



On Being with Others: Jaspers and Ortega

Oliver W. Holmes
Wesleyan University
oholmes@wesleyan.edu

Abstract: Karl Jaspers and José Ortega y Gasset are frequently associated with phenomenology and existential philosophy. Whereas such an interpretation of their philosophical status is problematic for some scholars, this essay takes the position that certain features of existentialism were common to both. For Jaspers and Ortega, one of the defining characteristics of human existence, for Jaspers and Ortega, concerns the finitude in which the individual experiences limits in the world. The essay examines their respective concepts of selfhood and historicity, and the broader implications of these concepts in existential phenomenology. An analysis of the boundary situations of the individual and his or her circumstances, through inter-subjective human reality, by both thinkers, will provide the existential formulation of self-disclosure and the apparent paradox between finite existence and the open possibilities of the future.

Keywords: Jaspers, Karl; Ortega y Gasset, José; Husserl, Edmund; Heidegger, Martin; Kant, Immanuel; Existenz; existentialism; "I myself"; the Other; boundary situation; circumstances; social world; inter-subjectivity; historicity.

Karl Jaspers' name is often associated with Martin Heidegger as being the founders of German existentialism. Yet he is rarely affiliated with José Ortega y Gasset, whose name also is connected to existentialism, Heidegger, and Edmund Husserl. Jaspers and Ortega share common philosophical interests as well as philosophical influences. As contemporaries, both sought to go beyond the antinomies of classical metaphysics such as rationalism and empiricism, reason and experience, theory and praxis, all of which their generation had inherited. This essay examines their respective concepts of selfhood, being and historicity, and how their conceptual proximity pertains to existential phenomenology; furthermore, it also invites comparisons in their philosophies of human existence.

Jaspers reflected historically which allowed him to make the following observation about philosophy as he observed it in his contemporary situation:

The philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries seems to work itself out in the great antitheses. But the thinkers were irreconcilable, and the ideas were mutually exclusive...When one looks over the thought of centuries, the same thing always seems to happen: in whatever form this Other to reason appears, in the course of rational understanding it is either changed back into reason, or sometimes it is recognized as a limit in its place; but then in its consequences it is circumscribed and delimited by reason itself, or sometimes it is seen and developed as the source of a new and better reason...Quietly, something enormous has happened in the reality of Western man; a destruction of all authority, a radical disillusionment in an overconfident reason, and a dissolution of bonds have made anything, absolutely anything, seem possible...Philosophizing to be authentic must grow out of our new reality, and there take its stand.¹

¹ Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, transl. William Earle, New York City, NY: Noonday Press 1955, pp. 22-3. [Henceforth cited as *RE*]

The new reality, to which Jaspers refers, pertains to the profound significance of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche in the contemporary philosophical situation. Philosophy, Jaspers opined, was never the same again after they had exerted their influence because of the degree to which each had sparked an acute awareness of the human condition: "Common to both of them is a type of thought and humanity which was indissolubly connected with a moment of this epoch, and so understood by them" (*RE* 24). This concern with the human condition, and the historical situations in which individuals find themselves, identifies the efforts Jaspers and Ortega made to overcome the continual bifurcation of reason and experience. Jaspers reflected further upon how the "great stars of the philosophers' heaven," Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Nicolas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, Schelling, Goethe, Hegel, Kant, and his contemporary Max Weber were signaled as thinkers who exerted an important influence on his philosophical development. "Even in the history of philosophy," he remarked, "we can witness the tremendous incisiveness of our age."² Kant, especially crucial in Jaspers' turn of mind, made a pointed comment concerning his century that is often referred to as the Enlightenment. In his 1783 essay Kant implores the individual to extricate humanity from "self-incurred minority" through the appropriate exercise of human reason in order for the age to become enlightened.³ The concept of rationality, associated with the period of Enlightenment, had been characterized by the confidence of rendering reality intelligible through indubitable categories of reason. Through his injunction—"Sapere Aude! Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding!"—Kant's perception of the Enlightenment became inextricably aligned with the idea of self-critique (*WE* 35). Through this project of self-critique, the concept of reason was to become aware of its boundaries. Kant proposes here a critical way of thinking, one that recognizes conceptual boundaries, and this proved appealing to Jaspers in

his search for understanding as to how individuals become aware of their being in the world. In this quest, Jaspers joined Ortega and other contemporaries in recognizing that one becomes a self through being with other selves whose uniqueness is confirmed through being made present by others in intersubjective communication. This is the process of self-analysis through interpersonal interaction. The abiding relevance of the history of philosophy, thus, indicates the degree to which the intellectual and historical contexts inform the kinds of philosophical questions raised by Jaspers concerning being in the world (*Existenz*). The relation of the individual self to other selves, which Jaspers categorizes as "communication," discloses the development of being in the world as one of freedom and responsibility. His philosophy of existence developed the methodological principle of existential elucidation, a method that articulates both the boundaries and possibilities of human existence, resulting in the concepts *Existenz*, boundary situations, and communication, and becoming central categories in Jaspers' existential philosophy.

