***Man and People* by Jose Ortega y Gasset**

In *Man and People*, Ortega attempts to answer the question, what is society? The book was compiled by Ortega, largely from a number of courses he taught across Europe in the early to mid-20th centuries. A sequel was originally planned but the author’s death precluded this work which was to discuss the state, law, society, nation and inter-nation.

1. Being in One’s Self and Being Beside One’s Self

In this chapter, Ortega asserts that a fundamental understanding of what society is has escaped both the layperson and the sociologist alike. It is this situation he is attempting to rectify.

Humans and animals are different in that the latter are completely directed and controlled by external factors. Humans, on the other hand, have the capacity for turning inward and this has provided us with “selves”, a curious trait which animals lack.

Originally, primitive humans were no more than animals, lost in the world and controlled by it. However, over thousands of years, we gained the ability to retreat inwards for a short time and contemplate. Naturally, we returned to “the things of the world” but when we did, we were now a fraction more capable of resisting them and exerting a minimum amount of control over them. This, in turn, meant that things oppressed us a little less and allowed us “more frequent and leisurely intervals of withdrawal” into ourselves. This cycle (lost in the world-theory-action) repeated until we gained a robust self and a relative freedom from the vagaries of the external world.

The implication here is that our “destiny, then, is primarily *action*. We do not live to think, but the other way round: we think in order that we may succeed in surviving… *Action* is to act upon the environment of material things or of other men in accordance with a plan preconceived in a previous period of meditation or thought, and there is no authentic thought if it is not duly referred to action and made virile by its relation to action.”

This ability to think, to have a *self*, is not guaranteed. We have achieved it but there is always the possibility that it will be lost. “Each one of us is always in danger of not being the unique and untransferable *self* which he is… The condition of man, then, is essential uncertainty.” We live “in perpetual danger of being dehumanized.”

Ortega claims the prior two centuries had witnessed the deification of this inward contemplation under the general name “intellectualism”; specifically *raison*, then *enlightenment*, then finally of *culture*. All of these movements “presented us with culture, with thought, as something justified by itself, that is, which needs no justification but is valid by its own essence... Human life was to put itself at the service of culture… [and] would in itself be a mean and worthless thing.”

Then the pendulum swung the other way, the *voluntarist* aberration, which “throws contemplation overboard and deifies pure action.” Thought and inwardness was discouraged. This meant we were descending back into animality.

2. Personal Life

In order to chase our quarry down, the social, we must first uncover radical (that is to say, the root) reality, which is human life as the life of each individual person, i.e. *my life*. This isn’t to say that *my life* is the highest or supreme reality, only that “it is the root of all other realities” in the sense that all realities must present themselves within the “confines of our own life.” Ortega goes on to highlight a few key features of our lives:

1. We are the only being that “does not exist, but *lives* or is alive.” Everything else appears, rises before us, resists us; in short, everything else *is there*.
2. Life is “not something that we have bestowed on ourselves; rather, we find it precisely when we find ourselves.” That is to say, when we find ourselves in a “world.”
3. Our lives are not given to us ready-made; rather, we must each make them for ourselves; “man is the only reality that does not simply consist in being but must choose its own being.”
4. The above entails that we are obligated to choose *how* we will be in each circumstance which means that each circumstance “invites us to different possibilities of acting, of being.”
5. My life is untransferrable; we must each live our own lives.
6. My life is “essentially *solitude*, *radical solitude*.” But this is not solipsism. Living can only take place in the “absolute “outside” that is the circumstance or world”. Indeed, living includes “two terms with identical values as reality: the somebody, the X, the Man who lives; and the world, environment, or circumstance”. We are alone in our radical reality, but we are “alone *with* them.” If you think about it, solitude naturally implies others; “solitude is always *solitude from* someone”. It is in this outside world that we will find the “social”.

