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Ortega, or the Stylist as Educator

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Students of pedagogy should clarify the important difference between a pupil's mechanical mimicry and his personal mastery of any matter that he purports to have learned. The behaviorist who relies on superficial signs has difficulty recognizing the crucial disparity between these forms of learning. One knows from personal experience, however, that in certain matters one can say and do the right things even though one does not comprehend the reasons for these words and deeds. When learning stops at this point, the pupil is left dependent on the pattern of behavior he has managed to mimic; not understanding its rationale, he has no confidence and flexibility with respect to the pattern, and he must either dumbly repeat it whenever the cue occurs, or eschew it completely as if he did not know it at all. Objections to such learning are legion: thus, the young T. S. Eliot decried this dependence when he observed that "Swinburne mastered his technique, which is a great deal, but he did not master it to the extent of being able to take liberties with it."[1] The full goal of learning is mastery to the point at which one can choose, for good reasons, whether to rely on a particular acquisition, whether to adapt a familiar technique to an unaccustomed use, or whether to introduce a novel procedure in the most routine of matters. To reach this goal one usually has to pass through the stage of mere imitation; but think what a wonderful gain in human power and liberty would result if all learning

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on Vers Libre" (1917), in *To Criticize the Critic* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 185.

continued up to the point of full, personal mastery. Montaigne sagely defined this goal: "so the fragments borrowed from others [the student] will transform and blend together to make a work that shall be absolutely his own; that is to say, his judgment. His education, labor, and study aim only at forming that."[2]

Pedagogues have always striven to prevent instruction from imparting a merely verbal, mechanical mimicry of a subject. Whether classicists or modernists, conservatives or progressives, they have tried to ensure that teaching culminated in their students' thorough, inner mastery of the matter taught. An educator of the public who, like Ortega y Gasset, aimed to Europeanize Spain had to contend with this perennial problem. The goal was to bring Spain more fully into the flow of the European tradition; and as Ortega saw it, the way to accomplish this integration was not by externally emulating the superficial features of European life, but by creating an intellectual elite that could transfer to Spain the scientific standards and cultural competencies of the European heritage. If members of this elite, however, were to affect the Spanish nation, their teachings had to pervade the populace. Consequently, to realize his program of Europeanization, Ortega had to master the arts of popularization.

Of the branches of education, popularization is the one most likely to end in the communication of sterile clichés, false competencies, and foolish jargons. It is easy for an unscrupulous popularizer to create a dumb pride about one or another cultural ornament, as a city booster inflames local vanity with a municipal theater. It is difficult, however, for men of superior competence to inseminate diverse persons with the fertile seeds of a fuller life. The first form of popularization concerns only external matters; and it usually entails simply the enthusiastic promotion of a particular part of the public environment. The second, true form of popularization involves the personal capacities of the men and women who compose the populace; and for this popularization to succeed, one needs to influence the inner character of diverse persons. To appreciate Ortega's style we should analyze it as a means of popularization, for his prose was shaped to attract a popular audience and to influence the character of his readers.

Critics of Ortega's style claim that it dazzles and deceptively hides his inner, philosophical evasion. They assume that a serious thinker should write in a stolid style, and that Ortega's vivid imagery and sonorous diction signify his lack of serious thoughts. Thus, José Sánchez Villa-

[2] Montaigne, "Of the Education of Children," Cotton and Hazlitt, trans., *Selected Essays* (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), p. 22.

señor, S.J., claimed that "his style has betrayed Ortega," for such elegant, engaging, evasive prose made it difficult to decide exactly what Ortega thought. Father Sánchez sensed that Ortega preached "an incendiary message";[3] and when the grounds for such a message seem uncertain, it is prudent — for the sake of the future life and the spiritual hegemony of the Church — to assume the worst about anyone who so exalted the present life. Father Sánchez was not the only critic who doubted that a man with a definite philosophic vision would choose to express it as unsystematically as did Ortega.[4] Many believe that the only task for philosophy is to add a third great synthesis to those of Aristotle and Aquinas. To contribute to this endeavor a thinker must publish his thought in systematic treatises.[5] Hence they conclude that Ortega chose the occasional essay as his major vehicle of expression because he had decided to assert, against the claims of systematic reason, an irrational glorification of life. Ortega's style, his rhetoric, was the weapon that he used against reason, for with his playful parlance he so subtly insinuated his dangerous views that no systematic critic would be able to expose their damning contradictions.[6] Fortunately, these critics proved able to prevent, with the aid of the rhetoric they scorn, this latest episode in the Satanic conspiracy to subvert the true philosophy by means of the persuasive arts.

Such paranoiac appreciations of Ortega's prose do not stand up to critical examination. Not content to suggest that Ortega's use of the occasional essay to express serious thought was a mistake, these critics conclude that it was a sign of bad faith. Rather than look for the rationale of Ortega's style, they absolve themselves of that task by claiming that his prose was patent proof of his disrespect for reason. With a writer who disdains reason the serious critic rightly seeks not to explain, but to expose; hence their polemic: "Ortega's is a frightening responsibility before history for having exchanged philosophy's noble mission for acrobatic sport."[7] The irony of the argument that unsystematic, occasional,

[3] José Sánchez Villaseñor, S.J., *Ortega y Gasset, Existentialist: A Critical Study of His Thought and Its Sources,* Joseph Small, S.J., trans. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1949), p. 136.

