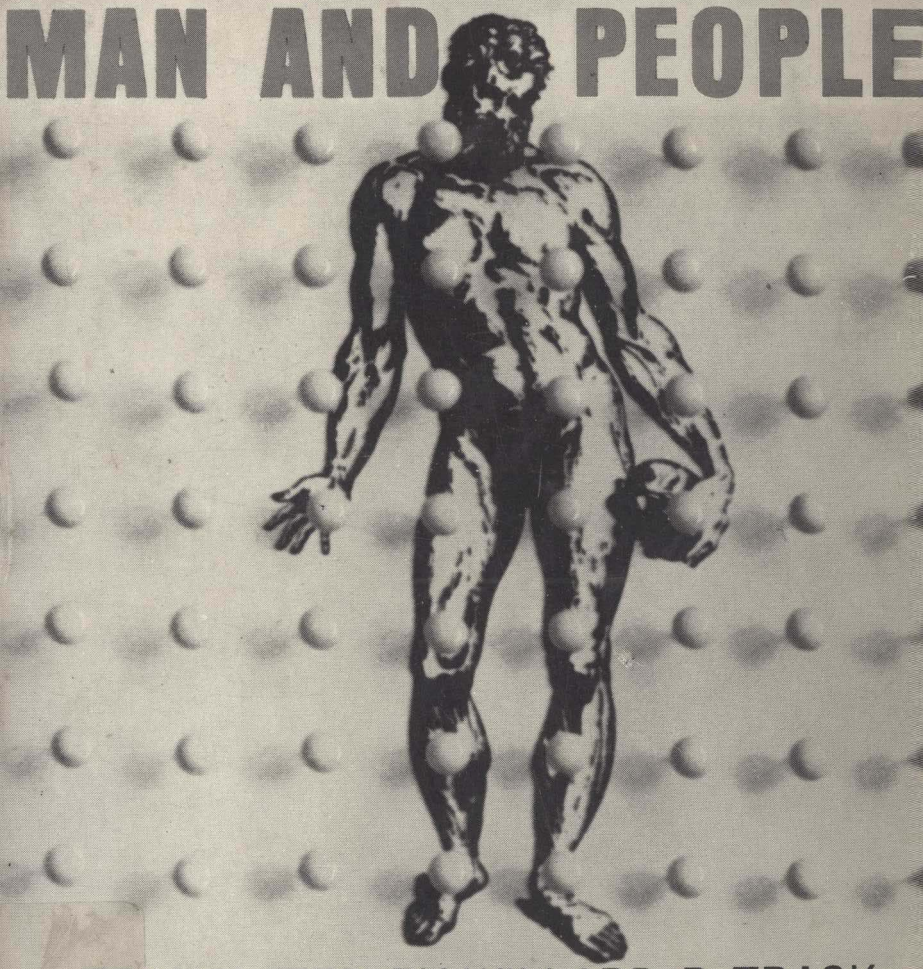
The last major work of the author of THE REVOLT OF THE MASSES.

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

MAN AND PEOPLE



TRANSLATED BY WILLARD R. TRASK

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

BORN IN Madrid in 1883, José Ortega y Gasset was one of the intellectual leaders of the Spanish Republican government. After the establishment of the Republic, Ortega became a member of Parliament. He also held for many years the chair of metaphysics at the University of Madrid and was editor of the influential journal of opinion, *Revista de Occidente*. After the Spanish Civil War, Ortega became an exile from Spain, living for a time in Buenos Aires, later settling in Lisbon. In recent years he visited Spain to lecture in Madrid. Books by Ortega include his most widely read work *The Revolt of the Masses, Man and Crisis,* originally published in Spanish under the title of *En Torno A Galileo, Man and People, Meditations on Quixote, History as a System,* and *What is Philosophy?* Señor Ortega died in 1955.

"Ortega y Gasset, after Nietzsche, is perhaps the greatest 'European' writer."

—Albert Camus

by JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

SOME LESSONS IN METAPHYSICS

THE ORIGIN OF PHILOSOPHY

THE REVOLT OF THE MASSES

MAN AND PEOPLE

MAN AND CRISIS

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

MEDITATIONS ON QUIXOTE

HISTORY AS A SYSTEM

CONCORD AND LIBERTY

MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY

THE IDEA OF PRINCIPLE IN LEIBNITZ AND THE EVOLUTION OF DEDUCTIVE THEORY

AN INTERPRETATION OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

VELAZQUEZ, GOYA AND THE DEHUMANIZATION OF ART

JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET

MAN AND PEOPLE

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE SPANISH
BY
WILLARD R. TRASK

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Publisher's Note

BEGINNING with the short Prologue which, in 1940, he prefixed to his *Ideas and Beliefs* (*Ideas y creencias*), and on many later occasions, Ortega announced the forthcoming appearance of a new book containing his sociological doctrine, under the title *Man and People*. Both before and after that date he expounded his idea of "usages" as constituting the social. In Buenos Aires he gave two courses, of six and four lectures respectively; in Madrid, a course of twelve lectures; two courses in Germany, at Munich and Hamburg, and another in Switzerland, each comprising four lectures. The texts of all these provide different expositions of his thought on the principles of a new sociology.