What all of this means is that “things *are* for us, originally and primarily in our human life”. It is only afterwards that they are what physics or astronomy or biology tells us they are; “none of this knowledge would exist if the earth did not exist before it as a component of our life”. The example Ortega gives is Earth, which is not primarily what physics tells us it is; rather it is “what firmly holds me up… what I sometimes have laboriously to climb… what parts and separates me from the woman I love…” In other words, “everything that composes, fills, and makes up the world… possesses no independent condition *of itself*… *is nothing in itself* – but is simply something *for* or *something against* our ends.” Another way to think of this is that the things in the world are “concerns to which I am constantly attending.” Everything in the world appears to us as “an instrument or an impediment *for*”.

3. Structure of “Our” World

Identifying radical reality as “my life” means that we have bypassed the whole idealism/realism debate because we have found that “two things are equally real, equally primary in life – Man and World.” Ortega now wants to investigate the second half of this equation; the external world.

First, the things we perceive are never present to our senses in their totality. The example is an apple, which only ever presents one side to us at a time. Of course, we can see the entire apple by turning it in our hands and remembering the first side we saw, but the whole apple is never present to us with “radical evidence”. Rather, it appears with “an evidence of the second order… supplied by mere memory”. What is not given us at any one time, the half of the apple we cannot see, Ortega calls *compresent*. Secondly, what is compresent exists for us in a habitual fashion. Even though we cannot prove it is there, we know, by habit, that it is.

Ortega now gives two laws we can derive concerning the structure of the world:

1. “[T]he vital world is composed of a few things that are present at the moment and countless things that are latent, hidden at the moment, that are not in sight, but we know or believe we know”.
2. A “thing is never present to us by itself but, on the contrary, we always see a thing standing out against other things to which we pay no attention and which form a ground against which what we do see stands out.” This ground is what he calls the *horizon*. So, there are three planes in the world; the foreground (the thing), the middle distance (the ground), and the far distance (the compresent which is beyond our perception).

Ortega now distinguishes between “environment”, which is everything within the horizon, and “world”, which is everything beyond the horizon.

4. The “Other Man” Appears

The fact that things in the world appear for us at all is only possible because there is another “thing” which isn’t just another thing in the world; my body. In this sense, we *are* our bodies. If we were anything else, like a “pure spirit”, bodies would cease to exist for us. This fact “puts me in a place and excludes me from other places.” This place we call *here*.

We have already seen that the being of all things is a *being for* but Ortega now wants to analyse this, what he calls, *serviceability*. All of the services of things can be “articulated together to form architectures of serviceability” which he calls *pragmatic fields*.

These two additional features lead to two final structural laws of the world:

1. Wherever I am in the world, it will always be *here*. Indeed, “*here* and *I*, *I* and *here*, are inseparable for life. And since the world, with all the things in it, must *be for me* from “*here*,” it automatically becomes a perspective – that is, its things are near to or far from *here*, to right or left of *here*, above or below *here*.”
2. The world is not a totality in itself, but is organised into “pragmatic fields” and each thing “belongs to one or more of these fields, in which it interlinks its *being for* with that of others, and so on successively.”

Turning to the contents of the world, Ortega notes that we can classify all things as mineral, vegetable, animal, or human. There is no possibility of *community* with the first two but the “animal and I are “we” because we mutually are *to each other*, because I know very well that in response to my action on the animal the animal will respond to me.” Ortega calls this relation *reciprocity*. The animal *co-exists* with me.

However, the degree of *co-existence* we can experience with animals is limited. It isn’t until we get to other humans that we find ourselves in true, equal *co-existence* with another being, a being that we know entertains an opinion about us. Naturally, all that appears to us in the *other* is a sensible body but “through this presence we see something that is essentially invisible, something that is pure inwardness, something that each of us knows directly only of himself – his thinking, feeling, desiring, operations that, by themselves, cannot be presences to other men.” This inwardness is never present to us but, like the side of the apple we don’t see, is *compresent*. However, whereas the other side of the apple can become present to me, “the inwardness that the other man *is* has never made itself, nor can ever make itself, present to me.”

5. Inter-Individual Life. We, You, I

In phenomenological terms, we can say that the compresent “I’s” we observe in other people are transcendent, as opposed to my own “I”, which is immanent. This means that the life of the other, unlike my own, is always only a “presumed or assumed reality… not radically, unquestionably, primordially “reality.”” This doesn’t deprive the existence of others of any value, but merely means they cannot be *radical*. In fact, if we class “my life” as a first-degree reality, there will also be second-degree, third-degree, and so on, realities. These, Ortega suggests, we call *interpretations*.