[4] An effort has waxed and waned several times to grant Ortega's genius as a writer and to deny his capacity as a philosopher. See besides Sánchez, books such as V. Chumillas, *¿Es Don José Ortega y Gasset un filósofo propriamente dicho?* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tor, 1940); and P. Ramirez, *La filosofía de Ortega y Gasset* (Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 1958). For a summary of this critique see Jerónimo Mallo, "La discusión entre católicos sobre la filosofía de Ortega," *Cuadernos Americanos,* No. 2 (1962), 157-66.

[5] Sánchez, *Ortega y Gasset,* pp. 195-216.

[6] *Ibid.,* pp. 132-42.

[7] *Ibid.,* pp. 232-33.

powerful expression belies irrationalism is that it could so easily be turned against the namesake of Father Sánchez's society. But to avoid such wrangling, let us not lose sight of the great lesson that arose from the Greek confrontation of reason and rhetoric: the effectiveness of style tells us nothing for or against the cogency of thought. To decide on the cogency of a man's thought we examine the reasons he gives for it, whereas to judge the effectiveness of a man's style we ascertain whether the effects produced by his presentation are consonant with his intentions.[8]

If Ortega's intention was simply to expound his philosophic system, then his style left much to be desired, for in no single work did he give an explicit, complete statement of his essential doctrine. But on one occasion he did state that it would have been too easy for him to become a *Gelehrte,* a savant who occupied his life writing exhaustive philosophic treatises; after all, he studied under Hermann Cohen, was a friend of Nicolai Hartmann, and won an important chair of metaphysics at the age of twenty-seven. Only choice, he said, prevented him from comporting himself as a learned metaphysician.[9] Ortega's literary intention went beyond expounding a system of ideas; he aimed at cultivating the ability of his readers to form coherent abstractions and to use those abstractions as means for improving the actual life they led. It is with reference to these intentions that we should search for the rationale of Ortega's style.

Two characteristics mark Ortega's prose: a notable variety of subject matter and an extraordinary constancy of form. Ortega wrote on easily as many subjects as Bertrand Russell, to choose a philosopher well known for his universal curiosity; but unlike Russell, whose treatment of different subjects often seemed to owe little to his basic philosophic convictions, Ortega made his reflections on politics, art, epistemology, psychology, history, and pedagogy all illuminate the essential premises of his thought. The unity in Ortega's thought was not achieved, however, at the price that more systematic writers, for instance Ernst Cassirer, had to pay. Whereas in *The Myth of the State* Cassirer began with an explicit statement of his philosophy of symbolic forms and throughout applied that conception systematically to the illumination of a persistent political problem, in *The Revolt of the Masses* Ortega did not explicitly mention his doctrine of human existence until the closing pages, and then it was to observe that the doctrine had been "entwined, insinuated, and

[8] A concise statement of the contemporary relevance of this confrontation is in Martin S. Dworkin's "Fiction and Teaching," *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (Autumn, 1966), 71-74.

[9] *Prólogo para Alemanes,* 1933, 1958, *Obras* VIII, p. 57.

whispered" in the text. By proceeding this way, readers who disagreed with Ortega's basic convictions might still profit from his analysis of European history, but readers who were not convinced by Cassirer's conception of myth could draw little from his application of it to the political past.[10] Ortega was particularly capable of treating diverse topics in such a way that his essays simultaneously stood alone and contributed to the elucidation of his system.

If Ortega's handling of subject matter was unique, so was his choice of form. Twentieth century philosophic stylists like Unamuno, Santayana, and Sartre have used a variety of prose, dramatic, and poetic forms to present their thought to the public. Ortega wrote only essays. Furthermore, all his essays, regardless of length or subject, were constructed in the same way: he would write in compact sections, each of which could stand alone as a short essay, and to form larger works he would string related sections together. His art was that of the aphorist, in which he took great care to fit various short, concise statements of principles together into a larger, unified work.

An instance of this variety and constancy may be found in the first volume of *The Spectator*. It included essays on epistemology; the philosophy of history; love; World War I; joy; "esthetics on a trolley car"; the Castilian countryside; paintings by Titian, Poussin, and Velásquez; the nature of consciousness; and the writings of Pío Baroja. Throughout these essays, certain convictions about thought, life, and the future of Spain insistently recurred. Despite the variety of topics, Ortega composed everything in short sections, in each of which he raised a single thought, explored its significance, and pointed towards the idea that would follow in the next. The longest essay, "Ideas on Pío Baroja," comprised fifteen of these sections, each about two pages in length.[11] Throughout his life Ortega continued to write on a variety of topics; and he was always faithful to his basic prose form, composing passages from fifty to five thousand words in length and including from one to fifty or more of these in an essay or book. Diversity of subject and invariability of form: these are the striking features of Ortega's prose; and to appreciate his style, it is necessary to understand why he always relied on one form of the essay to write about a variety of topics. Thus, the critic's task is to discover how these features of Ortega's style helped his readers to form coherent abstractions and provoked them to use these ideas in living their lives.

[10] See Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946). The words by Ortega are from *La rebelión de las masas*, 1930, *Obras* IV, p. 278.

[11] *El Espectador — I*, 1916, *Obras* II, pp. 15-125.

A young man in search of an ideal Spain could not be content with the established channels of action. Ortega's prospective patriotism recognized his country's traditional weaknesses, and the goal of the *nueva política,* or civic pedagogy, was to create the conditions for a Spanish renaissance, to establish a *Kinderland* that was free of the vices that vitiated the fatherland. Intellectuals had a duty to use every means they could to strengthen Spanish culture. One means that Ortega chose for pursuing this duty was the literary essay. As we shall see, the variety of subject matter and the constancy of form that typified his prose accorded with his desire to transform the Spanish character by means of his writing. In general, Ortega's style was shaped to attract readers and to develop their intellectual discipline. Hence, in analyzing Ortega's prose, we are studying the stylist as pedagogue.

