***What is Philosophy?* by Jose Ortega y Gasset**

This book is actually the written transcript of a series of lectures given by Ortega, first in Buenos Aires in 1928 and then again in Madrid in 1929. As a result, it reads like the spoken rather than the written word which certainly makes for an interesting reading experience, good if you want to get a feel for the flavour of Ortega’s speech, not so great if you want a tight and deliberate text.

There is a significant amount of repetition from chapter to chapter (as you would expect in a lecture series, beginning each new lecture with a review of what was covered in the last, for example) which is never a bad thing in a work of philosophy. He also talks of the trajectory he wishes to follow being more circular in nature and gradually decreasing in radius each time it completes one loop, rather than a straight line. This means that each topic is covered multiple times with each successive pass bringing more clarification and refinement.

Related to this is the sometimes circuitous journey Ortega seems to take to arrive at his final goal. This is a deliberate device he uses to prepare the reader (or listener) for the denouement to come. The conclusion of any chain of reasoning can be presented immediately and succinctly but if it is delivered ‘cold’, so to speak, without the audience having taken part in that chain of reasoning, no matter how revolutionary or true it is, it will fall on deaf ears.

Chapter 1

Ortega sets out the goal of his lecture series, being to analyse “philosophizing itself” rather than merely give an introduction to philosophy.

His first chapter centres on history, truth, and philosophy. He notes that while truths exist forever “without alteration or modification”, they also have an “aspect that is historical”, in that they are only apprehended in the human mind, that is to say, by a real person who is necessarily subject to time. This gives truths an odd “double condition”; they are eternal (non-temporal) but only revealed historically (temporally).

Nevertheless, truths are true eternally. Changes in thought between time periods don’t change the truth but only our orientation; “It is not truths that change, but man who changes”. This lets us avoid relativism, the idea that “each truth would be true only for a certain person”, but on the other hand, history, Ortega thinks, if it is to be a science, must be able to show how certain eternal truths come to be discovered by a particular person living at a particular time in history; i.e.it must understand, and give full meaning to, the individual in his or her time period.

Ortega sees a chance for harmony here, where philosophy, which is about “the eternal and invariable”, can meet history, which studies the “inconstant and changing”. This he sees as the “great philosophic task of the present generation”.

Chapter 2

Ortega begins here by outlining what he calls “history’s essential anachronism”. This is basically the idea that within any one “moment of history there exists not one generation but three: the young, the mature, the old.” While all members of these groups are *contemporaries*, only those within the same group are *coevals*, and these *coevals* all share an “integrated manner of existence… [or] fashion in living”, which means they all have similar outlooks on, and ways of thinking about, the world shaped by the age in which they grew up. This is important because if “all contemporaries were coevals, history would stop as if paralyzed, petrified in one definitive gesture”. We need these differences between coevals for our thinking to progress, develop and change.

The difference between generations is usually small but Ortega thinks his generation is greatly removed from the previous one. He is living at a “crisis in history.”

The last generation (living in the period from 1840-1900) saw a contracting and narrowing in philosophy and Ortega holds physics responsible for this. Its practical exactitude and experimental confirmation were part of the reason but the main force which carried it through was that its truths were “highly useful to man’s practical necessities.” Through improving material interests, physics appealed to the “masses of the middle class”, and this was enough to produce what Ortega calls, the “imperialism of physics”.

Such an atmosphere culminated in the pragmatism of Auguste Comte which defined truth in relation to utility; “the reason for knowing is to be able to predict, and the reason for prediction is to make action possible. The result is that action… defines the truth of knowledge.”

Since the problems of philosophy are unsolvable by the methods of science and were out of step with the atmosphere of the time, philosophers turned from their natural subject of inquiry and offered their services to physics. Ortega thus baptises the last nearly one hundred years with the colourful expression, the “terrorism of the laboratories”.