In an existential sense, one's being, the "I am," "I myself," is situated in concrete circumstances within which the potential of human existence becomes actualized. When Jaspers reflects on the individual as "I myself," he ascribed it the following conditions under which human self-realization takes shape: The first occurs as the individual experiences the boundary situations of struggle, suffering, guilt, and death. The second condition is fulfilled in the unique and individual experience of reciprocal, existential communication with another human being; an Other. To exist, as human beings, signifies to be in a situation. And since, as Jaspers argues,

existence means to be in situations, I can never get out of one without entering into another. Any understanding of situations means that I proceed toward ways of transforming them; it does not mean I might change my condition itself. There is nothing I can do about my being in situations. The consequences of whatever I do will confront me as a new situation which I have helped to bring about, and which is now given.⁴

Certain situations, such as those within which one has always existed, for Jaspers, do not change. For, in the

² Karl Jaspers, "On My Philosophy," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, transl. Felix Kaufmann, New York, NY: Meridian Book 1956, pp. 131-58, here p. 137. [Henceforth cited as *MP*]

³ Immanuel Kant, "Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," transl. Stephen Orr, *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 12 (December 1784), 35-42, here p. 35; <https://bdfwia.github.io/bdfwia.html>. [Henceforth cited as *WE*]

⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, Vol. 2, transl. E. B. Ashton, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1970, p. 178. [Henceforth cited as *P2*]

process of living, all human beings encounter boundary situations:

I am always in situations; I cannot live without struggling and suffering; I cannot avoid guilt...I must die – these are what I call boundary situations. They never change except in appearance. There *is no way to survey them* in existence, no way to see anything behind them. They are like a wall we run into, a wall on which we founder. We cannot modify them; all that we can do is to make them lucid, but without explaining or deducing them from something else. They go with existence itself. [P2 178]

This understanding of boundary situations as referring to existence points to the insights Jaspers derived from perceiving *Existenz* as a worldly Being. The position put forward through this perception underlies the argument that it is insufficient to navigate boundary situations solely with rational and objective knowledge. Jaspers posits:

The meaningful way for us to react to boundary situations is therefore not by planning and calculating to overcome them but by the very different activity *of becoming the Existenz we potentially are*; we become ourselves by entering with open eyes into the boundary situations. We can know them only externally, and their reality can only be felt by *Existenz*. To experience boundary situations is the same as *Existenz*. [P2 179]

Jaspers exhibits a world of bounded situations in which challenges and frustrations become insurmountable, a world filled with complexities and ambiguities in which traditional categories of science and reason appear to be insufficient. Such a world results in an existential dilemma which throws the individual back to oneself with a choice between faith and despair. The experiences of struggle, suffering, guilt, and death explain the anxiety evident in the human condition. In his intellectual biography he reflects:

We are so exposed, that we constantly find ourselves facing nothingness. Our wounds are so deep that in our weak moments we wonder if we are not, in fact, dying from them. At present moment, the security of coherent philosophy, which existed from Parmenides to Hegel, is lost." [MP 138]

A few pages later, Jaspers proffers his explanation regarding how the absence of coherence and meaning in life contributed to the loneliness and despair humans experience. According to Jaspers:

The community of masses of human beings has produced an order of life in regulated channels which connects individuals in a technically functioning organization, but not inwardly from the historicity of their souls. The emptiness caused by dissatisfaction with mere achievement and the helplessness that results when the channels of relation break down have brought forth a loneliness of soul such as never existed before, a loneliness that hides itself, that seeks relief in vain in the erotic and the irrational until it leads eventually to a deep comprehension of the importance of establishing communication between man and man. [MP 140]

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus offers his explanation of how, a "family of minds blocked the royal road of reason in recovering the direct paths of truth."⁵ Belonging to this family are certainly Jaspers and Heidegger, but also Husserl's and Max Scheler's phenomenology name in each case the direct path of truth. Camus makes the following observation regarding his understanding of Jaspers and the intellectual climate that he finds common to the thinkers of his generation:

In the ravaged world in which the impossibility of knowledge is established, in which everlasting nothingness seems the only reality and irremediable despair seems the only attitude, he tries to recover the Ariadne's thread that leads to divine secrets...the mind, when it reaches its limits, must make a judgment and choose its conclusions...The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world...This must be clung to because the whole consequence of a life can depend on it. [MS 19, 21]

In pointing the way of the absurd individual, and in identifying the threads of nihilism in Europe of the 1930's and 40's, both Camus and Jaspers follow Nietzsche in rejecting suicide and thereby, in affirming life; the "point is to live" (MS 48).