Certain readers may object, however, that didacticism is an enemy of literary grace, and yet Ortega's writing is a model of grace. To be sure, in an ordinary sense didacticism leads to a disquisitional rhetoric in which a condescending author presents his pupils with a packet of principles and with smug exhortations that their obligation and interest is to learn and believe. But Ortega's writing was not didatic in an ordinary sense. He devoted little effort to disseminating information or cultivating convention through his prose. He was strangely incapable of exposition. Even his essays on travel were displays of dialectical, not descriptive, skills;[12] and when, in an essay such as *Mirabeau, or the Politician,* facts were necessary, he presented them in a blurb of information that became memorable only in the ensuing analysis of principles.[13] Ortega's writing was informed by pedagogical intentions, but not by the pedagogy that is generally espoused by people who believe they possesss superior knowledge and who seek to proclaim it to lesser men. Ortega always wrote for an audience of peers.

When peers converse, it is a dialogue. A strong tradition in pedagogical theory suggests that the most profound teaching takes place in the course of dialogue. Here we encounter a great paradox of pedagogy: when men meet as equals they learn the most from one another. Before examing Ortega's prose, let us reflect on the educative genius of dialogue.

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[12] See especially "Notas de andar y ver," 1915, *Obras* II, pp. 249-65; "Temas de viaje," 1922, *Obras* II, pp. 367-82; and "Notas del vago estío," 1925, *Obras* II, pp. 413-50.

[13] *Mirabeau o el político,* 1927, *Obras* III, esp. pp. 612-18 where the facts of Mirabeau's life are given. Cf. "Juan Vives y su mundo," 1940, 1961, *Obras* IX, pp. 507-9, where Ortega prefaced his lecture with a blurb of information on Vives.

Dialogue contrasts monologue, the set speech.[14] Critics of Ortega's prose object to his reluctance to write monologues that would amount to a summa of his system. In a monologue, the speaker presents his listeners with finished thoughts that provide a ready answer to one or another problem. The center of interest in monologue is not the problem, but the speaker's answer to it. We tolerate monologues best when they are delivered by wise, old men, for in reverence we naturally refrain from questioning and criticizing, that is, from seeking to enter into dialogue. In a monologue the speaker, not the problem about which he speaks, is the object of real attention. Notoriously, monologues put problems to rest because such a speech, being a closed, self-contained proclamation of conclusions, usually destroys its hearers' interest in the question. In contrast, the dialogue is inherently open; and whereas a claim to knowledge is a condition of monologue, a recognition of ignorance is a condition of dialogue. The participants in a dialogue are equal, not in intelligence, learning, or verbal skill, but in that all profess a lack of knowledge (not opinions) about the matter at hand. This recognition that no participant has a prior claim on the final word means that the problem at issue becomes the central concern. In this way the interest of the participating audience is heightened; and the pedagogical assumption that gives great educative significance to such dialogue is the conviction that if the participants can be engaged in examining a real problem, whatever answer they work out will affect their character and the life they lead rather than merely the opinions they profess.

Hence, since Socrates, great teachers have consistently admitted ignorance and have confronted their auditors with a myriad of questions instead of answers. Note, furthermore, that a question is more than a statement transposed into the interrogative mood. Many apparent questions are simply rhetorical, and since both the asker and the answerer know the accepted response, the interrogation causes no inquiry. A true question is the opposite of this appearance. It is the moment of aporia, the dawning awareness that neither the asker nor the answerer has at hand an acceptable solution to the problem posed; at that moment the question has been put. The purpose of dialogue is first to put the question, not to proclaim the answer. Thus, the dialogical character

[14] There is a good discussion of dialogue in Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction,* Hans Meyerhoff, trans. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), pp. 154-70. The discussion that follows has been influenced by this work, by my own reflections on the style of Plato, Nietzsche, and Ortega, and by discussions with Martin S. Dworkin and others.

of Ortega's writing was obvious when he closed *The Revolt of the Masses* with a section that suggested "We Arrive at the Real Question." The question to which we here arrive is this. How does dialogue put the question? Why does dialogue provoke inquiry more effectively than monologue? What characteristics might be expected in the prose of a dialogical writer?

It would be inappropiate to proclaim at this point a general answer to these questions. Instead, let us venture certain observations. One's conception of philosophic dialogue depends in part on one's judgment whether the Platonic works are dialogical because they depict in dramatic form the philosophical conversations that men might have held, or because the only way that a particular, sound conclusion can be extracted from them is through the reader's critical involvement in the argument and through his personal commitment to the conclusions he draws with respect to the problems posed. If we make the former judgment and reduce philosophic dialogue to dramatized chat about philosophical questions, there is no dialogue in Ortega's work, and to pursue the matter further we would have to turn to those contemporary philosophers who have either written dramatic dialogue like Martin Buber and Paul Valéry, or used the theater, like Camus and Sartre, to expound their philosophies. However, a few persons may suggest that if one looks, not at the relation between various characters within the work, but at the relation between the work and its reader, then Plato's later, less dramatic dialogues are, in a philosophical sense, more dialogical than the earlier ones.