Chapter 3

The situation described in the previous chapter is now reversing though and philosophy is surging forward once more. This has occurred because of two events. The first is the realisation we have made these days (early 20th century) that previous thinkers were wrong in believing that “there is no other truth about reality than “physical truth.”” This is what Ortega meant when he said truth was historical. The mid-19th century individual had this ‘truth’ “in his very bloodstream”. This meant he or she was unable to question this doctrine and so was unable to go beyond it.

How were they wrong? They thought of physics as yielding absolute truths about the world but it only has a “symbolic correspondence with the world”. The theories are all disconnected from the world except at the point where experiments yield facts. Theories can change as long as the facts from experiments aren’t interfered with. But since physicists only point of contact with reality comes from experiments, it is, in fact, “a dependent reality and not an absolute one; it is… a quasi-reality – because it is conditional and relative to man.” So we now realise that we must reform the fundamental principles of physics and to do this we need a discipline which searches out reality independent from our actions, i.e. philosophy.

The second reason philosophy is being reborn has to do with the very nature of philosophy. So what is philosophy? Physics is the study of matter, mathematics the study of number. All such disciplines begin their investigations by parcelling off a part of the Whole which they strive to understand. So they begin not with a problem but with something known, a known part of the unknown Universe. Philosophy, on the other hand, begins with “the concept, “everything there is,” [and since] we do not know what that “everything there is” may be… *the philosopher, in contradistinction to every other scientist, sets sail for the unknown as such.*” The object of philosophy is unknown because its object is the Whole. Philosophy is that discipline “whose object must at the start be sought for, the science that is problematical even as to its object and its subject matter…”

Science is exact and rigorous but it wins these qualities only by “maintaining itself on a plane of secondary problems and leaving the decisive and ultimate questions intact.” Ortega gives some examples of these questions, “Where does the world come from, whither is it going? What is the definitive power in the cosmos? What is the essential meaning of life?” It is the incompleteness of science that constantly draws people back to philosophy as they feel that lacuna in their souls and desire to understand the rest of reality, the part where science cannot tread.

*Postscript: The Origin of Knowledge*

Here, Ortega asks “whence comes that hunger for the Universe… which is the root of philosophy”? What he is wondering is why we are not “content with things as presented to us, but [strive] to seek beyond their appearance for their being.”

Aristotle thought it was just “natural” for humans to want to know this, something like using a faculty we possess. But Ortega thinks this desire is anything but natural. Rather, he thinks it stems from something we *lack*, “in the terrible fact that man “does not know.””

But this then begs the question why does our ignorance hurt us so, “how can he [man] feel the ache in a member he never had?”

Chapter 4

We have seen that scientific truth is exact but insufficient while philosophic truth is sufficient but inexact. This makes philosophic truth more basic, “a truer truth.” The belief that the more exact something is the truer it is, is false. Exactness can only apply to quantitative objects, that is to say, “specific things which exist in the Universe” which means it can’t apply to the Universe itself.

Physics ran into a roadblock in the late 19th century and philosophy tried to keep going, with a “physics over and beyond physics… metaphysics”. Ortega won’t follow this path. He will pull back from physics instead to life itself.

So, Ortega has defined philosophy as the study of the Universe, or “everything there is”. What does this mean? Everything means he is not interested in individual ‘things’, only the aggregate of these, although he is also interested in how these things relate to other things and to the Whole. By “things” he means not just real, existing things but also unreal, imaginative things for these too possess some form of being. Hence, he elects to use the verb “to be”, rather than “to exist”, in order to capture absolutely everything there is.

He stresses again, in contrast to the scientist, that the philosopher does not know anything about her object, the Whole. She doesn’t even know if it will be a whole or whether the Universe might instead be made up of “diverse wholes, that is to say, a Multi-verse”, nor does she know if her problem is fundamentally knowable or not. All of this is in contrast to physics, meaning that “philosophy is the sole science which takes the problem as it is presented, without any previous taming.”

