannot come to be in force through public opinion as long as we are thinking in terms of simply eliminating war without finding an effective substitute.

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[24] Ibid., p. 228.

[25] Ibid., p. 289.

> Let us imagine, in effect, that in a certain moment all men were to renounce war . . . Can it be believed that this will be enough--or, further, that with this action man has made the most minute step toward peace? Great error! War, we repeat, was a means that man had invented to solve certain conflicts. The renunciation of war will not solve the conflicts. On the contrary, it will leave them more intact and less resolved than ever. The absence of passions, the voluntary pacifism of all men would prove completely inefficient, because the conflicts would demand solution and while no other means is invented, war will inexorably reappear in this imaginary planet inhabited only by pacifists.[26]

The only thing that will eliminate war, Ortega feels, is for the group of nations concerned to work together in some common effort, following the inexorable growth of the national loyalty as it has manifested itself in the development of the Nation so far.

There are two types of patriotism: the patriotism that regards the nation as a condensation of the past and as a collection of the free things that the present of our country offers us; and the patriotism that regards the nation not as the nation of the fathers, but as the nation of the sons. The first of these is passive patriotism, inactive yet spectacular, in which the individual dedicates himself to the fruition of what already exists. The second of these sees the nation as the collection of virtues it has not had and does not now have, and dedicates itself to realizing these virtues within the nation in the future.

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[26] Ibid.

> If the nation is understood in this manner, patriotism is pure action without rest, a hard and chastizing eagerness to realize the idea of better than the teachers of the national conscience propose. The country is a task to complete, a problem to resolve, an "ought to" (deber).[27]

It is within this context that we can note the second half of the quotation used earlier, which forms the key to Ortega's political theories: "I am myself plus my circumstances, and if I cannot save them I cannot save myself."[28] (Emphasis added). Man must not only come to know his individual circumstance: his individual life is inextricably bound up with the lives of other men. His society forms a very major portion of his individual circumstance, and he must not only come to know it: he must work toward saving it or he as an individual is lost. To save his society he must renew it, enlarge upon it; it is as much a task of bringing something into existence as his own life: man must continually bring both himself and his society into existence; his own life is radical solitude and must be brought into existence by him alone, but his society must count on its members to keep it going: it is a community effort. Man must save his individual circumstance, himself, but to do so he must save his collective circumstance, his society. "True patriotism is criticism of the land of the fathers and construction of the land of the sons."[29]

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[27] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 506.

[28] Ibid., p. 322.

[29] Ibid., p. 506.

Given his doctrine of the uniqueness of the perspective of each nation and each age, it is understandable that Ortega is non-committal as to the best type of government. Indeed, he maintains that there can be no "best" type that is universally valid because

> . . . the establishment of a new usage--a new "public opinion" or "collective belief," a new morality, a new form of government--the determination of what at each moment society is going to be, depends on what it has been, just as in the individual life.[30]

However, Ortega considers that, in the final analysis, human liberty involves the freedom to make choices; hence liberty and plurality are reciprocal. The form of government that comes closest, abstractly, to providing its citizens with an element of choice is democracy. The qualifier "abstractly" is added because one should not confuse liberalism and democracy as being the same thing. Democracy answers the question "who ought to exercise public power?" while liberalism answers the question "what should limit the public power?" Ortega points to the English Revolution as an example of liberalism, an attempt to limit the power of the king; and the French Revolution as an example of democracy, an attempt to establish equality.

Democracy implies equality and liberalism implies privilege. The two come together when privilege is extended

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[30] Ibid., Vol IV, p. 38.

over the entire mass of populace; that is, when all men have the same legal rights. It must further be remembered that democracy is a political, not a social ideal.