With respect to the reader, the so-called Socratic dialogues present definite statements that can be experienced and enjoyed without the reader's critical engagement and that are aporetic only by virtue of their inconclusive endings. On the other hand, a dialogue such as the *Republic* yields absurdities if the reader takes it literally as a description of an ideal social system; yet it functions as a powerful heuristic if the reader continually and actively engages himself in the critical interpretation of Plato's possible meanings. The work is internally aporetic; the ideal state turns out to be manifestly unjust, and the truth-revering rules are duty bound to lie. Plato was no fool; these and many other problems drive intelligent readers to rely on their interpretative powers and to attend to the issues raised. As soon as Plato's readers engage themselves in reasoning about the just man that may reside in their own hearts, they find that Plato left many clues with which they can thread their way through his artful contradictions. Hence, at least for the

purpose of studying Ortega's prose, let us take as the sign of philosophic dialogue the fact that the writer can compel, by a variety of means, the reader's critical involvement in the questions at hand.

By virtue of his ability to engage his readers in reasoning about particular problems, Ortega was a master of philosophic dialogue. He did not state his thoughts so that they could be easily spoken by others. He rarely gave a systematic, abstract statement of a principle; instead he would treat principles in relation to particular situations, leaving it to the reader to *make,* not repeat, the abstraction. Further, he usually presented incomplete arguments, in which there would be gaps that the reader would have to fill for himself. In writing, Ortega continually complemented the particular with the general, the general with the particular; and he left it to the reader to decide whether to read a work, or even a paragraph, as a theoretical reflection or as a polemical designation. Even the very brilliance of his wording made readers continually ask themselves: is this serious or is this simply a phrase? All these features were among the devices that Ortega used to engage the reader's intellectual powers by not making his primary meaning obvious, by not giving it a final, full, fixed formulation, by helping readers to extract from the text their own formulations of its meaning.

Even the critics of Ortega's style testify unwittingly to his ability to refrain from pronouncing the final word and to force his readers to seek it out for themselves. Thus, Father Sánchez observed that it was not "easy to discover what Ortega really holds. He submits his ideas to a scrupulous analysis before putting them on paper. Whoever tries to penetrate his thought has to launch forth on an arduous ideological hunt through the dense jungle of his extensive work. . . . Behind the scenery of his metaphors he artfully juggles his ideas. He calls this his delight, his irony — to wear that masquerade which permits us only by close scrutiny to glimpse his real characteristics."[15] These words, which were meant to damn, finely praise a man who wrote in order to create a philosophic dialogue with his readers, for they testify to the skill with which Ortega made his readers think. Thus Ortega hid his thought from casual curiosities and manifested it to those who were willing to search for it "by close scrutiny."

Ortega's style was dialogically effective. This power, however, might have been the result of his intentional art or of accident. His style might be explained as the fortuitous result of his gift for phrasing striking metaphors and his incapacity for systematically expounding ideas.

[15] Sánchez, *Ortega y Gasset,* p. 137.

However much these accidental qualities explain the origin of his style, he was well aware that his writing was dialogically effective. Ortega cultivated this quality of his prose. He frequently described his writing as an attempt to create a dialogue with his readers. "The involution of the book towards the dialogue: this has been my purpose."[16] To appreciate his purpose fully it is important to study his particular conception of dialogue.

Unlike Martin Buber, who made dialogue one of his principal subjects of reflection, Ortega rarely wrote about dialogue per se. For him, dialogue was reflection, it was thought; and although he wrote about it infrequently, he took part in it continually. According to Ortega, dialogue was a problem for a serious writer because thought was, in its essence, dialogue; and to communicate thought one had to produce a dialogue. Of course, in this production, the writer needed neither to set forth dramatic conversations nor to ramble on about dialogue; he needed to write in such a way as to provoke dialogue, or thought, in the reader. This task was particularly difficult because the dialogue that Ortega tried to stimulate was not so much a direct one between himself and his reader, as it was an indirect one between his reader and the reader's circumstances, of which Ortega's books were only a minor part.

To grasp this point, it is important to understand just what Ortega meant when he said that thought was dialogue. Above, we observed that dialogue was an open exchange concerning matters that the participants recognized to be significant difficulties. If we take this definition in its fullest sense, we find that the most incessant, productive dialogue is the continual exchange between a man's self and his circumstances about the vital problems of life. Each man lived in the midst of his personal, particular surroundings, and each man's thought comprised an infinitely complicated interplay between himself and these circumstances concerning the problems, which the man perceived to be significant, of living by means of limited capacities in the midst of inhospitable surroundings. This interplay, which was always open and always significant, was the primary dialogue of life: "life is essentially a dialogue with its circumstances"; "to think is to converse [*dialogar*] with one's circumstances."[17] This basic dialogue between a man and his world was each man's unique concern; other persons might help shape the

[16] *Prólogo para alemanes,* 1933, 1958, *Obras* VIII, p. 18.

[17] The first phrase is from *Las Atlantidas,* 1924, *Obras* III, p. 291. The second is from "Prólogo a *Historia de la filosofía* de Emile Bréhier," 1942, *Obras* VI, p. 391. Cf. "El deber de la nueva generación argentina," 1924, *Obras* III, p. 255: "thought is . . . essentially dialogue."

objective features of a person's world, but only each man alone could converse with *his* surroundings.