Can we dig a little deeper into the nature of the problem philosophy tackles? Ortega distinguishes between *practical problems* and *theoretic problems*. The former is an attempt to change reality in some way, to make “what is into what is not, but would be convenient if it were”. The latter notes that a thing exists but feels disturbed by it; its existence irritates us. Why? Because we can see that it is not sufficient in itself; it requires something “behind its appearance which completes it and supports it… its being is not a being but a pseudo-being”. Theory begins then by denying reality and going deeper, that is, “making what is not into what is”. The theoretic attitude is therefore “purer” than the practical because its “problem is more of a problem”.

But we saw that philosophy’s problem may not even be knowable. So what is the primary condition for knowledge? Simply put, there must be some coincidence “between the thing known and the thinking process… the structure of my mind and the structure of the world.” This means that every theory of knowledge is at the same time an ontology. So, when thinking was considered a result of being we had *realism* and when the structure of being proceeded from thinking we had *idealism*.

There are three approaches to the problem of knowledge; the optimistic, in which the structure of being completely coincides with the structure of thought which is rational and logical; the sceptical, in which the two don’t overlap at all and knowledge is impossible; and a mid-point, where they overlap in places and we must note carefully the rational, logical places where thought can penetrate and the irrational zones it can’t.

Chapter 5

Here Ortega returns to the question of why we are so eager to philosophize and the answer that it is because the beings presented to us are incomplete, they are fragments of something absent from our gaze. He takes colour which cannot appear on its own but needs extension, that is, matter. But what of matter? Matter cannot give being to itself. Rather, there must be some hidden background standing in support of the thing, so this “vague, enfolding background is not now present, but is compresent”. Every time we apprehend a piece of matter, we automatically assume this background. Ortega gives this background a name, “world, the world of which it forms a part, the world of which it is a piece.”

Exactly the same thing happens if we turn our attention to our inner, psychic reality of ideas, pain, emotions, etc. These things are only small incomplete parts, a foreground on the background we are calling the world. And since this world appears for *us*, it is *our world*.

The problem with this is that the background, our world, merely being a collection of the things within it, must also be fundamentally incomplete. “The fundamental being, by its very essence, is not a datum, is never a thing present to the understanding; it is the very thing that is lacking in all that is present.” So, how can we know about it? By its absence which gnaws at us every time we perceive the thing. Indeed, “its way of being present is to be absent.”

What Ortega is doing here is looking for a starting point for philosophizing. An absolutely certain and fundamental place we can build our knowledge on. And this takes us to Descartes who endeavoured to do the same by doubting everything until he hit bedrock.

Before we get to Descartes though, Ortega outlines the ultimate goal via two principles. The first he calls *autonomy*. This means that our task of understanding the Whole cannot lean on anything else for assistance but must create its own knowledge for itself by pulling away from everything uncertain. But this isn’t enough. Autonomy is static and negative. We also need an opposite principle which will allow us to expand once more towards the Whole, a universalist drive Ortega calls *pantonomy*.

Philosophy’s final goal is to acquire theoretic knowledge which means a web of *concepts*. Since a concept is something that can be put into words, philosophy doesn’t result in an ineffable vision of the Whole like that of the mystics. However, Ortega’s objection to mysticism doesn’t rest on its supposed ineffability but on the fact that “out of the mystic vision no intellectual benefit redounds to mankind.” Mysticism exploits the profound, revelling in its depths whereas philosophy always seeks to rise from those depths of meaning to reveal, or unveil, the truths it has uncovered.

Chapter 6

Ortega begins this chapter by encouraging us to approach philosophy in a jovial, light-hearted way as opposed to a serious, rational approach. A carefree, curious attitude is more conducive to discovery than the opposite.

Now to briefly recap; philosophizing is not the Universe nor is it living. It is the theoretical contemplation of the Universe, “a system of concepts about the Universe” and because of the nature of its theme (“everything that is”), philosophic inquiry must obey two principles; *autonomy* and *pantonomy*.