Normally, we don’t live in first-degree reality. Instead, “we live these presumptions or second-degree realities as if they were radical realities… Nay, more: normally, I am not aware of my genuine life… instead, I presumptively live presumed things, I live among interpretations of reality which my social environment and human tradition have been inventing and accumulating.”

This means that our usual lives are inauthentic or disingenuous. The remedy for this is a “periodical and thorough going over the accounts of the enterprise that is his life” which can only be performed by withdrawing to our solitude. “In solitude, man is his truth; in society, he tends to be his mere conventionality or falsification.” This withdrawal is called *philosophy*.

We have seen that we co-exist with the other person. Our actions *interpenetrate* because in all of our actions we must also factor in his or her reactions. Other people differ from animals in that they are “*capable of responding to me as much as I respond to [them]*”. This reciprocity is the first fact we can call *social*.

This reciprocity is the first characteristic we can attribute to humans (not just the *other* person, because I am also other for others). Whatever else humans may be, they (we) are first and foremost reciprocators. This means that “to speak of man outside of and apart from a society is to say something that is self-contradictory and meaningless… Man does not *appear* in solitude – although his ultimate truth is solitude; man appears in sociality as the Other, frequenting the One, as the reciprocator.”

Now, the first thing that appears to each of us is other people. “In our life the human world precedes the animal, vegetable, and mineral world.” We find ourselves inducted into the world through the ideas that other people instil into us. Even “*before each one of us became aware of himself*, he had already had the basic experience that there are others who are not “I,” the Others”. Ortega makes clear this is neither good nor bad; it just is.

“Being open to the other, to others, is a permanent and constitutive state of Man… This state is not yet properly a “social relation,” because it is not yet defined in any concrete act. It is simple co-existence, matrix for all possible “social relations.”

This initial ‘relation’ leads to two outcomes. First, I act on the other and the other acts on me. This means I come to understand that there is a common element to his/her world and mine; it exists for us both. This is the “objective world.” Interestingly, Ortega points out that “it is not *the* unique and objective world that makes it possible for me to co-exist with other men but, on the contrary, it is my sociality or social relation with other men that makes possible the appearance, between them and me, of *something like a* common and objective world”. This is the first *social* reality we have encountered. It is of the form “we live”.

Secondly, “we” come to know each other. As the “Other becomes more definite to me and I increasingly distinguish him from the other *Others* whom I know less well… the other [becomes] *You* to me… [in other words, the] unique human individual… appears to me.”

6. More About Others and “I.” Brief Excursion Toward “Her.”

Husserl claims we can know the Other’s body reveals an inwardness like our own because I know that “my body is the thing in the world that is closest to me, so close that in a certain sense it is indistinguishable from me since I am where it is, namely, “here,” *hic*. But I can move elsewhere, and in so doing move the *here* elsewhere – so that I can transport my body to the place that, from *here*, *hic*, is a there, *illic*.” So, when I see a body like mine *there*, it is reasonable to assume that “the difference between my body and the Other’s is only a difference in perspective”.

Ortega disagrees with this. Husserl’s argument works by analogy and analogy requires a common term; in this case, my body and the Other’s body. Ortega rejects this, arguing that my body is nothing like the Other’s body. The reason is that my body is mine, not because it is *here*, but because it is “the direct instrument of which I make use in order to deal with other things – to see them, hear them, approach them or run from them, manipulate them, and so on.” It is so important to me that, without it, I couldn’t live. It is “the thing in the world whose “being for” *is to me* the most indispensable, it is my *property* in the strictest and most superlative sense of the word.” The final proof for Ortega that our bodies share nothing in common is that I know *my* body from within whereas I only know the *Other’s* body from without.

A second reason Ortega disagrees with Husserl lies in the fact that sometimes the Other we discover is a completely different gender.