This primary dialogue of life, however, which constituted each man's unique experience, was not a solipsism in which the only reality was the one that a man intimately experienced. Each man informed his own conversation with his circumstances by taking part with other men in intellectual dialogue. To do so, men identified common problems; they created mutually comprehensible terms with which they could discuss these problems and their possible solutions; they embarked on the disciplined, dialectical examination of every proposed solution to their difficulties. With these common means — observation, conversation, and criticism — each man structured and controlled the primary dialogue between himself and his circumstances. Thus, beginning with their unique hopes and difficulties, men joined and created a common, rational world, in which they could theoretically solve their difficulties and imaginatively fulfill their hopes. Hence, "the dialectic is a collaboration" by means of which men joined together to enhance their personal exchange with their unique surroundings by confessing common concerns, concerting their goals, and perfecting their powers.[18]

To begin, then, dialogically effective writing allowed for the collaboration of the reader. An auditor could not collaborate in a monologue, and therefore it provoked no dialectical progression of thought. To be effective, a writer had to project from his personal life a set of problems, goals, and powers that the reader could discover implicated in his own intimate existence. For collaboration to take place, the good writer would neither speak nor conceal, but indicate, and the good reader would neither believe nor deny, but consider. Whoever gave dialogue its due would note that the mark of an effective writer was not that he was admired and generally understood, nor that he was notorious, but that those who read him carefully would genuinely apply in the conduct of their lives the powers that he communicated. Universal truths were the bane of dialogue, for, as Ortega often observed, they were inherently utopian and impossible to adapt to the dialogue of life. Both the writer and the reader could avoid empty universals by dealing only with words that they could find pertinent to an actual occasion. "All words are occasional," Ortega observed. "Language is in essence dialogue, and all other forms of speaking enervate its efficacy. For this reason, I believe that a book can be good only to the degree that it brings to us a latent dialogue in which we sense that the author could concretely

[18] "El deber de la nueva generación argentina," 1924, *Obras* III, p. 256.

imagine his reader. And the reader should feel as if, from between the lines, an ectoplasmic hand came out to touch his person, to caress him, or — very politely — to give him a cuffing."[19]

Shortly we shall study how Ortega used the compact, occasional essay to collaborate with his readers in the creation of such latent dialogues. But first, another preliminary matter merits attention. In *Meditations on Quixote,* Ortega said of a literary work that its form is the organ and that its content is the function that teleologically creates the form.[20] We have examined the form that he tried to give his prose — "the latent dialogue," a good name for those dialogues that lack dramatized conversation but that nevertheless engage the reader in the active interpretation of the text. But to appreciate fully how he implemented this form, it will help to reflect on the content — the *telos* or function — that provided him with the occasion for creating the form. Hence, before observing precisely how his writing enlisted the collaboration of the reader, we need to decide what it was that the reader was to collaborate in.

Serious writers simultaneously perform particular and general functions, but the enduring worth of their work rarely results from their skill with respect to particulars alone; they must further put their craftsmanship in the service of some general, transcendent concern. Thus, both the man of letters and the hack writer work with similar immediate aims, ranging from the salacious to the salvational; but in doing so, the literary genius is acutely aware of serving a universal function, whereas the scribbler is oblivious to this aspect of his office. Moreover, great literature results from a subtle blending of the particular and the general; and hence it is not achieved by intending, as one's immediate aim, to pronounce with an oracular air a series of great truths. On the contrary, the palm of lasting esteem has usually been won by those who could uncover the great truths that lay buried in particulars and who could make every simple act and observation reveal and illuminate the universal concern to which they as writers felt endentured.

Regardless of its immediate tone and subject, Ortega's writing performed the general function of apprenticing his readers to intellect. Thus, like the Platonic dialogues, Ortega's latent dialogue had two levels of significance: there was the ostensible subject of discussion and there was the attempt to perfect the discussant's rigorous use of intellect. This second preoccupation was so important to Ortega that one

[19] *La rebelión de las masas,* 1930, *Obras* IV, pp. 114-15.
[20] *Meditaciones del Quijote,* 1914, *Obras* I, p. 366.

can appropriately identify it as the function, the *telos*, the content of his writing. Hence, throughout his literary work, he tried to cultivate the intellect of his readers, even though there was, in the course of his career, one significant change in the audience he sought. Up to the early 1930's he was primarily concerned with the Spaniard's intellectual powers, whereas after that time he addressed himself to the abilities of the European. Be that as it may, the two audiences were intimately linked; the European grew out of the Spanish as for others it grew out of the French, British, Italian or German. In the twentieth century, perhaps throughout history, careful writers have discovered that audiences do not respond in strictly national patterns and that a work to which a national audience responds is likely to win a similar response from informed audiences elsewhere. Thus Ortega discovered his capacity to address Europe in the course of writing for Spaniards, and perhaps the secret of his appeal to both was his *power* to speak, by means of particulars, to an enduring concern of man, that is, to the question of man's intellect and its function in the conduct of life.

In the sum, then, Ortega consistently used a prose form, which he described as a latent dialogue, to serve the function of perfecting his reader's intellectual powers. These were his stylistic intentions. But intentions are never more than the prelude to a performance; and therefore, with these preliminaries in mind, we should examine how he used this form and content to influence his readers and thus achieve a measure of literary power.

Power, as Ortega conceived it, depended less on position, on office, on one's control of "force," than it did on one's ability to influence the intricate, intimate existence that persons experienced, and to do so without diminishing the intricacy or intimacy of that existence. To have power with respect to the state of intellect, one had to alter significantly the way men actually used their intelligence and culture in the course of their lives. Hence, Ortega resorted to the daily paper and the personal essay, for by these means he could speak to men about concrete matters as they pursued their personal concerns, having a coffee in the morning break or meditating in the quiet of their study. All of Ortega's writing was circumstantial; it was related in one or another way to his immediate world. Many essays concerned things that Ortega met with in the course of taking part in Spanish public life; and the rest he could write "as a spectator" because he was so deeply involved in the press of events that he found himself forced, from time to time, to suspend participation and to consider disinterestedly the

quality of the things about him.[21] Thus, even his impetus to reflection gained its strength from his involvement in his concrete surroundings. Consequently, he never assumed that his audience was some disembodied, universal philosopher. In the world of men there was no unmoved mover whose existence comprised only pure contemplation. Noting this fact, Ortega even wrote disinterested essays so that, in the cacophony of competing claims on an active man's attention, these reflections might command quiet consideration. In this circumstantiality we find the power of Ortega's prose with respect to intellect.