All theories are made up of combinations of concepts called judgements or propositions. A judgement is true if there is coincidence between it and the thing it refers to in the light of evidence. In this sense, positivism was right in reducing “strict knowledge to what is present before us” but its mistake was in recognising no other “immediate presence than that of objects perceptible to the senses” because there are many classes of things present to us that aren’t present to our senses, e.g. justice, the concept of triangle, etc. Therefore Ortega suggests it would be better to talk of intuition rather than sensory perception, where “intuition” simply means “that mental state in which an object is present before us.”

He investigates our intuition of an orange (as a colour and a spherical object) using this conceptual framework. Before we even look at the fruit, its colour, orange, is present to our minds as a particular shading in the colour spectrum. Then we open our eyes and our vision presents us with that actual colour. This is therefore a “full and complete intuition of the color” because our concept perfectly matches the sensory perception. This is possible because colour is an abstract object.

Things are not the same when we come to think about the material object though. An orange has many different attributes, including being spherical and having an inner and an outer aspect. Now while we mentally apprehend a fully spherical object, solid to its core, our perception can never match this, never presenting to us, “either in one single vision or in many partial visions, the whole of it as our thought presents it to us. We always think of more of it than we have present before us”. This means that “we have only an incomplete or inadequate intuition” and this is true for all corporeal things. This kind of intuition is called *experience* and is always approximate.

What about a geometric circle? This is a mathematical concept and, strictly speaking, none of the circles which appear in the world conform to the concept we have in our minds. So, where did our concept come from then? From our understanding of a line, which can be defined as an “infinite series of points.” But infinities always exceed our conceptual thought of them. In this case then, we have an “intuition [which] does not coincide with the concept; but unlike the case of the orange, intuition here gives more rather than less than what was in the thought.” Indeed, an infinite continuum “cannot be reduced to the concept, to *logos* or *ratio*. That is to say, the continuum is irrational, beyond the conceptual, or meta-logical.” This kind of intuition, because our concept remains completely fulfilled by the intuition, is also adequate.

Everything present to us with *adequate intuition* is *a priori* and therefore certain. Everything else is *a posteriori* and only approximate. Philosophy is only concerned with *a priori* knowledge. Now, Ortega begins his search for what *a priori* knowledge philosophy can find, the “data of the Universe” as Ortega calls it, to allow it to begin its quest to understand “everything there is”.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, Ortega follows Descartes in his search for an indubitable truth. Such a truth won’t be one with a rock solid proof or one known via a steady inference, rather it will be one that doesn’t *need* a proof or inference, one that *cannot* be doubted. If it admits of doubt, it is not the data of the Universe.

All of physics (all of science in fact) fails this criterion. Indeed, even the entire external world cannot satisfy it, for everything around me could be a dream. Philosophy cannot begin by affirming the external world, but, for the same reason, it can’t deny it either.

What is left then when everything is subject to doubt? Why, doubt itself; “if I doubt that the world exists I cannot doubt that I doubt – here is the limit of all possible doubting.” And doubt is nothing but a thought; “in order to doubt the existence of a thought I must perforce think this thought, must give it existence in the Universe, so that with the same act in which I try to suppress my thought I give it reality… thought is the only thing in the Universe whose existence cannot be denied, because to deny is to think.”

In addition, “thought has the mysterious privilege that its being, the essence of what it pretends to be, is reduced to a “*seeming to me*,” a being *for* me… It is what it seems to be, and nothing more… It exhausts its essence in its appearance.” Remember that everything else in the Universe is only a part of the Whole, appearing on the background of the world and dependent on that background for its being.

As we saw in the last chapter for something to qualify as *a priori* knowledge, it must present “itself to me in its entirety, just as it is, as it pretends to be, with no part of its composition remaining hidden.” Thought fulfils this criterion. And not just thought, seeing, hearing, conceiving of ideas, feeling, wishing, having a toothache – all of these things “are whatever they may be to themselves.”