Ortega himself prepared the present volume, adhering, in general, to the text that he had prepared for his course at the Instituto de Humanidades in Madrid, and adding further discussions of certain questions. Ortega contemplated a second part or sequel to this volume which would discuss the state, law, society, nation, and inter-nation, but death overtook him before its completion. In *Man and People* the basic questions of principle—not of application—are treated in a way which places the urgent problem today raised by sociological themes on a plane not reached, in this respect, by any other philosophy.

Man and People

1

Being In One's Self and Being Beside One's Self

My subject is this: Today people constantly talk of laws and law, the state, the nation and internationalism, public opinion and public power, good policy and bad, pacifism and jingoism, "my country" and humanity, social justice and social injustice, collectivism and capitalism, socialization and liberalism, the individual and the collectivity, and so on and so on. And they not only talk, in the press, at their clubs, cafés, and taverns; they also argue. And they not only argue; they also fight for the things that these words designate. And once started fighting, they kill each other—by hundreds, by thousands, by millions. It would be ingenuous to suppose that, in what I have just said, I refer to any specific nation. It would be ingenuous, because the supposition would be equivalent to believing that these ferocious performances are confined to particular parts of our planet; when, on the contrary, they are a universal phenomenon, which is progressively spreading and by which very few of the European and American peoples will succeed in remaining unaffected. Doubtless the cruel conflict will be more mortal among some than among others and it may be that one or another will possess the inspired serenity necessary to reduce the havoc to a minimum. Because certainly conflict is not inevitable; but no less certainly it is very difficult to avoid. Very difficult indeed, because to avoid it will require the collaboration of many factors

that differ both qualitatively and in importance—splendid virtues, together with humble precautions.

One of these precautions—humble, I repeat, but obligatory if a country is to pass unscathed through these terrible times—is somehow to contrive that a sufficient number of persons in it shall be thoroughly aware of the degree to which these ideas (let us call them ideas)—all these ideas about which there is all this talk and fighting and arguing and slaughter—are grotesquely confused and superlatively vague.

Everybody talks, talks, talks about these questions, but what is said about them lacks the minimum of clarity without which talking becomes a harmful operation. Because talking always has certain consequences. And since talking about these subjects has become general—for years, people have practically talked about nothing else, and allowed no one to talk about anything else—the consequences of all this chatter are, obviously, very serious.

One of the greatest misfortunes of our time is the acute incongruity between the importance that all these questions have at present and the crudeness and confusion of the concepts of them which these words represent.

Observe that all these ideas—law, code of laws, state, internationalism, collectivity, authority, freedom, social justice, and so on—even when they do not explicitly express it, always imply, as their essential ingredient, the idea of the social, of society. If this idea is not clear, all these words do not mean what they pretend to and are mere empty show. Now, whether we admit it or not, in the incorruptible depths of our being we are all of us conscious that on these subjects we have only random, vague, silly, or muddled notions. Because, unfortunately, crudeness and confusion in regard to these matters exists not only among the masses but also among scholars—to

the point where it is impossible to refer the uninitiated to any book or article where he can really correct and refine his sociological concepts.

I shall never forget the surprise mingled with shame and shock which I felt when, many years ago, conscious of my ignorance on this subject, I hurried, full of illusion, all the sails of hope spread wide, to books on sociology . . . and found something incredible—namely, that books on sociology have nothing clear to say about what the social is, about what society is. Even worse: not only do they fail to give us a precise notion of what the social is, of what society is; but, reading these books, we further discover that their authors—our esteemed sociologists—have not made any serious effort to clarify—even to themselves, let alone to their readers—the elementary phenomena in which the social fact consists. In the very works whose titles seem to announce that their authors intend to treat the subject fundamentally, we soon see that they avoid it—we might almost say, conscientiously. They hurry over these phenomena—which are, I repeat, preliminary and indispensable—as over red-hot coals; and with an occasional exception, never more than partial (Durkheim, for example), we see them rush on, with enviable boldness, to hold forth upon the most terribly concrete themes of human living together.

