

# Ortega y Gasset on Natural Selection and the Vocation of Man: A Rejection or Elaboration of Darwinism?

Rabi Lior  
[rabilior@gmail.com](mailto:rabilior@gmail.com)

**Abstract** In many of his writings and lectures Ortega y Gasset criticized Darwinism on numbers of issues. In this paper I aim to reexamine his critique and to prove that in 1916 the harsh critique was designed to hide the similarity between his ideas and Darwin's idea of Natural Selection. The origins of Ortega's idea on the vocation of man can be traced in his dialogue with Darwin in the year 1916. In the historiography his Philosophy of Life is conceived as a metaphysics that stands beyond biological and any other natural explanation. My contention on the other hand is that Ortega's concept of the vocation of man is an elaboration of Darwin's Natural Selection. I will try to show that in 1916 Ortega conceived the human character and the vocation of man as a product of Natural Selection. Instead of following Ortega's critiques on Darwin and his effort to show that there is no connection between his Philosophy of Life and Darwinism the article proposes to reconsider Ortega's thought as a constant dialogue with Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. The Change in Ortega's conception of Darwin's evolution came rather late in his thought and in the first section we will see how Ortega described technology in a manner that allows the human subject to change the environment in his favor.

**Resumo** Em muitos dos seus escritos e lições, Ortega y Gasset criticou diversos aspectos do darwinismo. Neste artigo procuro reexaminar tais críticas, mostrando que, em 1916, a crítica mais dura foi dirigida para ocultar a semelhança entre as suas ideias e a teoria darwinista da selecção natural. As origens da concepção orteguiana da vocação do Homem podem ser rastreadas no seu diálogo com Darwin em 1916. De acordo com a historiografia, a filosofia orteguiana da vida é concebida como uma metafísica que se situa para além de qualquer explicação biológica ou naturalista. Eu defenderei, pelo contrário, que a concepção de Ortega acerca da vocação do Homem foi, na verdade, elaborada a partir da teoria darwinista da selecção natural. Procurarei mostrar que, em 1916, Ortega concebia a natureza e a vocação humanas como produtos da selecção natural. Ao invés de seguir as críticas de Ortega a Darwin, bem como a sua tentativa de mostrar a inexistência de qualquer ligação entre a sua filosofia da vida e o darwinismo, eu

proponho-me reconsiderar o pensamento de Ortega como um diálogo permanente com a teoria da seleção natural. A mudança de perspectiva de Ortega relativamente à teoria darwinista da evolução veio bastante tarde no seu pensamento, e na primeira secção deste artigo procurarei mostrar como Ortega descreveu a tecnologia de uma forma que permite ao sujeito humano mudar o meio ambiente em seu favor.

## **I. The Way the Subject Reforms the Natural World.**

In his work “The Animal that therefore I am” Derrida distinguishes between an animal’s reaction and response. Do animals really respond to our gestures or just react? Derrida wonders why man is the only animal that feels the need to get dressed or in his own words why “clothing would be proper to man, one of the “properties of man?”<sup>1</sup> Can an animal feel it is naked?! Derrida concludes that an animal can never really be naked because it neither feels nor sees itself naked. He mentions that “clothing derives from technology”.<sup>2</sup> It is technology that allows man to create fashionable clothing.

In his lectures on technology Ortega also focused on the differences between man and animal in relation to man’s technical capabilities. Ortega’s main argument was that technology is a manner in which man tries to reform nature in his favor. Man does so in order to fulfill his needs. However, man does not only work to fulfill his biological needs, but rather tries to go beyond them. For the human being it does not suffice only ‘to be’ (estar), but to live well (bienestar)<sup>3</sup>. The animal does not need technology because for the animal it is enough to be able to take from nature only what it is necessary in order to survive. But man has a different task, creative

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida, 2002, 373.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida, 2002, 374.

<sup>3</sup> “El bienestar y no el estar es la necesidad fundamental para el hombre, la necesidad de las necesidades”, Ortega, 1933, 33.

task. This creative task is the main difference between Ortega and Darwin conception of man. By using this idea Ortega aims to go beyond the biological depiction of man and to differentiate between his philosophy and Darwin's evolution whose ideas as we shall see later in this paper fascinated him and influenced on the articulation of his own thought.

