



Jaspers and Ortega on the Historicity of Being Human

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Abstract: Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and German philosopher Karl Jaspers were both born in 1883, and they both maintained the position that humans are principally historical beings. Therefore, as attested by this notion itself, there are points in which their philosophy coincides. Ortega argued that human beings have no nature, only history. His argument is that history as such is human nature; what is most natural about being human is the fact of being historical and thus always having historicity. Jaspers maintained the same position that in contemplating historicity, one's focus should not be on human nature in the strictly hereditary sense, because it is one's traditions, not the genetic makeup, that most make one to be human. Jaspers emphasizes the conversion of an existential historic consciousness into a consciousness of historicity that is similar to what can be understood in Ortega as historical perspectivism imbued with pragmatism.

Keywords: Jaspers, Karl; Ortega y Gasset, José; philosophy of history; philosophy of historiography; continental philosophy; Iberian philosophy; history; historiography.

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The Spanish Philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and the German Philosopher Karl Jaspers were born in the same year, and they both maintained the position that humans are historical beings. Therefore, as attested by this notion, there are points in which their philosophy coincides.

Their overlapping notions of historicity can be summarized in terms of sharing the following key defining features. First, a human being is not comprised of solely nature in the strict biological sense of the term; rather, what humans have is history. Second, this leads to the presumption of the lack of static and fixed defining human attributes; as historicity is in constant flux since it exists in time. Third, this then means that human existence occurs in an incessantly flowing continuum that has historical determinacy, since humans are at any given time embedded in a historical moment. The fourth shared feature is that this historical determinacy

implies that humans are existing, and live in limited freedom as a self that must navigate its way through concrete, temporal, historical circumstances. This is captured here in what can be considered historical perspectivism, a concept that is used in a similar way by both philosophers.

There is an important dialogue and analysis to be considered here that adds to the thoughtful scholarship on the metaphysics of humankind as historical beings, as well as on the philosophy of history and historiography. Most succinctly defined, history is the study of past events, and historiography is the subsequent interpretation we make of that data in the writing of history. As historical beings, philosophizing on the study, recording, and writing of history is therefore crucial to better understanding human experience and existence.