To put it another way, “thinking has as its especial privilege the capacity to give being to itself”. The existence of everything else and the fact that I think about them are two different things – therefore always problem and not fact. “But in order that a thought of mine shall exist it is enough that I think I am thinking it. Here, thinking and existing are one and the same thing.”

The danger with such a realisation is that we sink into *idealism* and come to believe that nothing exists *except* thought. Leibnitz, Kant, Fichte and Hegel all carried us in this direction, away from the world. In this obsession that sprung up around the inner, the conscious, we cleaved ourselves off from the world, locking ourselves away from it. Not only can “nothing external… penetrate into the soul… it also means the reverse: that the mind treats only with itself, that it cannot go forth from itself”.

Chapter 8

When we say that things exist, we are saying that those things are “there in the Universe, in the general ambit of realities.” But the existence of thought is “not a matter of location, not a being here or being there, but a constant making and remaking of itself… pure bringing into action”. It is therefore something different, something more foundational than the existence of things.

Ortega now imagines our conscious, subjective being as a circle. Things that happen to us happen within this circle and the “I”, as the “subject of all our acts, of seeing and hearing, of imagining, thinking, loving and hating”, lies at the centre, “not as a reality apart from the seeing and the thinking, but merely the ingredient called *subject* which forms part of every act.” The periphery of the circle therefore represents the external world, full of material things demanding our attention. This is, in fact, a basic activity of the “I”, to attend to things. The interesting thing is that most of the time, “the subjective goes no deeper than the circumference… what we may call the “natural” attitude of consciousness, for which *only* the cosmic world, composed of corporeal things, exists.”

Animals, along with “natural” man, live like this, *ecstatically*, that is, “outside oneself”, but how is it that humans developed the ability to turn back from this external world to look inside themselves? It requires two things; something to free us from the external world and something to call us to our internal selves. Ortega calls these the negative and the positive, respectively.

The negative came in the form of Greek scepticism, which forced us into the realisation that we cannot know what things are. Christianity gave us the positive by conceiving of a God who was not just another flinger of lightning, but was a “transcendent and extramundane truth, whose manner of being is not to be compared with that of any cosmic reality.” Christianity demanded a complete turn away from the external world in order to converse with such a being; a turn within. It is only within that God (our authentic being or true reality) can be found.

Chapter 9

But Ortega still hasn’t dismissed idealism’s rise from Descartes who first conceived of it, to Leibniz who made it a closed *monad*, to Fichte who equated the self with the entire Universe. In order to do this, we will need to revise our language which was originally formulated to explain the external world of the cosmos, not the inner world we have stumbled upon. The word “being” will be our first casualty.

Thought is never merely “quiet being”, it never just is, because it is always a “taking account of itself, appearing to itself, reflecting on itself.” So the being of thought is always active, never static; the being of thought “consists solely in terms of reference to itself, in making itself, in moving toward itself”. If thought was quiet, it would no longer be thought.

Thought cannot be doubted. If I think A, then thinking about A must exist. In addition, both my self (my “I”) and the object which is thought must also exist. But that is all. Descartes’ mistake was to infer an external, “cosmic being… a thing-being, a static entity” to have the thought. Thought loses its reality, the “I” is no longer pure as thought, “but a thing of which thought is an attribute, a manifestation, a phenomenon.”

So, let’s turn back to the world and see what idealism has to say about it. The two notions, idealism and realism, assert that absolute reality is either within or outside me. But my room, something more than two metres high, is clearly not within me. Ah, but the *representation* of the room is within me. So, we are no longer talking about the room then, merely the *representation* of it. But, we must be careful here. What is mine is not the *representation* but the *representing*. The world, on the other hand, is the thing which is represented. This is Schopenhauer’s error, to have confused in the one word “representation” the two terms, the thinking and the thing which is thought.