In his late lectures we can notice Ortega's subtle dialogue with Darwin and his critiques on Darwin's evolution. In 1951 in the conference in Darmstadt Ortega refers to Natural Selection and examines a situation in which certain individuals don't possess the natural abilities to adapt to a certain natural or environmental problem. Unlike Darwin, his argument is that in such extreme situation these individuals will try to adapt environment in their favor. Technology for Ortega means the ability of the subject to adapt nature in its favor. This interpretation is a way to criticize what Ortega conceives as the mechanical explanation of Darwin: "The technology is contradictory to the idea of the subject's adaptation to the medium; it is rather the adaptation of the medium to the subject. This is enough to allow us to suspect that we see a movement to the opposite direction that the biologists refer"<sup>4</sup>. In his lectures on technology Ortega aimed to overcome the biologist conception of man and mainly the Darwinist idea of Natural Selection. Therefore, he also argued that technology is not a natural response to biological needs.<sup>5</sup> Technology is a product of man's "fantasy": "As a species, man's desires do not have much in common with the instincts, with nature". Technology is a product of our "desired fantasizes".<sup>6</sup> Ortega mentions that man for example has a desired fantasy- to follow what he fantasizes as justice<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ortega y Gasset, 1933, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ortega, 1933, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ortega, 1951, 51. Cerezo contends that there is a strict parallelism between the conference in Darmstadt and the lectures from 1933: "Hay así un estricto paralelismo entre las dos conferencias, la del 1933 y la de 1951: el 'centauro

Human being is always looking to find things he sees in his fantasies, things he cannot always find in nature. Technology is a way the human tries to achieve these desired fantasies<sup>8</sup>. Man is not satisfied with his circumstance. In this manner he is different from the other animals and he will try to adapt the circumstances to his fantasies. Ortega distinguishes between three possibilities:

1. The circumstance does not present any difficulty to the human.
2. The circumstance present unbearable difficulties.
3. The circumstance present difficulties together with conformabilities.

He rejects the first two options and accepts the last one. For Ortega, humans are never satisfied with their circumstances and this can explain how they try to adapt nature to their own fantasies. It is not only Natural Selection that affects man, but it is rather man who tries to adapt nature to his wishes. Therefore, the human has different task from these of the other animals. In this manner Ortega distinguishes between his own philosophy and Darwin's Natural Selection.

In his later work Ortega also refers to the idea of "instinct of preservation" and contends that humans live because they want to live. The Instinct of preservation is a narrow definition of man. In this aspect Ortega's later thought is not so different from Nietzsche's thought. In her article Pearson writes that "in his theory of life Nietzsche sharply criticizes the view that the aim and goal of life is self-preservation and places all the emphasis on the enjoyment a living thing gets out of simply discharging its force"<sup>9</sup>

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ontológico' de la primera es 'el ser excéntrico' de la segunda". Cerezo, 2011, 243.

<sup>7</sup> Ortega y Gasset, 1951, 107.

<sup>8</sup> "Las necesidades biológicamente objetivas no son, por sí, necesidades para él", Ortega, 1933, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Pearson, 1997, 91

Focusing mainly on this biological definition might cause us to forget that man can control his instincts by the use of his will. Human life cannot be understood when it is strictly based on the biological interpretation. Ortega differentiates between man and animal by the ability of the first to decide to end its life, man has the capability to suicide. Humans do not have to focus only on their basic needs, on their survival or their being in the world. The difference between man and animal lies in man's ability to have desired fantasies, desires that aim to change the environment to his needs and comforts. Man's task is not only to live, but mainly to live well. This difference between man and animal, the ability to choose, to look forward, to feel tension between his fantasies and nature, are the main features in Ortega's thought that differentiate it from the biological explanation. Ortega's later work aims to overcome any understanding of man in biological manner. Already in 1924 Ortega published an article about vitalism in which he tries to explain how his concept of vitality differs from the biological concept. In this year he argued that he used many biological terms mainly in order to criticize the idealistic version of rationalism<sup>10</sup>. When he referred to Goethe's concept of life in his paper from 1932 Ortega argued that Goethe's concept of life is biological, botanical.<sup>11</sup> The aim of Ortega was to overcome what he conceived as the conception of life itself from outside.