> Democracy as democracy, that is, strictly and exclusively as a norm of political right seems an eminently good thing. But democracy, exasperated and outside itself, democracy in religion and art, democracy in thought and manners; democracy in heart and in custom is the most dangerous infirmity that a society can suffer.[31]

It must never be forgotten that, while the political sphere is a very important part of society, it is only a part and can never be correctly taken for the whole. The more reduced the sphere of action of an idea, the more dangerous it is if applied to the entire of life. Democracy is essentially a juridical form, hence is incapable of providing us any orientation in areas that are not within the juridical sphere. When democracy is extended to the social spheres that do not involve public affairs it ceases to be democracy and becomes plebian-ism.

> We have here the criterion for discerning where the democratic sentiment degenerates into plebian-ism. Whoever gets irritated at seeing equal men treated unequally, but is moved at seeing the unequal treated equally, is not a democrat, he is a plebian.[32]

With the distinction between democracy and plebianism we come again to Ortega's concept of the superior individual as a guiding force in human development. It is, as Ortega

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[31] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 135. [32] Ibid., p. 138.

has pointed out, the superior individual who first sees the necessity for men to join together in a communal effort, forming the basis of society. All primitive myths and legends relating to the creation of a people go back to a superior ancestor of one sort or another. The standards of the superior individual become the norm toward which all the rest strive.

> I have here the elementary creating mechanism of all society: the example of a few is articulated in the docility of many. The result is that the example yields abundantly and the inferiors perfect themselves in the manner of their betters.[33]

Thus it is, strictly speaking, only through the desire of the mass of individuals to follow the example of the superior individual or group that society comes into being. All society, then, is ultimately based on a two-way relationship between the elite and the masses: the elite must lead, and the masses must follow their lead. Indocility, or a refusal to follow the superior individual, brings about the breakup of society.

Hence Ortega maintains that, by definition, any social group is aristocratic. For example, when six men gather for conversation on a street corner, the observant bystander will note that one tends to dominate the conversation while the rest follow his example. If there were no individual to

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[33] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 104.

guide the group, the conversation would degenerate into a series of disjointed phrases. The same fact holds true for larger human aggregates.

> A nation is an organized human mass, given structure by a minority of select individuals. Whatever our political creed, we must recognize this truth. It belongs to a stratum of historical reality much deeper than that concerned merely with political problems. The legal form which a nation may adopt can be as democratic or even as communistic as you choose, but its living and extra-legal constitution will always consist in the dynamic influence of a minority acting on a mass. This is a natural law, and as important in the biology of social bodies as the law of densities is in physics.[34]

Many inaccurate things have been said about Ortega's concept of the elite as the guiding force of human destiny. All too often it is mistakenly visualized in terms of a monolithic society of conspirators punching buttons to activate the mass, which lives in blind servitude to the elite. Needless to say, this concept has no connection with Ortega's. In Ortega's concept, it is not the mass man who lives in servitude; but, on the contrary, it is the elite man, the man of excellence, who lives in essential servitude, because he lives according to a rigid personal standard that asks more than the common man is willing to ask of himself.

> This is life as a discipline--the noble life. Nobility is defined by the demands it makes on us, by obligations, not rights. Noblesse oblige. "To live as one likes is plebian; the noble man aspires to order and law" (GOETHE).[35]

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[34] Ibid., p. 93. [35] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 182.

The noble man, then, is the man who demands more of himself, and the nobility is not a closed society based on any absurdity of heredity. The privileges that the superior individual enjoys are not concessions, they are conquests; and as such, they presuppose the superior individual's capability of reconquering them at any time.

> For me, nobility is synonymous with a life of effort, ever set on excelling itself, to transcend from what one is to what one sets up as a duty and an obligation. In this way the noble life stands opposed to the common or inert life, which reclines statically upon itself, condemned to perpetual immobility, unless an external force compels it to come out of itself.[36]

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[36] Ibid., p. 183.