For instance, take *Meditations on Quixote.* In this small book, and in *The Spectator,* which was its continuation, Ortega made the intellectual function of his prose explicit. "The reader will discover, . . . even in the remotest musings on these pages, the throbs of a patriotic preoccupation. He who wrote them, and those to whom they are addressed, began spiritually with the negation of a senile Spain. But isolated negation is an impiety. When the pious and honorable man denies something, he contracts the obligation to erect a new affirmation. . . . Having negated one Spain, we find ourselves on the honorable course of discovering another. Only death will free us from this task. Hence, should one penetrate into the most intimate and personal of our meditations, he will catch us conducting with the most humble powers of our soul, experiments towards a new Spain." The purpose of these experiments, Ortega said, was to infect his readers with a desire to understand their surroundings by "sincerely presenting to them the spectacle of a man agitated by a vivid eagerness to comprehend." If this desire became an operative element of the Spaniard's view of life, the old Spain would be transmuted into the new.

For centuries, Ortega suggested, Spaniards had been animated by rancor and hate; they closed themselves and could neither love nor understand. Comprehension was an act of love in which one carried the matter in question to its fullest possible significance by the shortest available route. The most important aspect of intellect was not erudition, but the power to use man's cultural creations to enhance one's comprehension of the concrete, personal world in which one lived. "All that is general, all that has been learned, all that has been achieved in the culture is only the tactical maneuver that we must make in order to accommodate ourselves to the immediate." Spaniards had been unable to cope with their circumstances because they had not learned to love their

[21] See the acknowledgment in *Espectador* I and "Verdad y perspectiva," 1916, *Obras* II, pp. 11-21.

world, that is, to employ their culture to perfect their surroundings.[22]

In a meditation on his method, Ortega amplified this thesis. He began by musing idyllically on the mysterious profundity of a forest, for he happened to be sitting in one near the Escorial. What is a forest? he asked; and with this question he began to contemplate the nature of thought. The forest became the occasion of his thought, the forest became his teacher. "This beneficent forest, which anoints my body with health, has furnished my spirit with a great lesson. It is a majestic forest; old, as teachers should be, serene and complex. Moreover, it practices the pedagogy of allusion, the sole delicate and profound pedagogy." An appreciation of this pedagogy, which is the most difficult one to practice, is essential to understanding Ortega. One can comprehend this pedagogy only by practicing it, and consequently he wisely refrained from particularizing the methods by which it should be pursued: "whoever wishes to teach us a truth should not tell it to us; he should simply allude to it with a concise gesture, a gesture that suggests in the air an ideal trajectory along which we can glide, arriving by ourselves at the foot of a new truth."

If one contemplated the forest, which — for the trees — one could never directly experience, one discovered the lesson the forest taught. Beneath the surface of things, beneath their sensory appearance, there was the idea of them, which would be revealed when one fused one's superficial perceptions with an act of pure intellection. To experience a forest, one had to combine the mental concept, the forest, with one's sensations of being surrounded with dense trees, of walking on a bed of leaves and moss, and of hearing the stillness gently interrupted by the songs of birds and the whispers of the breeze.[23]

Concepts, the basic stuff of intellect, were the general, common ideas and definitions by means of which men converted immediate sensory data into personal conceptions that were stable and communicable to others. Spaniards habitually ignored concepts and exaggerated the importance of immediate, unrefined impressions. Consequently, Spanish civilization was "impressionistic" and lacked continuity, direction, and intelligent leadership. With only a bit of irony, he suggested that to correct this imbalance Spaniards should make it a national goal to master the concept. Instead, many mistakenly justified Spanish im-

[22] This and the preceding paragraph summarize *Meditaciones del Quijote*, "Lector . . . ," 1914, *Obras* I, pp. 311-28. The quotations are respectively from pp. 328, 313, 321; the definition of comprehension is from p. 311.

[23] This and the preceeding paragraph summarize *Meditaciones del Quijote*, 1914, *Obras* I, pp. 329-37. The quotations are both from p. 335.

pressionism by opposing reason to life. Reason was not a substitute for life; concepts were the work of life, and like digestion or reproduction, reason was a vital function of the human being. As a vital function, reason was a great aid, not a threat, to life. Rightly understood, the concept would be the ally of the Spaniard's traditional impressionism.[24]

Like Seneca, Ortega might have quoted Posidonius — "A single day among the learned lasts longer than the longest life of the ignorant."[25] A man with developed conceptual powers would have a greater capacity for the immediate experience of life than would someone with scant ideational ability. In the course of every moment a man experienced a multitude of fleeting impressions; and without some means of fixing his attention, he could not concentrate on one matter long enough to apprehend masterfully any but its most superficial significances. A man fixed his attention and investigated the ultimate significance of a thing by means of concepts. These intellectual tools were by themselves no substitute for the impressions of real experience, Ortega cautioned; concepts complemented and completed impressions by enabling a man to convert his feelings and sensations into comprehension. And a man expanded his life by achieving such understanding. "Only when something has been thought does it fall within our power. And only when the elemental objects have been subdued, are we able to progress towards the more complex."[26]