The dialogue with Darwin existed through all of Ortega's thought. The explicit critique appeared mainly in "Meditation on Technology", but also in his writing from the twenties or thirties<sup>12</sup>. In his paper on

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<sup>10</sup> Ortega, 1924.

<sup>11</sup> "Claro es que Goethe nos desorienta porque su idea de la vida es biológica, botánica", Ortega, 1932, 405.

<sup>12</sup> Marías argues that the concept of human life in Ortega's thought does not refer to the biological aspects of life: Marías, 2000, 66. In his later work Ortega went beyond the biological conception of human life, but as we shall see in the next sections the young Ortega was influenced by Darwin and biological concept of life.

Goethe from the year 1932 Ortega presented what he conceived as the main difference between his own philosophy and the evolutionists. His contention was that human life is a drama not an evolution.<sup>13</sup> Human life is about choices, decisions and opportunities and humans' main focus is on the future. Humans' focus is on the future, on the plans they should make for their future. Man's focus is to change the circumstances, making them different according to his plans. In this manner Ortega understands the present dimension in human's life only in relation to his future, his circumstances<sup>14</sup>. Animals do not feel that there exists a big difference between them and their circumstances. In contrast, man experiences the difference because he has desired fantasies and his focus is on the future.

## **II. How Can a Darwinian Explain the Creativity of the Human Mind?**

In his first book "Meditations on Quixote" published in 1914 Ortega dedicates two short paragraphs designed to reconsider what he conceives as the most relevant or central conclusion that can be deduced from Charles Darwin's idea of Natural Selection. In these two short paragraphs (that appear at the end of the book) Ortega tries to show the difference that exists between his and Darwin's concept of life. The critique of Ortega looks at odds with his own articulation of human life that is not based on the traditional philosophical ideas of soul or cogito. Hence, reading these paragraphs we ask ourselves if

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<sup>13</sup> "Para la planta, el animal o la estrella, vivir es no tener duda alguna respecto a su propio ser. Ninguno de ellos tiene que decidir ahora lo que va a ser el intante inmediato. Por eso su vida no es drama, sino...evolución", Ortega, 1932, 407.

<sup>14</sup> "Mi presente no existe sino merced a mi futuro, bajo la presión de mi futuro", Ortega, 1930, 131-132.

there really is a big difference between Ortega and Darwin's concepts of life. It may be so that what seems as an anti-Darwinist attack is only a conscious exaggeration that intends to disguise the similarity. In other words, stressing only the supposed difference might be intended to disregard the similarities. In these paragraphs Ortega wonders where the source of human creativity comes from. Furthermore, he raises serious doubt that the concept of adaptation to the environment can explain the creativity of cultural heroes. By concentrating on the creative ability of the heroes of human culture Ortega is aiming to doubt the relevance of the Darwinist description. He argues that human life should be understood as freedom and not as deterministic adaptation to the material surrounding:

The natural sciences that are based on determinism have conquered the biological camp. Darwin believes that he succeeds to imprison the vital-our ultimate hope, within the physical necessity. Life descends to be no more than matter. The physiology turns to mechanics. The organism that appears as independent unity, able to work for itself, is inserted in the physical medium like a figure in a carpet. Our actions are not reactions. There is no liberty, originality. To live is to adapt: to adapt means to leave the material surrounding to penetrate us, we are expelled from ourselves. Adapting is renouncing. Darwin moves aside the heroes from their doing.<sup>15</sup>

Here we can see that Ortega argues that if we adopt the Theory of Evolution we would not be able to understand human ability to articulate original ideas, for example we would not be able to properly conceive how there are humans (los héroes: the heroes) like Cervantes or Flaubert whose work and ideas are so creative and original. This puzzle is further elaborated in the work of Daniel Dennett who asks in one of his articles the following question: "How can an arrangement of a hundred billion mindless neurons compose a creative mind, an I?"<sup>16</sup> This dilemma as we know does not prevent Dennett from suggesting a

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<sup>15</sup> Ortega y Gasset, 2010, 244.