CHAPTER VI

THE THEME OF OUR TIME

The modern age began, in Ortega's historical chronology, with the generation of Descartes, the decisive generation falling between the years 1610 and 1634. It was this generation that first developed the new thoughts that were to set the theme for the modern age with full clarity and in complete possession of their meaning. From the time of this decisive generation Western man's concept of the world changed gradually from generation to generation over the next three hundred years. However, beginning with the generation following the generation of 1911, that is, the generation between the years 1919 and 1934, with its median year 1926, the Western world entered a stage of historical crisis.

The breakdown of the established order had begun earlier. The German theologians, through their examinations of the Bible, had begun to question the literal interpretations current at the time. The work of anthropologists like Sir James Frazer added to man's knowledge of primitive religions, showing that Christianity was not wholly unique. The work of Charles Darwin further rocked the foundations of the established order, but continuity was held, temporarily. With the

generation of 1926, the traditional norms were destroyed, and no new ones were put forth to take their place.

The Great War, which was to have made "the world safe for democracy," had failed. Millions of this generation had died, promises had been broken, civilization cheapened. The generation that returned from the war found that the old ideas no longer sufficed to give them a meaningful definition of its circumstance. The staid Victorian Age and its hopelessly optimistic faith in progress gave way to the iconoclastic bitterness of H. L. Mencken, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon; the flowery prose of an earlier age gave way to the lean, stripped-for-action sentences of Hemingway and a host of lesser imitators as the "lost generation" cast about for a more concrete norm than the Great Gatsby syndrome.

True to historical form, the modern period of historical crisis gave rise to extremism as a form of life: in 1917 the Bolshevik coup d'état overthrew the provisional government of Russia; in 1922 Mussolini's Black Shirts marched on Rome; and in 1933 (five years after Ortega wrote The Revolt of the Masses), Herr Adolf Schicklgruber was named Chancellor of Germany. Nor were the war-torn countries the only ones to experience extremism: Spain's Second Republic fell to the Falange in 1939; the United States experienced the Nazi Bunds, Father Coghlin, Huey P. Long, et al., and the hysteria of the McCarthy era is too recent to require further comment. In Mexico the Cristeros and their spiritual descendants, the

the Sinarquistas, struck terror in many hearts before they were brought under control.

The unifying factor in all these examples of extremism is the ascent of the masses to complete social power. "Such a crisis has occurred more than once in history. Its physiognomy and consequences are known. So also is its name. It is called the rebellion of the masses."[1]

In order to understand Ortega's meaning fully, we must avoid giving a purely political tinge to the words "rebellion," "masses," and "social power." "Public life is not solely political, but equally, and even primarily, intellectual, moral, economic, religious; it comprises all our collective habits, including our fashions both of dress and of amusement."[2] The rebellion of the masses consists in the mass-man ascending to the positions of social power which have heretofore been the prerogative of the elite. However, it is not a matter of the society; that would be a case of personal error, not a sociological subversion. "The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will."[3]

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[1]Ortega y Gasset, José, Las Obras Completas de José Ortega y Gasset, Vol. IV (Madrid, 1961), p. 143.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 148.

In his use of the term "masses" Ortega does not mean a particular socio-economic class: mass-man is found at all levels of society. We may define mass-man as

> . . . a man emptied of his own history, with no inward past, and so given over to any so-called "international" discipline. He is less a man than the shell of one, made of plain idola fori; he has no insides, no inalienable privacy of his own, no irrevocable "I." Consequently, he is always ready to play at being anything. He has only appetites, he believes that he has only rights and no obligations; he is a man without the imperative of nobility--sine nobilitate--the snob.[4]

The masses, then, are so-called not because of their great numbers as much as because of the inertia, or mass, that they manifest. The mass-man has no patience with anything that is excellent, individual, or superior in any way; it crushes these things beneath it. The rule of the mass-man is democracy as a social ideal instead of a purely juridical ideal--democracy with a vengeance! "The sovereignty of the unqualified individual, of the human being as such, generally, has now passed from being a juridical idea or ideal to be a psychological state inherent in the average man."[5]

Man's liberty involves limitation; yet the mass-man believes that to live is to meet with no limitation whatsoever. Seeing no limits to himself, and finding complete freedom as his natural, established condition, without any special cause for it, the modern mass-man feels no compunction to refer to any authority higher than himself.