Culture was not simply a body of great literature; it was the concepts, principles, and ideas that made the literature — as well as the art, law, and science of a people — useful in the conduct of their lives. Because Spaniards had few concepts at their command, they had little culture; despite the fact that they had a rich tradition, they lacked the means for bringing this tradition to bear upon their lives. Here, then, was the writer's task: to communicate fundamental concepts and to show how they were to be used in life. "On the moral map of Europe we represent the extreme predominance of the impression. Concepts have never been

[24] This and the following two paragraphs summarize *Meditaciones del Quijote,* 1914, *Obras* I, pp. 337-64. The quotations are from pp. 354 and 359 respectively. For a more technical discussion of Ortega's conception of the concept see "Conciencia, objecto y las tres distancias de éste," 1915, *Obras* II, pp. 61-66; "Sobre el concepto de sensación," 1913, *Obras* I, pp. 245-61; *El tema de nuestro tiempo,* 1923, *Obras* III, esp. pp. 163-68. Ortega's *magnum opus* on the subject is *La idea de principio en Leibniz y la evolución de la teoría deductiva,* 1947, 1958, *Obras* VIII, esp. pp. 66-70, 99-114, and 256-323.

[25] Seneca, *Epistulae Morales,* LXXVIII, 2B, Richard M. Gummere, trans., Loeb Classical Library, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 199.

[26] *Meditaciones del Quijote,* 1914, *Obras* I, p. 354.

our forte; and there is no doubt that we would be unfaithful to our destiny if we ceased to affirm energetically the impressionism found in our past. I do not propose a secession, but, on the contrary, an integration. . . . Our culture will never give us a firm footing if we do not secure and organize our sensualism by cultivating our meditativeness."[27] To develop his readers' reflectiveness, Ortega wrote primarily about concepts. By an allusive pedagogy, he explained various concepts and showed how they were to be used. Thus, the essay we are analyzing was at once a critique of Spanish culture and an introduction to the concept of the concept. By functioning in this second way, his essay helped to overcome the deficiency in Spanish character that had been identified as crucial in his cultural critique. Whatever the ostensible subject of Ortega's prose, there was as well a discourse on one or another concept and its significance for life.

Since the function of Ortega's writing was to communicate various concepts to his readers so that they could use these in living their lives, the variety of subject matter and the constancy of form that were characteristic of his style were singularly appropriate. Both characteristics were fundamental features of his pedagogical prose.

Anyone who wished to make reason serve life could not be content with dwelling on a few specially favored thoughts. Ortega had to concern himself with a multitude of concepts, which would run the gamut of the situations that arise in life. Hence, even if he were naturally inclined to specialize, Ortega's purpose would have led him to speak on many matters. By dwelling on a narrow range of concepts, a writer helped cultivate learned ignoramuses who were reasonable in esoteric matters and bumbling fools in the mundane concerns of life. Besides permitting Ortega to introduce a useful range of concepts, variety in subject matter permitted him to shun abstraction and to emphasize the concrete even though he wrote about principles. Thus, he could use the pedagogy of allusion. For instance, in meditating on the concept, Ortega began, not with the metaphysics of essences, but with the forest glen in which he sat. But note, if he had not continually varied the real situations that he used in explicating his ideas, his readers would soon have found either that he was concerned primarily with the situation itself, he being gifted with a minor talent for describing forests, or that the situations had been, like the tables and chairs of freshmen epistemology, converted into technical conventions that no longer served effectively to

[27] *Meditaciones del Quijote,* 1914, *Obras* I, p. 359.

bring metaphysics down to earth. The variety of Ortega's subject matter enabled him to avoid these pitfalls; he introduced his readers to a multitude of concepts by presenting well-chosen references to daily life.

Ortega relied on short, personal essays as his favorite prose form because through these he could bring latent dialogues to his readers, and with such dialogues he could practice the pedagogy of allusion. In each fragmentary essay Ortega introduced a concept; he indicated and explored certain things that would engage the readers in using the concept; he scattered clues about how the concept might be mastered; and he then broke off, leaving the reader to proceed alone along the ideal trajectory that had been suggested. There are dangers, however, in such a prose form, and in seeing why Ortega would risk these dangers, we perceive his true mettle as an educator of the public.

Anyone who intends to teach by the pedagogy of allusion must risk being misunderstood and he must have faith in the ultimate competence and good will of others. Ortega took that risk and he had that faith. "There is little probability that a work like mine, which, although of minor value, is very complicated, which is full of secrets, allusions, and elisions, and which is throughout completely intertwined with my vital trajectory, will encounter the generous soul who truly desires to understand it. More abstract works, freed by their intention and style from the personal life out of which they surged, can be more easily assimilated because they require less interpretative effort."[28] Here we arrive at the choice of Hercules that any popularizer must make, one way or the other. Have I confidence in the capacity of the audience to make an interpretative effort, or do I distrust its ability? Such confidence leads to the way of difficult virtue; such distrust beckons down the path of easy pleasure. Ortega believed that a man mastered himself and his world by making an interpretative effort; and he therefore believed that a writer misused his readers when he made their interpretative effort unnecessary, for by doing so the writer encouraged readers to be lax before life and to expect life to reveal itself replete with a ready-made discipline.