<sup>16</sup> Dennett, 2009, 396.

plausible solution to the concept of the mind. In his book Ortega does not try to find a solution to the problem he raised. Hence, it seems that here one can either follow the idea of Natural Selection or Ortega's metaphysics of human life.<sup>17</sup> However, I believe that to deal with this issue is much more intricate than it may seem by focusing only on these two paragraphs. In the following sections I will try to show how the main ideas in Ortega's Philosophy are actually an effort to elaborate much further the conclusions that can be derived by analyzing Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

The main critique on Darwin in these two paragraphs is aimed to show that the mind has a potential of originality. When it is conceived according to a biological point of view it will be hard to understand the nature of human creativity since "Darwin pushed aside the heroes from their work on earth".<sup>18</sup> Ortega concludes that Darwinism cannot explain the existence of heroes' creative human mind. This critique of Ortega might be responsible for the fact that researchers usually did not put any serious effort to examine the close similarity between Ortega and Darwin's thought. In the following paragraphs I will try to demonstrate the similarities between the young Ortega and Darwin's concept of human life. Ortega's critique may be explained by an intended effort to hide the similarities between his and Darwin's concept of life. I believe that Ortega's concept of human character and its vocation is actually an elaboration of Darwin's thought and an effort to go much further philosophically. This elaboration leads to an articulation of a metaphysical concept of human life.

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<sup>17</sup> Ortega's original philosophy is mainly interpreted as an effort to go beyond both realism and idealism. His 'categories of human life' are presented in many of his books that appear after 1928. See for example: Rodríguez Huescar, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Ortega, 2010, 244.

In his nine important and albeit forgotten lectures at the University of Buenos Aires from 1916 Ortega focuses mainly on the philosophical implications of the advancement in biology. These lectures appeared on print only in the year 1995. This late appearance may also be responsible for the fact that none of Ortega's researchers focuses on Ortega's alternative or elaboration to Darwinian Theory.

In these lectures from 1916 Ortega maintains that human preferences, predilections and tendencies are gradually formed during evolution. However, since these tendencies become so natural their evolutionary formation is forgotten. Each person has different tendencies and human vocation is examined according to the ability of the individual to follow or not to follow his own tendencies. This ability to choose to obey or not to the personal tendencies is also a product of evolution; a process in which human attitude towards the surrounding went beyond the interest in immediate dangers and the human started to be interested in finding the truth for itself. This ability to go beyond the immediate necessities is also connected, as we will see, to the ability to choose in favor or against our personal tendencies, to obey the truth that is supposed to be located beyond the subjective point of view.

### **III. The Objectives of Philosophy and Biology.**

In his youth writings Ortega maintains a constant dialogue with Nietzsche in relation to his Theory of Perspectives, Elitism and critique on scientific assumptions.<sup>19</sup> During August-October 1916 Ortega gave nine long lectures at the University in Buenos Aires. In his third lecture

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<sup>19</sup> See for example the following articles: Ortega, "Glosas", in: *Vida Nueva*, 1 de diciembre de 1902, or Ortega, "El sobrehombre", in: *El Imparcial*, 13 de Julio 1908. On Ortega and Nietzsche see Sobejano, 1967.

from that year he refers specifically to Nietzsche's argument according to which human truth is an illusion and that therefore "science, moral and culture are unstable delusions".<sup>20</sup> According to Ortega, Nietzsche's argument is 'an elegant blasphemy', to be applauded by the 50-year-olds of the previous generation. Ortega does not underestimate Nietzsche's argument regarding human consciousness or truth, and feels the need to justify carefully the alternatives he subsequently offers for them.

In his nine lectures in Argentina Ortega does not focus only on Nietzsche's Theory of Perspectives but also refers to Nietzsche's interpretation and critique on Darwinism. In these lectures we can find more than one occasion in which Ortega examines explicitly Nietzsche's interpretation and alternative to Darwin's Theory of Evolution.<sup>21</sup> The dialogue with the philosophical implications of Darwinism is common to both Nietzsche and Ortega. However, while Nietzsche's critique on Darwin is more explicit, it might seem that Ortega's own interpretation and alternative to Darwinism is far more implicit.<sup>22</sup> What is Ortega's own attitude towards Darwinism and/or the way in which Nietzsche reads Darwin? Focusing on this question can surprisingly lead to a new interesting insight regarding the relations between Philosophy of Life and Darwinism and it further leads to another question: Must a Metaphysical attitude towards human life as freedom necessarily contradict Darwin's 'dangerous idea'?