Ultimately, the problem with Husserl’s “analogical” position is that the only common elements between mine and the Other’s body are abstract ones, therefore unreal. Only the concrete is real. The most important of these abstract features is “the capacity to respond to me, to reciprocate… [but] the abstract Ego does not respond, because it is an abstraction.” To say that someone is like me because they can respond to me says nothing real because it ignores the content of that response.

To reinforce Ortega’s second criticism he then embarks on a (somewhat outdated) discussion of how women are different from men which is difficult to reconcile with our modern values:

1. The feminine is confused; “Man… is made up of clarities… Woman, on the other hand, lives in a perpetual twilight; she is never sure whether she loves or not, will do something or not do it…” This doesn’t mean men are always *right*, only that “within himself, he sees himself clearly.”
2. The feminine is “inferior to the masculine.” He criticises Simone de Beauvoir for her belief that “to consist in “reference to another” is incompatible with the idea of a person, which is rooted in “freedom toward oneself.”” Ortega thinks that men refer to women and women refer to men… however he also thinks “this reference to the other sex, though constitutive in both, has a pre-eminent place in woman, while in man its autonomy is reduced by other references.”

He continues by saying that “when we see a woman, what we see consists in *weakness*” although he claims this is not so by comparison with man. He concludes this point by saying that “woman makes us happy and *is happy herself*, *is happy in feeling that she is weak*.”

1. The final difference is that the feminine ego’s “relation to its body is different from the relation in which the masculine ego stands to its body.” Women are more ‘in tune’ with their bodies than men are meaning that “her body exists for her more than man’s does for him.” This, he thinks, explains the reason why women “adorn and ornament” their bodies. He also thinks that the erotic attraction men feel towards women is not “aroused by the feminine body as body; rather, we desire woman because Her body *is* a soul.”

7. The Other as Danger, and the I as Surprise

So, social relation only emerged in the discovery of the Other Human who is capable of responding to my actions. My actions must therefore consider the Other’s actions; the former are interpenetrated by the latter, making them *inter-action*. However, this Other, this “human life”, we have discovered who rescues us from our solitude is also a life not mine, a life forever outside of my life.

My life is intimate and “cosy” to me, even my pains, because they occur in *my* subjective world, they are genuinely mine. This stands in opposition to the external world which can never participate in this cosiness precisely because it is outside. But the world is “strange and inhospitable to me” for another reason too. My world is composed of things whose being consisted in *being for* me in some way, their *serviceability*. But the objective world we discovered “common to you and to me and to everyone else, which is neither yours nor mine, cannot be composed of things that refer to any of us, but of things that claim to exist independently of each one of us, indifferent to you, to me, and to anybody. In short, this world is composed of things that appear to me possessing a *being* that is their own and not a mere *being for*.”

We have already seen how, from the first, we are acted upon by Others and it is only through their eyes, through “Them”, that we come to know the world and even ourselves. This also means that “my radical reality… is concealed from my own eyes by a crust made up of what I have received from other men, from their maneuvers and their opinions”. Ortega calls this World and life already “impregnated with their [the Other’s] humanity” a *humanized* world.

It goes without saying that “this world that is humanized for me by others is not my genuine world; it does not possess an unquestionable reality; it is only more or less probable… [and the duty of] submitting it to periodical purifyings so that its things shall be rated at their true value… is philosophy.” However, this “humanizing” is not good or bad; it is value neutral. The result of all this is that “normally, we do not live in it [our own radical realities], but pseudo-live by co-living with the world of men, that is, by living in “society.””

Ortega now describes in some detail how this “society” functions. He talks about how we act upon Others and how they act upon us, revealing to us, through their *gestures* (including speech), their character; in short, how an Other becomes a *You*. This knowledge we acquire of the Other is never settled because he or she “does not possess a fixed or settled being; his [or her] being is precisely freedom to be.” Our knowledge is therefore always shifting to reflect this. Others are “dangerous” precisely because of this and this danger never entirely disappears. Part of the reason for this is that they are always free to act in any way they want but also because they are never totally revealed to us, at best they are *compresent*. The Other’s life (and therefore the Other him or her) is something we can never know because it is transcendent.