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[4] Ibid., p. 121.

[5] Ibid., p. 152.

> He is satisfied with himself exactly as he is. Ingenuously, without any need of being vain, as the most natural thing in the world, he will tend to consider and affirm as good everything he finds within himself: opinions, appetites, preferences, tastes.[6]

If there is no authority higher than the individual, some sort of standard to which it is possible to appeal in a discussion, there can be no civilization. Civilization is the will to live in common, and a man is uncivilized, a barbarian, to the degree that he does not take others into account.

> The world is a civilized one, its inhabitant is not: he does not see the civilization of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force. The new man wants his motor-car, and enjoys it, but he believes that it is the fruit of an Edenic tree. In the depths of his soul he is unaware of the artificial, almost incredible, character of civilization, and does not extend his enthusiasm for the instruments to the principles which make them possible.[7]

Unless civilization, culture, is constantly created anew, it will perish, since civilization, like life, is always a process of becoming. Unless the mass-man relinquishes social control and allows the elite to recreate the culture, modern civilization cannot long endure, since without physics and chemistry, the planet cannot support the numbers that now inhabit it.

> Civilization is not always there, it is not self-supporting. It is artificial, and

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[6] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 109. [7] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 196.

> requires an artist or an artisan. If you want to make use of the advantages of civilization, but are not prepared to concern yourself with the upholding of civilization, you are done. In a trice you find yourself left without civilization. Just a slip, and when you look around everything has vanished into air. The primitive forest appears in its native state, just as if curtains covering pure Nature had been drawn back. The jungle is always primitive and, vice versa, everything primitive is mere jungle.[8]

Mass-man is born into a world of plenty, into a well-ordered society that seems to run along on its own power, and he comes to feel that automobiles, aspirins, and four-lane highways are an integral part of nature--there for the asking.

> This leads us to note down in our psychological chart of the mass-man of today two primary traits: the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude toward all that has made possible the ease of his existence. These traits together make up the well-known psychology of the spoiled child. And in effect, it would entail no error to use this psychology as a "sight" through which to observe the soul of today's masses. Heir to an ample and generous past--generous both in ideals and in activities--the new vulgar mass-man has been spoiled by the world around him. To spoil is to put no limit on caprice, to give one the impression that everything is permitted to him and that he has no obligations.[9]

The epoch of the mass-man is the age of specialization. Instead of scientists, the universities produce technicians, trained in increasingly smaller areas of specialization, and

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[8] Ibid., p. 201.

[9] Ibid., p. 181.

with no grasp of the underlying concepts of science or of civilization. From his knowledge-in-depth of his narrow field, the specialist then projects and pontificates on all other fields. He is, Ortega says, a learned ignoramus; and as such, is only a half-step removed from the rest of the mass-men.

Thus mass-man suffers from intellectual hermeticism: he finds himself with a set of stock definitions of his circumstance, and decides to content himself with them and to consider himself intellectually complete.

> Once and for all, he consecrates the assortment of topics, prejudices, fag-ends of ideas, or simply empty words which chance has piled up in his mind, and with an audacity only explained by ingenuousness, will impose them everywhere. This is . . . the characteristic of our time: not that the vulgar believes itself superexcellent and not vulgar, but that the vulgar proclaims and imposes the rights of vulgarity, or vulgarity as a right.[10]

We see with Communism, Syndicalism, Fascism, and White Citizen's Councils the type of individual, described by Ortega, who does not want to give reasons or to be right, but simply shows himself resolved to impose his opinions on the rest of mankind.

Ortega contends that the greatest danger of this rise of the mass-man is the State. In the past, authoritarian States have oppressed individuals, but there has been an inviolable area where the State did not transgress. The rise

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[10] Ibid., pp. 187-188.

of the mass-man has given rise to the Totalitarian State, which recognizes no area as inviolable.