In his books Nietzsche calls Darwin a 'mediocre' thinker and tries to stress the differences between his own concept of life and Will to

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<sup>20</sup> Ortega, 1996, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Ortega, 1996, 68, 78-9, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Contrary to what is assumed in the historiography I believe that Ortega's dialogue with the biologists' interpretation of human life and Darwin's theory of Natural Selection does not sum up with his argument from 1914 that Darwinian will find it hard to explain human acts of creativity. Here I will try to show the real extent of the debate that Ortega had with Darwin and the biologist perspective on human life.

Power and Darwin's idea of Natural Selection.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary Ortega never speaks of himself as being "anti-Darwinian" and his dialogue with Natural Selection is more implicit in comparison to Nietzsche's, who explicitly expresses a severe critique. Although Ortega follows some aspects of Nietzsche's interpretation of Darwin it seems that he refrains himself from criticizing him directly. Ortega's attitude derives as I believe from the distinction he makes between the objectives of biology and philosophy. On two occasions in his lectures Ortega argues that although biologists and philosophers try to understand human life both the philosophers and biologists need to remember that there is a difference between their objectives and methods. The biologist analyzes what he considers as the real facts (hechos), while the philosopher on the other hand would define the biologist's analysis as a confined examination of what we perceive through our senses. The biologists must also adopt philosophical assumptions. What are these assumptions? According to Ortega the biologists' assumptions rely on the positivist Theory of Knowledge. The biologist treats human consciousness as a biological fact. Declaring that facts are all there is in the world is an exposition of a philosophical argument. Unlike the biologist the philosopher is responsible to go beyond the pure analysis of facts. The philosophers' questions are: 1. Does truth exist? 2. What is the correct method to arrive towards truth: rational or empirical? Ortega maintains that by choosing the empirical method the biologists appropriate a philosophical truth according to which truth derives from the sense data:

Natural science departs from the facts and these facts are not more than particular class of truth. The biological facts are the affirmation that such phenomenon takes place. Something is not a truth because it is a fact; On the contrary, something is a fact because we convinced

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<sup>23</sup> See for example where Nietzsche writes in *Will to Power* a section "against Darwin's theory", Nietzsche, 1968, 343.

ourselves through pre-biological reasons, prior to our observation, that it is such.<sup>24</sup>

For Ortega the question here is whether to conceive natural facts as the ultimate truth as the biologists are doing or to follow the philosopher that is more skeptical regarding human assumptions. A philosopher can decline the assumption that facts are all there is. He can argue for example that truth lies behind the facts. Ortega suggests that the philosophy focuses on the ultimate truth. Therefore, the philosopher has to define what the method to arrive towards the truth is. Ortega concludes that the philosopher asks questions which cannot be answered by relying only on the medium of experience.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, Ortega suggests that there is another central difference between biology and philosophy. Biology is based on the assumption that the ultimate reality is to be found in the facts. Philosophy on the other hand cannot be based on any assumptions. Philosophy is the effort to reflect on the ultimate truth and it begins by presenting a doubt regarding all of our unreflective assumptions.<sup>26</sup> As we will further see the difference between the objectives of philosophy and biology is central for our understanding of Ortega's analysis of both Darwinism and the critique of Nietzsche on Darwin. The difference between the biologist and the philosopher's work derives from their different objectives. The different definitions of what the ultimate purpose of an organ, consciousness or human life as a whole really is derives from a different definition of life's objective. Ortega's main argument is that the philosopher is not allowed to determine for the

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<sup>24</sup> Ortega, 1996, 85.

<sup>25</sup> Ortega, 1996, 86.