Ortega suggests that the “catastrophes that we have been undergoing for the past thirty-five years” were possible because Europeans forgot this important fact; that the Other is dangerous. They thus lost their alertness.

He goes on to say that “the ground, the plane on which this daily intercourse is conducted can only be adequately described by calling it “strife.”” The harmony we sometimes (often?) see in places, such as families, is only achieved after “countless impacts and collisions against the others – collisions that, comparatively speaking, may be as minor as you please but which, clearly seen, are real strife.”

This is the final and most important layer to the Other’s dangerousness; “the simple fact that You are You… you have a mode of being that is your own and peculiar to you, and that does not coincide with mine.” *You*, through your being, frequently negate my being in these collisions which underwrite social life.

Curiously though, it is only through these collisions, through the negations the Other imposes on my being that I “discover my boundaries, my frontiers, dividing me from your world and you.”

At first, “in my radical solitude and in my childhood” I made no distinction between Others and I. There was no boundary to *I*. It was only when I started bumping into other things that I discovered where I ended and other things began.

But even once I realised *I* lived in a world of *other* things which were different from me, they were still all *mine*, that is, they all existed *for me*. It wasn’t until I encountered the Other that I discovered that those things were also *yours*. This leads to the realisation that there are Other people who are *not-I*, which entails that the *I* which I am is “only a minute portion of the world, the tiny part of it that I now begin accurately to call “I.””

Now the word “I” has two meanings. “One is its generic, abstract meaning as a common noun – “he who lives in the World” – this is the *I* philosophers have been concerned with since Descartes. “The other meaning of the word is concrete and unique” – the *I* that we each are and which we are concerned with here.

The main point Ortega wants to make here is that the unique *I* we each feel we are is not something we possess from the outset. Rather, it is “something that gradually appears to us exactly as other things do… we discover that we are *I* after and by virtue of having first known the *you’s*, our *you’s*, in our collision with them, in the strife that we called social relation.” Indeed “my *I* continues slowly becoming apparent to me all through my life…”

8. Suddenly, “People” Appear

Now Ortega wonders what the State is, particularly with regard to *forbidding* and *commanding* certain actions. A provisional answer is that it is “everything, society, the collectivity.” So, in a State, there are many actions and words that are customary and we find ourselves doing precisely these things, “not because we want to… but simply because “*people*” *do them*… so now *people* force us into human actions that proceed from them and not from us.” Who are these *people*? “Why, *everybody*, *nobody* in particular.”

Most of the things we do and say we do because they *are done* and say because they *are said* by “this unseizable, indeterminate, and irresponsible subject, *people*, *society*, the *collectivity*.” In doing this “my life ceases to be mine, I cease to be the supremely individual person that I am and I act on society’s account – I am a social automaton, I am *socialized*.” This collectivity is “something human, but is the human without man, the human without spirit, the human without soul, the human dehumanized.” In short, customs are actions that “have no particular subject who creates them and is responsible for them, for whom they have meaning.”

9. Reflections on the Salutation

Social relations as we have defined them so far are always relations between individuals; they are what Ortega calls *inter-individual* relations or *co-living*. But this is a mistake; one which most sociologists have made too; that is, confusing the social with the inter-individual. The social is not what appears in contrast to the individual, but in contrast with the *inter-individual*.

In order to identify the social, Ortega analyses one particular social act, the salutation:

1. It is an act *I*, a human being, execute.
2. Although I execute it, it “comes to me from outside of myself, it does not originate from any particular individual.”
3. I don’t execute it “of my own spontaneous will; indeed, I often execute it reluctantly” which means it is done under compulsion.
4. Considering all of this, the act is “much less like human behaviour than like a mechanical inhuman movement.” But it gets worse. I don’t even know why I have to perform a salutation in the first place. It is therefore meaningless and mysterious to me, hence irrational.

Ortega calls these customary actions society forces on us, “usages”, and points out that all our lives we are surrounded by and immersed in a sea of them, indeed, “they are, *sensu stricto*, our environment or social world, they are the society in which we live.”