> The contemporary State is the easiest seen and the best-known product of civilization. And it is an interesting revelation when one takes note of the attitude that mass-man adopts before it. He sees it, admires it, knows that there it is, safeguarding his existence; but he is not conscious of the fact that it is a human creation invented by certain men and upheld by certain virtues and fundamental qualities which the men of yesterday had, and which may vanish into air tomorrow. Furthermore, the mass-man sees in the State an anonymous power, and feeling himself, like it, anonymous, he believes that the State is something of his own. Suppose that in the public life of a country some difficulty, conflict, or problem presents itself, the mass-man will tend to demand that the State intervene immediately and undertake a solution directly with its immense and unassailable resources.[11]

One of the characteristics of the extremism that becomes manifest in periods of historical crisis is the desire to retreat into a small corner of the universe, reducing the complexity of the world into a simple entity that can be swallowed whole.

> This withdrawal by man into a corner of the world is an exact symbol of desperation in its first stage. It signifies that man, in effect, reduces life and the world to a corner, to a single fragment of what it was before.[12]

Modern mass-man has retreated from the complexity of society to the narrow sphere of politics--making it the whole world.

> The mass in revolt has lost all capacity for knowledge or devotion. It can contain nothing but politics, a raving, frenetic, exorbitant politics that claims to replace all

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[11] Ibid., p. 225. [12] Ibid., Vol. V., p. 108.

> knowledge, religion, wisdom--everything, in short, really qualified to occupy the center of the human mind. Politics drains men of solitude and intimacy, and preaching total politicalism is therefore one of the techniques of socialization.[13]

It is this total involvement in politics that is the hallmark of both Communism and Fascism: the State does not exist for the individual, but vice versa. This much is obvious. But it is also the hallmark of the mass-man in general, even in democratic societies. It has been but two or three years since a showing of Picasso's paintings was cancelled in Dallas because of the painter's political leanings, a recent example of Ortega's point that politics replaces art.

> . . . the mass-man does in fact believe that he is the State, and he will tend more and more to set its machinery working on whatsoever pretext, to crush beneath it any creative minority which disturbs it--disturbs it in any order of things: in politics, in ideas, in industry.[14]

Thus State intervention is the gravest danger that threatens civilization today. The mass-man rebels against diversity; he is utilitarian and does not realize that liberty and diversity are reciprocal. Man's liberty demands that he must have more than one alternative when he creates his life through choice. Through State intervention mass-man is able to impose a sterile uniformity on the nation, a sameness that stifles all spontaneous social effort which is the sustaining and impelling force of human destinies.

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[13] Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 130-131. [14] Ibid., p. 225.

> The result of this tendency will be fatal. Spontaneous social action will be broken up again and again by the intervention of the State; no new seed will be able to fructify. Society will have to live <u>for</u> the State; man <u>for</u> the machinery of government. And as, after all, it is only a machine, whose existence and maintenance depend on the vital supports around it, the State, after sucking out the very marrow of society, will be left, bloodless, a skeleton, dead with that rusty death of machinery more gruesome than the death of a living organism.[15]

It must not be supposed, however, that Ortega is entirely pessimistic about the future of Western Civilization. Western man has gone through two periods of crisis in the past, each time emerging stronger than ever. Europe is demoralized, said Ortega, and this demoralization has brought about the revolt of the masses. But this does not necessarily signal the eminent doom of the West. What is needed is for Western Civilization to embark upon a new program, to set a goal toward which to recreate itself anew. Once a definite, long-range goal has been set, government will cease being a hand-to-mouth operation, and the masses will fall in behind their leaders. In 1928, Ortega envisioned the creation of a United States of Europe as the enterprise that would pull the West out of its doldrums. A war and a half later, with the European Coal and Steel Community burgeoned into a Common Market, we may find that Ortega was correct.

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[15] <u>Ibid</u>.

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