Nietzsche's injunction to affirm life calls for a commitment that assesses human existence positively in the face of its constraints and possibilities. Jaspers characterizes the boundary situation of the human condition as the inevitable fact that individuals always exist in a specific situation at a given time in history. I exist at a specific historical moment, in certain social circumstances, and with specific inherited biological

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, transl. Justin O'Brien, New York, NY: Vintage Books 1959, p. 17. [Henceforth cited as MS]

characteristics. He explains:

The boundary situation of being subject to the singular constraint of my data derives its poignancy from the contrasting thought of man at large and of his due in any state of perfection. Yet at the same time, and in every situation, the constraint allows for the possibility of an uncertain future. The unrest in the boundary situation is that what is up to me lies still ahead; my freedom in it is to assume given facts, to make them my own as if they had been my will. While the first boundary situation makes men aware of the historicity in all existential existence, particular boundary situations – death, suffering, struggle, guilt – affect each individual as general ones within his specific historicity of the moment. [P2 183-4]

To explicate the individual's existential response to the boundary of human existence, Jaspers employs the Latin dictum, *amor fati*—a concept he associated with both Machiavelli and Nietzsche—in order to emphasize the historic import of human proactivity. For as individuals immerse themselves into life in the form of creating human possibilities and becoming in time, each one assures oneself of oneself and of one's existence:

amor fati. I love it as I love myself, for only in my fate can I be existentially sure of myself. Here, objective constraint becomes for Existenz an experience of being. The sense of historicity as a sense of fate means to take concrete existence seriously. [P2 192]

This sense of the immediacy of historic consciousness informs one, "I know myself to be identical with the particulars of my existence" (P2 192). The existential situation entails, in Jaspers' words,

nothing but the singular and definite realization which no longer needs to be justified to generalities... The existential reply [to general standards] is *amor fati*, the historic consciousness of adopting the particular as definition turned into the depth of Existenz itself. Within my *amor fati*...lie the negation of specific conditions of my existence and finally of my whole fate, the possibility of suicide, as well as the possibilities of strife and defiance. [P2 192-3]

The existential response thereby becomes an important component in the process of human self-awareness, which leads to the recognition and understanding of what Jaspers calls a "situation Being" in a social world of other individuals.

The world of social relation, or community in all of its ramifications – "this society, this state, this family,

this university, this profession of mine"—comprises Jaspers' concept of "communication in the idea, and in its realization by Existenz" moves an individual closer to one's fellow human beings; "I myself" and one other self (P2 49-50). Jaspers continues, "when I come to myself there are two things that lie in this communication: my being I, and my being with another" (P2 56). Jaspers eventually makes a marked distinction between "communication in existence" and "existential communication." For him, the distinction underscores the important process by which selfhood of the person becomes explicit in connecting an individual's unique selfhood with the selfhood of others. As he phrases it:

In communication that affects me, the other is this one only. Uniqueness is the phenomenon of the substantiality of this being. Existential communication is not to be modeled and is not to be copied; each time it is flatly singular. It occurs between two selves which are nothing else, are not representative, and are therefore not interchangeable. In this communication, which is absolutely historic and unrecognizable from the outside, lies the assurance of selfhood. It is the one way by which a self is for self, in mutual creation. The tie to it is a historic decision on the part of a self: to avoid its self-being as an isolated I and to enter in communicative self-being. It is only in freedom, as a possibility, that I can understand what it means to say, "I cannot be my free self unless the other is and wants to be himself – and I am with him." [P2 54]

The elucidation of *Existenz* and existential communication of the self with others allows for the moment that "I realize the particularity of my communication, and thus its limitations, I feel a shortcoming" (P2 51). The self realizes that as "a single isolated consciousness I would not have communicated anything, would ask no questions and give no answers...without the self-consciousness of others" (P2 51). Jaspers writes that the experience of shortcomings in existential communication "is my point of departure for the philosophical reflection in which I try to understand that to be myself I need the other for whom no one else can substitute" (P2 251). To avert the sense of dread and nothingness an isolated consciousness may experience, Jaspers promotes the principle that individuals become authentic when they devote themselves to the other; the other taken to mean either the community of other individuals or the limiting horizons of situation Being. As he explains:

The thesis of my philosophizing is the individual cannot become human by himself. Self-being is only

real in communication with another self-being. Alone, I sink into gloomy isolation—only in community with others can I be revealed in the act of mutual discovery. My own freedom can only exist if the other is also free. Isolated or self-isolating Being remains mere potentiality or disappears into nothingness. [MP 147]