10. Reflections of the Salutation, Etymological Man. What is a Usage?

We have seen that our environment contains minerals, plants, animals and men, but now we can say that in addition, “and in a certain sense before all these things, there were those other realities, usages.” So, what is usage?

Ortega rejects the definition “social habit” because a habit is something repeated frequently and usages need not be frequent. Rather usage “makes its appearance to me as the threat in my mind of an eventual violence, coercion, or sanction that other people are going to exercise against me.” This is the third social fact we looked at in the previous chapter.

In addition, not only do usages lack meaning, “it is of the essence of usages to have lost their meaning, hence to have once been inter-individual and intelligible human actions, actions with a soul, which were then drained of meaning, became mechanized, automatized, and as it were mineralized, in short, soulless.”

We can see the same thing with words, which no one, except for philologists, knows why those particular words specify the things they do. The process which discovers this lost meaning is called *etymology*.

With this, we can see that “all human acts have an etymology” by which a once meaningful act/gesture/word changes over time until it becomes unintelligible. Ortega makes the insights here that; “Words do not have etymologies because they are words but because they are usages” and the human being “as member of a society… [is] *the etymological animal*.” History, in turn, is “only a vast etymology” and “the only discipline that can discover the meaning of what man does and hence of what he is.”

An interesting feature of a usage is that from the time when an individual created the act/gesture/word until the time “when it actually becomes an observed usage… a long time must necessarily pass.” This means that by the time it becomes a usage, it has already begun to lose its meaning. “Usage is slow in becoming established and slow in disappearing. Hence all usage – including new usage – is in essence old.” Usages are “interconnected and rest one upon anther, forming a gigantic architecture. This gigantic architecture of usages is, precisely, society” therefore “the social is essentially anachronism.”

11. What People Say: Language. Toward a New Linguistics

It has been said that man is a social animal. Ortega agrees but only if he can also add to it “inseparably, that man is also and at the same time naturally unsociable, that in him there is always, more or less somnolent or awake, an urge to flee from society.” This is because society is naturally coercive. Every aspect of our lives has been dictated to us by *people* and nothing we do has any meaning for us.

Language is a social usage. It is somewhat ironic therefore that in order to engage in individual inter-action, a deeply personal process, the participants must utilise irrational, meaningless “words” which have absolutely no personal connection to us and which come to us from outside.

Those words, in themselves, lack meaning. They are no more than “*possible* meanings… the reality “word” is “inseparable from the person who says it, from the person to whom it is said, and from the situation in which this takes place.” Ortega compares words to something like an algebraic formula, “which is not itself a calculation but only a schema for possible calculations, a schema that requires to be completed by the substitution of specific figures for its letters.”

So words get their meaning from the human beings who use them in a particular situation, in which they are no more than one component in a whole complex made up of many things; vocal inflections, facial expressions, gestures, etc.

The upshot of all this is that Ortega wants to outline a new linguistics. Traditionally, linguistics has focused on something it calls “language” but which is really an abstraction or a first approximation because it has limited itself to phonetics, grammar or lexicology, none of which are “language”.

He distinguishes between *saying* and *speaking*. To speak is to use a language which has been made and which “our social environment imposes… on us.” It is therefore something mechanically received from outside which then progresses inwards. All language was invented because the modes of communication in prior existence were insufficient to express what the person wanted to express. This desire to express, to manifest, to declare, Ortega calls *saying*. “Saying” is obviously “previous to speech and to the existence of a language” and therefore progresses in the opposite direction to “speech”, from the inwards out. Being a “deeper stratum than speaking” it is therefore what linguistics should focus on in a new discipline Ortega coins the “Theory of Saying.”

When we don’t start from “saying”, we make the mistake of thinking that language (speaking) is the expression of what we want to communicate when in fact much of what we want to communicate remains unexpressed both above language, in the “ineffable”, and below language, in all that “goes without saying.”

In truth language says only a part of what we want to say and actually raises an obstacle to the transmission of the rest. In addition, the more important the subject, the more the clumsiness and vagueness of language becomes apparent. This is particularly a problem in thinking, which is largely conducted through language, i.e. talking with oneself, from which it follows that thinking necessarily entails a certain amount of misunderstanding ourselves.