So, where is the room? Clearly, “it is not inside my thought and forming part of it, but neither is it outside my thought if by outside one understands having nothing to do with it – it is inseparably linked with my thinking of it, neither outside my thought nor within it, but linked with it”. If I close my eyes, my room disappears. If I open them, it reappears. These are the indisputable facts and that is all philosophy concerns itself with, hence “insofar as thought and seeing begin to exist, so does their object, the thing seen… the external world does not exist except in my thinking of it, but the external world is not my thought; I am neither the theatre nor the world – I am confronting this theatre, I am linked with the world – together we are the world and I. And generalizing, we will say: the world is not a reality subsisting in itself and independent of me – it is what it is *for* me, and for the moment it is nothing more.”

This means that the world is only an apparent being, it is just what I see of it, as I see it, and it can have no more substantial being than this appearance… but that is ok. We need not look for more than this. In addition, since I am the one who perceives the world, without it, I would not exist. “Without objects there is no subject.”

The error of idealism was to make objects dependent on the subject without realising that the subject is also dependent on the object.

The basic datum of the Universe is therefore that “if thought exists, *ipso facto*, I who think and the world about which I think also exist… the one exists with the other, having no possible separation between them. I am not a substantial being nor is the world, but we both are in active correlation; I am that which sees the world and the world is that which is seen by me. I exist for the world, and the world exists for me… The basic and undeniable fact is not my existence, but my coexistence with the world.”

If the basic fact is that I exist with my world, loving it, hating it, moving through it, etc., what this means is that the “primordial reality, the fact of all facts, the datum for the Universe, that which is given to me is. . . “my life”…[which is] primarily a finding of myself in the world”. So, we are done with abstractions. We are now dealing with the personal self, not “a philosophic theory but the philosopher in the act of philosophizing, that is to say, in the act of living the process of philosophizing”.

This means that we must now seek to understand “my life” and until we do so, we cannot define or understand any of the things that are lived by me.

Chapter 10

For the ancients, being, meant a “thing”; for moderns, it meant “subjectivity”; for us, being means “living”.

We have called the basic datum “the coexistence of myself with things” but this is not quite right because “coexistence” implies a separation or independence of the co-existents. Our coexistence with things on the other hand is a dynamic one; the world confronts me, opposes me and I act on the world, look at it, love it, etc. “The static concept of being can be declared done and finished”. As we have seen, this type of coexistence is what we have always called “living”. On the back of this, Ortega wants to dispense with the words “existing”, “coexisting” and “being” and replace them with “my living”.

So, what is my life? Biology and psychology cannot answer this for they are only parts of my life when I choose to study my body or my mind. They are “secondary peculiarities which assume the fact that I live and that in living I meet, see, analyse and investigate both the body-things and the soul-things”, in other words, which already assume “my living”.

Ortega lists the following attributes of life:

1. “All living is one’s own living, feeling oneself live, knowing oneself to be existing – where knowing implies no intellectual knowledge nor special wisdom, but is that surprising presence which one’s own life has for every one of us”. In short, living is what we do and what happens to us; it is *ours*, not because it is ours but because we are aware of it *as* ours. The mentally deranged individual’s life is not his own because he lacks that presence, that self-awareness to truly make it his. This is why it is so disturbing to see an insane person.
2. “To live is to find oneself amid the world.” This doesn’t mean being surrounded by physical things and bodies, but to be amid things which “affect us, interest us, caress us, threaten us and torment us.” In this way, “life finds itself at the same time that it discovers the world”. Ortega says, “we can picture “our live” as an arc which unites the world and the self; but as between the world and the self there is no priority; neither comes first, but both come at the same time.”
3. “To live is not to enter by choice into a place which has been chosen earlier according to one’s taste… it is to find oneself suddenly fallen, submerged, projected without knowing how, into a world which cannot be changed”. Life is never predetermined. We always see the future as *possible*, meaning we are always called on to choose among different possibilities.
4. To live is to construct our lives. Ortega calls this “raising oneself by the boot straps, upholding one’s own being.” Because of this, life is a continual burden, although one that habit sometimes allows us to forget.