Jaspers' philosophical reflection resonates in a similar point of departure made by Ortega. The latter connects the concept of human being closely to his concept of existence through the frequently cited formula, "I am I and my circumstances." In referencing it Ortega proclaims:

This expression which appears in my first book and which condenses in final volume my philosophic thought, does not only mean the doctrine that my work expounds and proposes, but means that my work is an executive case of the same doctrine. My work is, by its essence and its presence, circumstantial. This is precisely what the cited phrase declares.⁶

He proceeds by stating that the new philosophy of human existence, which emphasizes "living in the here and now," was a concept that opposed the traditional idealism and utopianism that had been discovered in Germany in the 1930s (OC6 348). In moving beyond the epistemological concerns of Neo-Kantianism he studied under Hermann Cohen at the University Marburg, Ortega adopted Husserl's methodological approach of philosophy as a rigorous science, to envision the "new concept of being," by combining it with the philosophical approaches found in Wilhelm Dilthey, Heidegger, and in the later writings of Husserl. In *What is Philosophy?* he aligns his philosophical position with that of Heidegger and the new philosophy of being, existence, and human life:

These common words, finding oneself, world, occupying oneself, are new technical words in this new philosophy... I will limit myself to observe that this definition, 'to live is to find oneself in a world,' like all the principal ideas in these lectures, is already in my published work. It is important to me to observe this, especially, with regard to the idea of existence, for which I claim chronological priority. [OC6 40] For that very reason I am pleased to acknowledge that the person who has gone deepest into the analysis of life is the new German philosopher, Martin Heidegger... To

live is to find oneself in the world. Heidegger, in a very recent work of genius, has made us take notice of all the enormous significance of these words. [OC7 415-6]

This new perception of historicity gave rise to what Karl Löwith describes as the "existential-ontological of Heidegger, and the existential-philosophical of Jaspers."⁷

In 1925 Ortega presented a series of lectures, to his students at the University of Madrid, on Husserl's phenomenological approach, in which he projected his own program to study the "restatement of the problem of Being" for a series of publications. In this quest for "synthetic thinking," Ortega proceeded to explain how he "abandoned phenomenology at the very moment of accepting it. Instead of withdrawing from consciousness, as has been done since Descartes, we become firm in the radical reality which is for everyone his life" (OC8 273). He avoided phenomenology where the emphasis appears to be on the abstract in the tradition of idealism. His critical response to Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic* of 1929 identified this tendency in phenomenology.⁸ Several European thinkers who were influenced in one way or another by concepts of the phenomenology movement, including Ortega, and who were not necessarily members of the movement, became dissatisfied with the alleged solipsistic standpoint of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Well-aware of his critics, Husserl introduced ideas which transformed his earlier position on transcendental phenomenology and shifted it from a world of isolated ideas into a world community of intersubjective individuals. The observations and insights that he delivered in two lectures at the Sorbonne in 1929 were further developed in two of his later works.⁹ In these later writings, Descartes' concept of ego lost its abstract, absolute status and became correlative

⁷ Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, transl. David Green, Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1967, p. 359.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, transl. William R. Boyce Gibson, New York: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 1-8, 157.

⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, transl. Dorion Cairns, The Hague, NL: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960. [Henceforth cited as CM]; Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, transl. David Carr, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1970, pp. 154-5, 188, 157-63. [Henceforth cited as CES]

⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas, 11 Volumes*, Madrid, ES: Revista de Occidente 1963-1969, here Volume 6, pp. 347-8. Translations made by the author. [Henceforth cited as OC with volume number]

to the world of human experience, and Husserl proclaims that scientific knowledge can be understood only to the extent that one first understands the notion of *Lebenswelt* (life-world). CES became immediately famous for its thematic treatment of this concept. The study of the lived-world, the experience of it, and ego-and-life-relatedness became the primary consideration of phenomenology. In regard to the *Lebenswelt*, the innovative contribution of CES lies in Husserl's efforts to provide a thematic account of history and the historicity of it. He perceived the historical world to be pre-given as a socio-historical world. As he expresses it,

to live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world [CES 142]...wakefully in the world...we are conscious of fellow men on our horizon [CES 358]...Like me, every human being...has his fellow men and always, counting himself, civilization in general, in which he knows himself to be living. [CES 372]

Ortega found Husserl's idea of life-world appealing in that it resembled his own perception of human life. Husserl's discussion of the problem of other people, of inter-subjectivity, and of the world as a world essentially being inhabited by Others, was arguably the aspect of his philosophy which had the profoundest effect on the development of existential phenomenology and upon the thought of Ortega.