Linguistics also fails to take account of the fact that all speech includes a great amount of silence. “A being who could not renounce saying many things would be incapable of speaking.” All language includes silences but each language leaves different things unsaid “*in order to* be able to say others” and these differences would be included in a “Theory of Saying.”

Linguistics cannot investigate the origins of language because approaching language as speech requires linguistic data, which we obviously don’t have from the times when languages were first being made. However, language is not a static, fixed entity, but is always changing, that is to say, always *originating*.

There are two basic theories of the origin of language; a divine gift or an evolution of the cries, squawks, or grunts of animals based on the simple needs all animals have. Ortega suggests a third alternative; that the need early human beings had to communicate was “incomparably greater” than other animals, hence we “had a great deal, an *abnormally* great deal, to say.” This heightened need came from the “teeming “inner world”” we possessed; an inner world which was by no means rational. Rather, it was a world of fantasy, a “superabundance of images, of fantasmagorias, which began to flow in [human beings] and in [them] created an “inner world.”

Since the things in this inner world could not be perceived, were “not there” in the environment, it was not enough to merely “signal” them. Simple signs had to become complex expressions, “that is, a sign that bears a meaning, a signification within it.” This is precisely what continues today in all languages when there is a “collision between the individual, the person, who wants to *say* the new thing that has arisen within him and that others *do not see*, and the language as constituted – the fertile collision of expression against *speech*.”

In this creation of new utterances, phonemes are produced that do not exist in the language. These specific phonemes are produced because “the physiognomy of their sound adequately expresses what at that moment the individual feels and wants to say.” What ought to be studied is not how the mouth, tongue, etc. produce the sounds (phonetics), or the sounds themselves (phonology), but why the body came to be used in such a way that those particular phonemes were produced. More important than the sound of the phoneme or the shape of the mouth in producing it, is the “*expressive* movements or gestures” that a group of people has chosen to produce spontaneously in creating their language. “The phonic system of each language is a projected representation of the “soul” of the corresponding people.”

12. What People Say: “Public Opinion,” Social “Observances.” Public Power

Most of the ideas that we live by we have never really thought for ourselves. We use them mechanically, on the authority of what people say. Society, in turn, contains no real ideas; that is, clearly reasoned, therefore rational, ideas. This doesn’t mean they are untrue, just that they have never been really, truly *thought*; they have only been used mechanically and coercively by individuals. This is “public opinion.”

We can contrast public opinion with “private opinion” which is the opinion of a group. One significant difference between the two is that the former doesn’t require anyone to maintain it; it predominates and rules by itself. This is an important point Ortega wishes to make; “When something is usage, it does not depend on the adherence of individuals; on the contrary, it is usage precisely because it imposes itself on them. Because of this the social in its entirety is a different reality from the individual.” Ortega calls the fact that usages impose themselves on us their “binding social observance.” There are two features to binding social observance:

1. It doesn’t appear as something dependent on our individual adherence, “it *is there*, we are obliged to *reckon with it* and hence it exercises its coercion on us…”
2. We can look to it at any time as “an authority, a power to which we can look for support.”

Now, these two characteristics perfectly describe the Law and the action of the State. “Both these things… imply that society is, in essence, power, an insuperable power facing the individual”, that is, *public power*.

Although public power can and does manifest in the form of police and courts and so on, the truth is that it “has constantly acted on the individuals who make up the collectivity from the time that a human group has existed… [but] because it is so constant and ubiquitous, we do not perceive it as such…” Public power is therefore, just the “active, energetic emanation of public opinion.”

In any group, there are always individuals who are *anti-social*; the murderer, the thief, etc. Hence, society is never fully what it promises, but is always to some degree or another, *dis-society*, a “repulsion between individuals. Since on the other hand, it claims to be the opposite… society is a reality that is *constitutively* sick, defective…”

This sickness is ineradicable and so for any group of people to endure, it must “frequently summon its internal “public power” to intervene in violent form and even… to create a special body charged with making that power function in irresistible form. This is what is commonly called the State.”