Obviously, I cannot demonstrate this to you now; I will content myself with making the following simple statistical observations, which seem to me more than sufficient.

First: The works in which Auguste Comte founded the science of sociology amount to more than five thousand pages of quite small print. Now, in all those pages we do not find lines enough to make up one page devoted to telling us what Auguste Comte understands by *society*.

Second: The book in which this science or pseudo science celebrates its first triumph on the intellectual horizon—Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, published between 1876 and 1896—has at least 2500 pages. I do not think there are as many as fifty lines in which the author asks himself what are these strange realities, "societies," with which his voluminous book is concerned.

Lastly: Some years ago Bergson published his book—a fascinating book, by the way—*The Two Springs of Morality and Religion.* This hydraulic title, which is a landscape in itself, conceals a 350-page treatise on sociology, in which there is not one line in which the author formally tells us what are the "societies" about which he speculates. Indeed, we emerge from reading it as from a jungle—covered with ants and surrounded by frantic swarms of bees; because all that the author does to enlighten us concerning the strange reality of human societies is to refer us to the anthill and the beehive, to alleged animal societies—about which, of course, we know less than we do about our own.

This is not to say—far from it!—that in these books, as in some others, there are not insights, at times inspired insights, into certain sociological problems. But, for want of clarity in regard to the fundamentals, these happy discoveries remain secret and hermetic, inaccessible to the ordinary reader. To use them, we should have to do what their authors did not do: try to clear up these preliminary and fundamental phenomena; hold ourselves resolutely to defining what the social is, what society is. Because their authors did not do this, like inspired blind men they sometimes manage to touch upon certain realities—I might say, to bump into them—but they do not succeed in seeing them, still less in clarifying them to us. So that our intercourse with these writers proves to be the dialogue between the blind man and the cripple:

"How are you getting on, my good man?" the blind man asks the cripple. And the cripple answers the blind man: "As you see, my friend . . ."

If this sort of thing goes on among the masters of sociological thinking, we can scarcely be surprised if people in the marketplace raise their voices over these questions. When men have nothing clear to say about a matter, instead of keeping quiet, they commonly do the opposite: they "say" in the superlative, that is, they shout. And the shout is the sonorous preliminary to aggression, to combat, to slaughter. *Dove si grida non è vera scienza*, said Leonardo. "Where there is shouting there is no true knowledge."

Thus it is that the ineptitude of sociology, filling people's heads with confused ideas, has finally become one of the plagues of our time. Sociology, in short, is not abreast of the times, and so the times, badly buttressed, fall headlong to destruction.

If this is so, do you not think that one of the best ways of not wholly wasting our time would be to devote ourselves to clarifying, to some extent, what the social is, what society is? You—many of you, at least—know very little or nothing at all about the subject. For my part, I am not sure that I am not in the same case. Why not put together our ignorances? Why not start a stock company, with a good capital of ignorance, and undertake the enterprise without pedantry or with the least possible amount of it, but with a lively desire to see clearly, with intellectual relish (a virtue that has begun to disappear in Europe) —with the delight that is awakened in us by the hope that we shall suddenly be flooded with light?

So, once again, let us set out in search of clear ideas; that is, of truths.

Few are the peoples who in these latter days still enjoy that tranquillity which permits one to choose the truth, to

abstract oneself in meditation. Almost all the world is in tumult, is beside itself, and when man is beside himself he loses his most essential attribute: the possibility of meditating, or withdrawing into himself in order to come to terms with himself and define what it is that he believes, what he truly esteems and what he truly detests. Being beside himself bemuses him, blinds him, forces him to act mechanically in a frenetic somnambulism.

Nowhere do we better see that the possibility of meditation is man's essential attribute than at the zoo, before the cages of our cousins the monkeys. The bird and the crustacean are forms of life too remote from our own for us to see, comparing them with ourselves, anything but gross, abstract differences, vague by their very extremeness. But the simian is so like ourselves that he invites us to pursue the comparison, to discover differences that are more concrete and more fertile.

If we can remain still for a time in passive contemplation of the simian scene, one of its characteristics will presently, and as if spontaneously, stand out and come to us like a ray of light. This is that the infernal little beasts are constantly on the alert, perpetually uneasy, looking and listening for all the signals that reach them from their surroundings, forever intent on their environment as if they feared some constant peril from it, to which they must automatically respond by flight or bite, the mechanical discharge of a muscular reflex. The animal, in short, lives in perpetual fear of the world, and at the same time in a perpetual hunger for the things that are in the world and appear in the world, an ungovernable hunger that also discharges itself without any possible restraint or inhibition, just as the animal's fear does. In either case it is the objects and events in its environment which govern the animal's life, which pull and push it about like a mari-