From the perspective of this intersubjective shift in phenomenology, Ortega reverted to "I am I and my circumstances," as an analytical ontological expression of his general philosophic viewpoint in his later works. For Ortega, the individual ego's consciousness of self occurs through the awareness of both its physiological features and behavioral gestures and those of Others in reciprocal human interaction, a consciousness of self that results from self-analysis of the inner essence of the being of I and its awareness of other selves as similar beings in the circumstances of the world of lived experience. In effect, he attempted to characterize the nature of an individual's experience of one's world and oneself. There is an attempt by him to distinguish between the fact that one's relationship to an organism is different from one's relation to a person *qua* being, and that one's actions toward a non-human organism differ from the way in which one acts toward a person. "Living," he suggests, "is to reach outside of oneself, devoted ontologically, to what is other, be it called world of circumstances" (OC5 545).

Once human life has been established as Ortega's point of departure, "we are *ipso facto* given two terms

or factors that are equally primary and, moreover, inseparable. Man, who lives, and the circumstances or world in which man lives" (OC7 115-6). As a living being, an individual relates to other living beings.

For Ortega, "all realities must in some way make themselves present, or at least announce themselves within the shaken boundaries of our human life" (OC7 101). Hence, the basic reality of human life constitutes the life of the individual along with the lives of other individuals as well as situations that encompass the confrontation of this individual with the realities of physical objects. Through this viewpoint, the individual being-who-lives-in-the-world does not perceive the world from the isolation of the ego, for the very essence of one's being consists of living in an actively disclosing manner. For Ortega, being-in-the-world has a dual characteristic: it relates to one's own circumstances and also functions as being-for-and-with-others. As he explains,

Our world, the world of each one of us, is not *totum revolutum*, but is organized I "pragmatic fields." Each thing belongs to one or some of these fields, in which it articulates its *being-for* with that of others, and so on successively [OC7 152]...[all of us] live in the one and the same world...This is the attitude that we may call, the natural, normal, and everyday attitude in which we live; and, because of it, because of living with others in a presumed world – hence our world – our living is co-living, living together. [OC7 130]

Any meaningful interaction with the other "consists in my relation with becoming active, in my acting on him and his on me. In practice, the former usually follows upon the latter" (OC7 148). In this manner, then, the discovery of the physical presence of the other, as an object-in-reality, becomes a reverse revelation of I and its being. The being which is subsequently revealed to I is revealed as being-for-and-with-others. This component of being-for-itself and-others becomes an integral part of being-in-the-world and being-for-itself and, thereby Ortega introduced the existential phenomenological perspective through which he developed his idea of individuals interacting in human society. He explains this in a more detailed passage that reads:

This means that the appearance of the Other is a fact that always remains as it were the back of our life, because on becoming aware for the first time that we are living, we already find ourselves, not only with others and among others, but accustomed to others. Which leads us to formulate this first social theorem: Man is a *nativitate* open to the other, to the alien being;

or, in other words, *before each one us became aware of himself*, he had already had the basic experience that there are others who are not "I," the Others; that is to say, again, Man, on being a *nativitate* open to the other, to the *alter* who is not himself is a *nativitate*, like it or not... Being open to other, to others, is permanent and constitutive state of Man, not a definite action in respect to them... 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." It is simple presence within the horizon of my life—a presence which is, above all, more compresence of the other, singular and plural. [OC7 149-50]

The framing of the social world as a horizon connotes for Ortega, as it did for Husserl, the context in which the experience of human interaction (among I and We and Other) occurs. The collective of I's constitutes the fundamental structure and content of the social world. Ortega recalls, "Husserl says very well the meaning of the term man implies a reciprocal existence of one for the other, hence *a community of men, a society*" (OC7 148). He could have included Jaspers in this discussion. In describing social reality, Ortega distinguishes between things (such as stones, plants, and animals) and humans through his assertion that whereas things exist, humans live. By dint of the unique qualities of human existence, the individual possesses an essence that is specifically one's own. All individual human acts, for Ortega, are directed toward some object and, as such, the actions of individuals are manifested in accord with the nature of the objects toward which they are directed and in concert with their physical properties and special contexts. If the object is a stone, the individual's actions would be unilateral; however, if the object is an animal, an individual's actions would respond to an anticipated reaction by the animal to which they are being directed:

We know that a stone is not aware of our action on it... But as soon as we begin dealing with an animal, the relation changes... There is, then, no doubt that, in my relation with the animal, the act of my behavior toward it is not, as it was in the case of the stone, unilateral; rather, my act, before being performed, when I am planning it, already calculates with the probable act of reaction on the animal's part, in such a manner that my act, even in the state of pure project, moves toward the animal but returns to me in an inverted sense, anticipating the animal's reply. [OC7 133-4]