Ortega wants to draw our attention to the notion that living is “a constant process of deciding what we are going to do” because there is a paradox here. It means that my life is not what it is but what it is going to be; in other words, what it has not yet become. And this means there is a temporal element at the “root and base of our lives”, in particular, the future. “Life is an activity executed in relation to the future; we find the present or the past afterwards, in relation to that future.”

Chapter 11

In this final chapter, Ortega wants to outline some of the categories that pertain to our indubitable reality, “living” or “my life”. They make up a set which stands in contrast to Aristotle’s categories of “being” which are different because they are of being in general. Our categories involve the individual and so are rare in that they are both “equally “general” and “individual.””

The first category of our lives is “to find oneself” which doesn’t merely refer to the self, but also to the world because ““to find oneself” is, after all, to find oneself occupied with something in the world.” And what are these things we occupy ourselves with? Their being is “reduced to what it represents as the object of my occupation. It has no being in itself… apart from my living it… Its being is functional, its function in my life: it is a being *so that*, a being toward an end – so that I may do this or that with it.” But things don’t disappear when I am not concerned with them; they still *are* on their own. True, but in that case the thing “surges forth in virtue of my abstracting it from my life – and abstracting is also a doing, a making and an occupying oneself”.

Here, Ortega picks up the question in the title, “What is philosophy?” It is an extreme form of theory in which life attempts to “transcend itself; it is to de-occupy oneself, to de-live, to cease to be interested in things. But this dis-interesting of oneself is not a passive process. On the contrary, it is a form of being interested”. Philosophizing, even though it is a de-living, it is also a form of living.

Another category is called our “circumstances”. We always find ourselves amid circumstances in which there are a number of concrete possibilities we must choose from. We have already seen how all life is a “constant process of deciding between various possibilities.”

Ortega now turns to time. As we saw, “life is that paradoxical reality which consists in deciding what we are going to do, therefore in being what we not yet are”. This would be impossible if time were originally what Ortega calls, “cosmic time”, which is time as we usually think of it; “Cosmic time is only the present, because the future has not yet come, and the past no longer is.” At every moment, we are living in the present but this is just mechanical or physical; it is outside what we have called “my life”. Rather, my vital life is always directed to the future. I talk in the present, but I do so only by thinking about what I am going to say (in the future). In every action I take, I am anticipating the future.

However, in talking I use words which only make sense in light of my past. Then through this past, I discover my present. This is what Ortega calls “true interior time. The future tosses me back toward the past; the past toward the present, and from here I go again toward the future…” All of this happens in an instant and captures how the three dimensions of time manifest.

In what seems to be a rejection of empiricism, Ortega says that the impression is not the first thing we encounter. Prior to this, we are “originally a bundle of appetites, desires, and illusions. We come into the world dowered with a system of preferences and prejudices…” He seems to be advocating a kind of innate personality here which means that “all seeing is a process of looking at, all hearing is in the last analysis a listening-to, all living is an incessant, original preferring and disdaining.” He goes so far as to call this feature our “innate sensibility.”

Finally, in summing up all we have seen about “my life” Ortega quotes Heidegger as saying that “life is concern”, concern with the world. Ortega prefers to say that “life is preoccupation… Every moment of the day we are having to decide what we are going to do the next moment, what it is that will occupy our lives. This is occupying ourselves in anticipation, pre-occupying ourselves.”

This word “preoccupied” also reminds us that failing to be so disposed towards life is to simply do what everybody else does, to “surrender to the unanimous, to let customs, prejudices, habits, topics, be installed within them, give them life, and take on the task of making them live.” This is what “makes man common and woman mediocre”.

But of course we cannot abdicate the imperative that we be preoccupied with life and so to try to do so by following the crowd is to be “preoccupied with becoming un-preoccupied” and seems to be the most inauthentic attitude of all.