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Review

Ortega y la técnica

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This book is a comprehensive exploration of Ortega's work, using his ideas on technology as a focal point. The exhaustive review includes remnants dispersed in the philosopher's preceding texts, especially in *La rebelión de las masas* [The Revolt of the Masses], which gives full meaning to the work carried out subsequent to *Meditación de la técnica* [Man the technician]. *En torno a Galileo* [Man and crisis], *La idea de principio en Leibniz* [The idea of principle in Leibniz], and especially *El hombre y la gente* [Man and People] are difficult to fully understand if they are not linked to this intellectual process over time.

To a large extent, Alonso's perspective is innovative. It allows us to rectify some interpretations of Ortega's philosophy that cast doubt on its originality, or that emphasise its dependence on other thinkers, especially Heidegger, which the philosopher from Madrid expressly

denied. More than any other interpretation, this publication reveals the capability of anticipating earlier works such as *Ideas y creencias* [Ideas and beliefs]. It disentangles the foundations of Ortega's thought in order to explain it as an attempt to understand the human condition modulated by variations in the search for an answer to the same question: What has made man uniquely human from his earliest beginnings?

The book is admirably interwoven in a circumvoluntary way that unfolds Ortega's ideas starting from a hermeneutical foundation. According to Alonso, what Ortega sees as the assumption of hominization is not an animalistic adaptation to nature, but rather a human reaction to adjust the historical circumstance to his imagined needs. Alonso is reluctant to admit that the ability to internalise is that which separates nature from history, as "internalisation is a historical, human invention" (p. 178). He insists that Ortega finds this ability in the "attitude of self-absorption," a kind of isolation within oneself that detaches itself from the environment that disturbs the animal. Man has been a technician from the very beginning because self-absorption allows the potential for introspection, which unfolds subjectivity to produce ideas, assign functions to bodily members, and create devices that allow him to carry out activities in order to react to the circumstances in which he performs his work. In my judgment, Alonso does not dwell sufficiently on his affirmation that self-absorption should not be understood as "a vain solipsism" (p. 168).

I believe Alonso does not do justice to Ortega's prevailing debt to Husserl's analysis of intentionality, whom he cites more than Scheler and Bergson. The Madrid philosopher recognises him as a master in order to detach himself from his cognitive idealism. He comments on a passage from *Ideas y creencias* [Ideas and Beliefs], where Ortega points out an aspect in which he believes Max Scheler falls short. Alonso writes: "The only thing missing from this magnificent text is the allusion to technology as the indispensable correlation to imagination" (p. 177). In my view, rather than suggesting a lack in Ortega, he implies more of a shortcoming in his interpretation.

I find it strange that Alonso does not even quote Husserl when he talks about phenomenology, nor is the latter even included in his vast bibliography. If self-absorption means entering into oneself, or becoming the object of one's own attention, the explanation of how it is possible for the subject to become the object as a correlation is to be found in the

analysis of the intentional act to which Ortega refers on numerous occasions. This is the distinction that Brentano gathers from scholasticism. Self-absorption is an unfolding of the *intentio*, a constitutive act compatible with the “historical invention of intimacy,” which can be contrasted with the disturbance experienced by the animal, which is always turned outward, attentive to what is outside itself. It resides in allocating an invented function to an object, to the self-absorbed individual, to a bodily member, or to what is within reach, such as a fishing rod. Ortega reproaches Husserl and Descartes for considering it the act of a discarnate, pure self, capable of deducing the existence of the object from the deductive capability of cognition (Ortega, *OC*, X, pp. 210 and ff.) It is a vital act that needs no demonstration because it is an expression of living. If an announcement cannot demonstrate itself, life does not need to be demonstrated in order to be lived. “Living means that one must be outside oneself, on the outside absolutely, which is the circumstance, or the world” (*Id.*, X, p. 164).

This comment should not be taken as a censure, but rather as an observation that might merit the author’s attention if he were to make his approach even more specific. Alonso renews the focus on placing Ortega in his most original, defining aspect, a perspective that subtly draws the line of demarcation that separates animality from humanity, without imposing a sharply negative rupture, as Heidegger does. The utilization of technology goes from being a product to being a distinctive feature that embraces history from its very beginning. It is a breach whose outline does not exclude a reference to the “primal nature” inscribed in the physical body, yet it interrupts all Darwinian evolutionary pretensions. Alonso meticulously applies the technique of cross-referencing, which has been facilitated by the commendable, digitised edition of the *Obras Completas* [Complete Works].

Ortega was ahead of his time in announcing the problem currently posed by the unusual acceleration of technology. Alonso refers to this situation in one of the latter chapters of the book, in which he explains how Ortega’s philosophy is a suitable instrument for analysing the current indications of this progression: genetic engineering, the Internet, robotics, and the ideological after-effects arising from the exasperated, fearful exaltation of autopoiesis, such as environmentalism, transhumanism, genetic manipulation, the advance of bodily cybernetics, and more. This threat must be underscored. If man embodies technical progression, this uncontrolled acceleration has taken him out of his natural state. Deconstructive masochism is as powerful as the capacity for construction. If, according to Ortega, “man [is] the living being capable of improving indefinitely” (*Id.*, I, p. 125), we must concur that he is also the being who is capable of worsening indefinitely as well. Human construction is still capable of perfecting its technology, which could usher in the consummation of its own destruction. This is the issue of our time.