In observing action, responses, and reciprocal

responses one can find this sort of transcendental reflection to be fundamental in Ortega's description of the social world. With an animal as an object toward which actions are being directed, one finds more of a reciprocal response than, for example, with stones or other inanimate objects. An individual and an animal exist-for-each-other yet, according to Ortega, to a different degree than as man and man; the latter relate to one another as being-with-and-for-the-other. The question remains: what kind of behavior can be constituted as being social and what are the contingencies implicit in this behavior? The contingency, for Ortega, relates to the fact that social behavior entails interaction between individuals, in contrast to acts between individuals and animals—human life remains the ultimate reality—and this human interaction must be reciprocal. For, reciprocity of action arises and occurs amongst humans. Ortega's inquiry to this effect reads:

Does not the word "social," immediately point to a reality consisting in the fact that man conducts himself in confrontation with other beings which, in their turn, conduct themselves with respect to him—therefore, to actions in which, in one way or another, the reciprocity intervenes—in short, to say the same thing in another way, that the two actors mutually respond to each other, that is, they correspond? [OC7 135-7]

Upon experiencing the others as other individuals, Ortega argues that the I understands and relates to them as modalities that are analogous to the I and are as fundamental modalities of human life inextricably connected to their circumstances as well. This interaction manifests itself in such a manner that the I apprehends the world-about-others and the world-about-I as being one and the same world—from an objective, empirical standpoint—that differs in each individual case only insofar as it affects their respective consciousness differently. For all humans perceive reality through sense perception, albeit individual perceptions of this very reality are registered in individually differing ways. Accordingly, as Ortega indicates, I am the only one who is an I. All other I's are similar to objects (in the sense that they are perceived solely as physical organisms) and, once viewed, as being "an other person" (that is, a being perceived as possessing both a body and an inwardness, yet with a different I), are referred to as Others. My own place in this world—in time and in space—is related to I and my body. When the ego (which is I) encounters an alien ego, therefore, it is essential for it (the ego) to transcend itself and thereby

make possible meaningful attempts to understand and to perceive the existence of other egos, or I's. The Other, as I, Ortega contends, embodies an ego that possesses a similar quality of consciousness, inwardness and solitude; an ego that will be regarded as possessing both the primary and secondary modal qualities and whose fundamental essence and structure also will be experienced as existing within the I. Thus, for Ortega, any attempt to enter this sphere of the Other's inwardness, would require concerted efforts to attain the transcendental attitude. He explains,

In this sense of radical reality, "human life" means strictly and exclusively the life of each individual, that is, always and only my life...if, by chance—I added—appears in this my world something that must also be called "human life" in another sense, neither radical nor primary, nor patent, but secondary, derivative, and more or less latent and hypothetical...What is decisive in this step and in this appearance is that when my life and everything in it, on being patent to me, on being mine, have immanent character—hence the truism that my life is immanent to itself, that it is all within itself—the indirect presentation, or compresence, of the alien human life startles and confronts me with something transcendent to my own life. [OC7 141]

Through the mediacy of the human world, the I and the Other communicate as collective human lives. In this context, the relation between the consciousness of I and Other consists in a relation of transcendental exteriority. Ortega explains,

What is certainly patent in my life is the notification, signal, that there are other human lives; but since human life in its radicality is only mine, and these will be lives, of others like myself, each the life of each, it follows that, because they are others, all their lives will be situated outside of or beyond or trans-mine. Hence they are transcendent. [OC7 142]

Expressed in this manner, the individual, as a being-who-lives-in-the-world and as a being-for-and-with-others, is an empirically finite being who has to transcend the finitude of one's "radical reality." From the perspective that becomes often associated with existential philosophy, Ortega averred that, in order to transcend the determinacy of one's being and to attain individual consciousness, an individual must make free choices and decisions. From an ontological viewpoint, and similarly to Husserl and Jaspers, Ortega makes a case for the necessity of entering the transcendental attitude so that an individual may bring oneself closer to