Note that here is a principle by which the pedagogical quality of any communication, be it private or public, personal or "mass," artistic or scientific, may be evaluated. Culture gods notwithstanding, neither the medium nor its emissions are the message; information theory has confirmed what careful writers long have known: in reality, not in intention, the message sent proves to be neither more nor less than the meaning

[28] "Prólogo a una edición de sus obras," 1932, *Obras* VI, p. 347.

received.[29] Such a message is educative neither by virtue of what its sender asserted nor of the means by which it was sent, but rather by virtue of its recipient's need to exercise beneficially his intellectual capacities in receiving its meaning. A communication is educative because it exercises the interpretative power of a person in such a way that his capacity to receive meanings is increased. A communicator can easily subvert or ignore — and thus damage — the interpretative powers of his audience. He may try to compel a particular interpretation, against his followers' better judgment, by using various nondiscursive suggestions. He can try to prevent a significant interpretation by insisting that his words mean exactly and only what he wants them to mean. Or finally he can remove occasion for interpretation by giving a bland summation of a complete, closed system that is readied for rote reeital by passive readers. All such communication is diseducative, because no matter how persuasive, entertaining, or informative it may be, it degrades the recipiant's intellect by habituating him to distrust his interpretative powers.[30] And since, as Ortega contended, our intellect is our most precious tool for living, prudent men will either avoid diseducative communication or render it less harmful by explicating to themselves the reasons why it produces diseducative effects. Ortega's writing gained its pedagogical power from his determination to respect the intelligence and intellect of his audience.

By requiring a great interpretative effort from his readers, Ortega risked on the one hand that they might have difficulty precisely reproducing his personal conception of one or another concept, but he ensured on the other that they would be better able to think by means of that concept. Readers who independently pursued the thoughts that he suggested would train themselves in using concepts to order their experience. To encourage such mastery, it was best to refrain from excessive explicitness and to make the reader think through the lesson for himself. Ortega's style produced effects consonant with his intentions. As the forest had been the occasion, not the subject, of Ortega's meditation on

[29] Although many information theorists would not accept my use of "meaning" here, they have called attention to the importance of ensuring that the intended message is actually the one received. A good introduction to the subject is J. R. Pierce, *Symbols, Signals and Noise* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), esp. pp. 125-65.

[30] Many writers have informed my reflections on these points. Perhaps the works that most effectively bring out the principles at stake are Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), and F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937).

the concept, so his meditation was to be the occasion, not the subject, of his reader's own reflections.

In sum, Ortega tried by means of his writing to disseminate throughout Spain a more adequate repertory of essential concepts that would perfect the Spaniard's impressionistic genius. In his essays Ortega called attention to different concepts in the course of writing about a great variety of topics; and he compelled the reader's involvement with these concepts by not providing an exhaustive, abstract interpretation of his subject, and by giving instead a suggestive yet precise indication that could be completed only by the reader's own efforts. There is no better example of these techniques than the final part of *Meditations on Quixote,* in which Ortega meditated on the concept of the novel, for he held that it was necessary to master this concept in order to do justice to *Don Quixote* and to the great influence on Spanish character that this book had had. In this meditation Ortega introduced and allusively explicated various other concepts that contributed to an understanding of the novel; he wrote passages of five to ten paragraphs on the idea of the literary genre, the exemplary novel, epic, the bard, myth, books of chivalry, poetry and reality, realism, mime, the hero, lyricism, tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, and the experimental novel. On each of these topics, Ortega was at most suggestive; and the reader was clearly expected to complete his own conception of these matters and to unify them into a general conception of the novel that might prove adequate for interpreting *Don Quixote* and its effect on the interpreter's life.[31]

Throughout Ortega's work, one will find him in this way introducing, explicating, and commending concepts through short, suggestive essays that implement the pedagogy of allusion. Ortega's prose was dialogically effective because of his ability to record allusive actualities, rather than consummate abstractions; and consequently, even through his style he wielded pedagogical power. The principle that gave his prose its power was the principle of respecting the reader's interpretative abilities.

Men used a great variety of concepts to give a desirable order to their lives. Spaniards had never mastered many of the powerful concepts with which men had transformed life in the rest of Europe. A civic pedagogue could promote the regeneration of Spain by helping his countrymen to master these concepts. Anything could be taught in a liberal or an illiberal way; the later method perpetuated the student's dependence on teachers, whereas the former increased his independence of masters and led to a sound self-reliance. Whether a liberal educator worked through

[31] *Meditaciones del Quijote, Obras* I, pp. 365-400.

formal or informal agencies, he always respected the potential of his students, for otherwise he would seek from sincere, paternal concern to prolong their dependence on his, or similar, instruction. Thus, as a writer, Ortega tried to elicit collaboration from his readers in important intellectual matters; and in doing so, he developed their conceptual skills, presented them with important problems, informed their responses, and provoked their efforts.

A conflict has continually raged over the proper way to make reason function in public life. Those who think they know what is to be done have a strong urge to impart their conclusions directly to others without bothering to transmit the skills by which the conclusions were drawn. This procedure, which is inherently illiberal, has the virtue of predictability, but it means that the community will be limited to the life that accords with the intelligence, taste, and benevolence of its established leaders. Others seek to make reason function in public life by awakening the rational powers of all members of the community. The division here is not between those who know and those who do not, but between those who have cultivated their rational powers and those who have not yet begun to do so. He who leads an examined life does not desire to disseminate the conclusions of his inquiries, but to provoke others to embark on their own rational examination of experience. This procedure, which is the liberal one, has the drawback of unpredictability, but it is the true basis of an open society. Once the power to reason has been awakened throughout the community, it becomes difficult for established elites to control events, and there arises the possibility that the community may find within its members an unsuspected capacity for truth, beauty, and goodness. Each writer must choose whether to spread the results of reason or the powers of reason. Ortega chose the latter course; for he believed that when a mind comes alive and begins to vibrate with the power of reason, its duty is not to think paternally on behalf of those who are still inert, but, with the ineluctable force of resonance, to vibrate in sympathy with other reasoning minds and to augment with the increment of each the power of the whole, so that all are awakened and a great work may be wrought.