an understanding and consciousness of the experience of the Other. At this juncture, the phenomenological and existential philosophies become linked in that the individual remains an empirical, finite, concrete, and unique being within particular circumstances, who has been placed decisively within the spatial-temporal context of one's world here-and-now and, through this perspective, transcends one's "radical reality" in every detail (OC5 545-7). Even though he called into question the abstract analogical transposition of Husserl's transcendent reduction, Ortega's phenomenological explication of the importance with respect to transcending individual experience—as the fundamental basis upon which to understand the very experience of reality—still remains very much within the tradition of Husserl and several of his students and followers throughout disparate phases of the phenomenological method such as Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Husserl's transcendental reduction sought to avoid judgment concerning the ontological status of the object under discussion. The phenomenological tradition developed after Husserl, notably Heidegger, criticized Husserl's stance on this issue and pursued the formulation of ontological positions. Ortega joined in this discussion when he presented the ontological ramifications of reality. Upon engaging this issue, Ortega conceived the human body as being connected to the totality of what he called human life or radical reality and, as such, to be the foundation of its vital structure. More specifically: the body is a body of an individual in so far as it exists in the indissoluble unity of radical reality. However, he poses the question, "what do we mean when we say that an Other is before us, that is, an other like myself, another Man?" His answer, "I, ego, means for us no more than 'human life,' and human life...is properly, originally, and radically only the life of each of us, hence, my life" (OC7 158-9).

To certain minds it would appear to be an obvious fact that individuals are able to understand others, in their being and essence, both as being like themselves and as being other than themselves. From a phenomenological standpoint, however, this fact becomes a problem which is neither obvious nor easy to explain. Husserl's solution of it differed from the one elaborated by Ortega. Husserl solved it by employing his concept of *Einfühlung* (empathy, or literally, "feeling oneself in another"). Husserl's concept of *Einfühlung* in the context of *Lebenswelt* resembles David Hume's idea of sympathy, and its philosophical

function (as a propensity to sympathize with others, and as a transcendent theory of experiencing someone else) intended to establish as thoroughly as possible, a way of presenting the Other. Ortega renounced the supposition inherent in this solution to the problem and argued that the concept, *Einfühlung*, assumes the Other is analogous to I; the concept assumes that it is a double of I and still fails to serve the function of explaining the most difficult question—namely, how is it possible that this double of myself continues to appear to me as constituting the other? The main thrust of Ortega's argument is directed against Husserl's formulation, in *CM*, of the alter ego as an analogue of the ego. The solution of an analogical transposition or projection, therefore proved inadequate for Ortega, and the notion of the appearance of the Other became the problem to which he extended his existential phenomenological position of being-for-itself and being-for-and-with others. In order to clarify somewhat the problem, Ortega replaced Husserl's concept of "in [my] every intentionality," in order to clarify somewhat the problem, with his own idea of "my life as radical reality." As the individual is never a world-less I—for as radical reality one's life is being-in-the-world—one is also never an isolated (Other-less) I. Ortega perceived this manifestation of radical reality as constituting the fundamental feature of being-for-and-with-others and consequently it cannot be explained as an isolated I that somehow discovers a way of encountering another equally isolated I. An individual does not have to find his or her way to another individual for, with the disclosure of one's own being-for-and-with-others, the being of the other I's becomes disclosed to one as possessing this identical feature:

Observe then: being the other does not represent an accident or adventure that may or may not befall Man, but is an original attribute. I, in my solitude, could not call myself by a generic name like "man." The reality represented by this name appears to me only when there is another being who responds or reciprocates to me. Husserl says very well: "The meaning of the term 'man' implies a reciprocal existence of one of for the other, hence, *a community of men, a society*." And conversely: "It is equally clear that men cannot be apprehended unless there are (really or potentially) other men around them." Hence—I add—to speak of man outside 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. [OC7 148]

The I and the other, thereby, are constituted through their appearance before each other, in the common world of society, and as each engages in reciprocal interaction. In this respect, Ortega was in basic agreement with Husserl as the former attempted to reconcile the realms of I and other, solitude and society, by establishing the fact that a referral to the other (on the part of the I) is an indisputable condition for the constitution of being-in-the-world.

In the social world of being-for-and-with-others, thus, an individual directs oneself away from the possibilities that may be viewed as being exclusively one's own and attempts to broaden the understanding of each self by relating to the common world possibilities of others. The social world in which the individual lives—as one who remains linked with other individuals through manifold relations—becomes a realm that the individual apprehends and interprets to be meaningful for one's own possibilities, circumstances, and here-and-now. In adopting this standpoint, Ortega contended that, individuals who are rooted in radical realities, must "make an attempt at interpenetration, at de-solitudinizing" (OC7 140). This being the case, as the spatial-temporal dimensions of an individual's radical reality become part and parcel of one's personal here-and-now, the reality of the social world (as the context and mediacy through which groups of individual interact) is also enmeshed in this person's here-and-now. Through the fact of personal finitude, the individual's temporality reveals itself as the consciousness of the intersubjective structure of one's own life. The reality of the social world, conversely, reveals itself to the individual as an intersubjective structured world that is being shared in the interactions of I with others. The spatial-temporal manifestations of this intersubjectivity connect the I to the others and, at the same time, sharply differentiate the world of I from the social world of others. Ortega explains it thus:

The first thing, I fall foul of in my proper and radical world is Other Men, the Other singular and plural, among whom I am born and begin to live. From the beginning, then, I find myself in a human world or society. [OC7 177]

In the context of social reality, the individual measures one's I by what it is that constitutes the Others and by what they have achieved and failed to achieve respectively in the social world. The experience of the social world by an I thereby justifies and corroborates

itself (as a being-in-the-world) through the experiences of the others with whom the I interacts. The possibilities of individuals and their subsequent understanding of themselves can be broadened after their encounter with Others in the social world they share. Ortega, however, also perceives the social world, in several aspects, as constricting in lieu of expanding the individual's possibilities. As an empirically finite being whose radical reality continually confronts the possibility of death, the individual, for Ortega, can make efforts to transcend the determinacy of one's being by making, existentially, free choices and decisions. Conversely, the individual, as a social, empirically finite being who, interrelated with other individuals, finds it difficult to transcend and to recoil from the process of the reciprocity of human interaction in the context of social reality and, hence, becomes conditioned (by society) to act with a view toward what others have done and currently are doing. Once given this social world that may be interpreted to signify the possible realm of action for all of us (with the realization that all men find themselves among men), in Ortega's view, the individual must discriminate between what constitutes the possibilities of Others—humans in general in the social world—and what constitutes the possibilities inherent in the uniqueness of one's own finite being. As he states:

What is yours does not exist for me—your ideas and convictions do not exist for me. I see them as alien and something as opposed to me...All You's are such—because they are different from me—and when I say I, I am only a minute portion of the world, the tiny part of it that I now begin accurately to call I. [OC7 178, 189-90]

At this point one notes that the individual must live neither as an isolated I nor as a conformist in the common social world of the others. Rather, the individual shall live the existence of a unique I. That is to say, the unique individual is someone who lives in an actively and disclosing manner and who has the ability both to come out of and to withdraw into the possibilities which are permitted within the realm of the You's and We's that he confronts in the reality of the social world. Ortega elaborates this point by asserting that,

It is in the world of the you's, and by virtue of them, that the thing I am, my I, gradually takes shape for me. I discover myself, then, as one of countless you's, but as different from them all, with gifts and defects

of my own, with a unique character and conduct, that together draw my authentic and correct profile for me—hence as another and particular you, as *alter tu*. [OC7 196]

At this point of the analysis, it becomes apparent that the term "social world" (society) for Ortega, connotes merely the category which he employed to describe the phenomenological interaction between individual I's both as unique individuals and as social individuals. In other words, the social world entails the realm in which the interactive process of the I and its circumstance become extended to the inclusion of other I's. Departing from this perspective, Ortega became concerned with the fundamental patterns of human interaction that underlie the large context of social reality. The reduction of the whole of what constitutes social reality into component elements discloses the phenomenological grounding of Ortega's analysis of human intersubjective communication. Hence, the social relation of individuals identifies the distinctive unity which is defined by the reciprocal interaction of its unique individual components. As he explains it:

the basic structure that is social relation, in which man moves appearing and defining himself in front of the other man, and from being the pure other, the unknown man, the not-yet-identified individual, becomes the unique individual—the You and I. But now we have become aware of something that is a constituent factor in all that we have called "social relation"...namely, that all these actions of ours and all these reactions of others in which the so-called "social relation" consists, originates in an individual as such, I [myself] for example, and are directed to another individual as such. Therefore, "the social relation" as it has thus far appeared to us, is always a reality formally inter-individual. [OC7 202-3]

The existential phenomenological grounding of humans, as unique and autonomous individuals, in social relations with Others, points to affinities with Jaspers' concept of existential communication. "I am I and my circumstances," for Ortega, and "I myself," "I am," for Jaspers constitute interpersonal relationships, in the context of social life, which are situated in historical time and place. The historical consciousness in 1930 prompted both thinkers to write trenchant contemporary criticisms of modern society. Criticisms that convey a lament not so much concerning a world that was lost, but rather of a world they had inherited. Through their respective works, *Man and the Modern*

Age and *The Revolt of the Masses*,¹⁰ Jaspers and Ortega joined Gabriel Marcel in criticizing the spiritual and

¹⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*, transl. Eden and Cedar Paul, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1957. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, transl. anonymous, New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1957. Online <https://archive.org/details/TheRevoltOfTheMassesJoseOrtegaYGasset>.

intellectual tendencies of their generation.¹¹ All three thinkers provided analyses of an epochal consciousness that each identified as fraught with uncertainty, and being formed from within a society that is dominated by new technologies, mechanization, and mass culture.

¹¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, transl. G. S. Fraser, South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2008.