<sup>26</sup> "Toda ciencia particular parte de algún supuesto, por lo menos, de suponer que el conocimiento verdadero es posible y consiste en proceder de esta o aquella manera determinada. Pero una ciencia cuyo problema está en averiguar si es posible el conocimiento verdadero, la teoría y en qué consiste, claro es que no puede partir de ningún supuesto", Ortega, 1996, 73-74.

biologist what the objective (el fin) of human life is.<sup>27</sup> Since there is a difference between the objectives of philosophy and biology there is also an obligation for the philosopher to be careful when he reflects on the conclusions of the biological analysis. Therefore, there might be two presentations of what human life or consciousness (as we will see later) is. According to Ortega, both of these presentations may be equally correct. On the one hand, the biologist can argue that the aim of human life is to preserve itself. How can we decide that an individual succeeds in preserving itself? Darwin for example argues that the criterion is to be traced in the ability to have predecessors. The struggle for existence is not the survival of the individual but the survival of his characteristic and his ability to pass those to a next generation.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, there is the interpretation of human life from the philosophical viewpoint. A philosopher like Nietzsche for example can argue that the aim of living organisms and human life is not survival or self-preservation. Rather, the goal of human life is to increase its power: "It can be shown most clearly for every living thing, that it does everything, *not* in order to preserve itself, but to become *more*".<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, Ortega assumes that the differences between the objectives of philosophy on the one hand and biology on the other hand, a difference that many philosophers like the positivists and naturalist tended to disregard, is actually central for the philosophical debate of what life's objectives are. Considering this difference between the objectives of philosophy and those of biology we can understand why Nietzsche's discussion on Darwinism is wrong "the

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<sup>27</sup> "El filósofo ha de guardarse muy bien de pretender enseñar a los biólogos qué cosa sea el fin de la vida", Ortega, 1996, 68.

<sup>28</sup> "I should premise that I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny". Darwin, 1998, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, 1968, 366.

philosopher has to be really careful not to pretend to decide for the biologist what the objective of human life is".<sup>30</sup> This conclusion is also applicable for the biologists who might tend to decide for the philosopher what the objectives of human life/consciousness/nature are. In order to examine the plausibility of Ortega's analysis of Darwin's and Nietzsche's interpretation of Natural Selection it is important first to present Nietzsche's arguments and then to reconsider whether Ortega had a real alternative of his own to Darwinism.

#### **IV. Naturalism versus Teleology.**

One of Darwin's earliest critics, Robert MacKenzie, conceived the idea of Natural Selection as 'an inversion of reasoning'. The central idea of Darwin is that the process of natural selection is not guided by a divine or absolute wisdom; there is not any intentional guidance by an intelligent designer.<sup>31</sup> During the course of time the critique on Darwinism represented mainly a focus on the conception of Natural Selection as a blind law. What are the arguments of those who criticize Darwin's presentation of natural selection as blind process? The critique is based on three main lines of thought: the idea of intelligent design, the 'anthropic principle' and the teleological argument:<sup>32</sup>

1. Those who favor the idea of intelligent design argue that the organic world is too tightly functioning to be a product of the blind law of Natural Selection.
2. Some physicists believe that had the laws of nature not been exactly as they are then life could never have evolved. Since the exact form of

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<sup>30</sup> Ortega, 1996 68.

<sup>31</sup> Dennett, 2009, 393.

<sup>32</sup> Since in this section I examine mainly the teleological argument that stood at the center of the interest of Ortega and Nietzsche alike I will focus mainly on the mentalist and naturalist explanations of Natural Selection.

natural laws could be infinite range, the only conceivable explanation is that there was an involvement of a designer.

3. The teleological argument criticizes the idea of Natural Selection as blind law. Its adherents point out that the world is not just thrown together randomly, but functions in a harmonious way towards an end. The human eye for example seems to have been designed for the purpose of enabling sight.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of Natural selection as a blind law leads to the insight that there exists a process in which absolute ignorance gradually leads to the appearance of wisdom and human consciousness. Different authors refer specifically to the question of teleological argument in Darwin's writings. Phillip R. Solan argues that the development of Darwin's conception of nature teaches us that in his maturity Darwin never adopted a "belief in a purposeless nature that undercuts all teleological explanations". According to Solan, "there is a persistence of philosophy of nature, indebted to certain strands within German reflections on nature that underpins the concept of natural laws".<sup>34</sup>

Jeff Wallace argues that what may seem as teleology in Darwin's expressions is no more than a metaphor. If we were to follow Darwin's expressions some of us would be able to assume that he describes the process of Natural Selection as an intentional process. In the third chapter he writes. "Every selected character is fully exercised by her; and the being is placed under well-suited conditions of life".<sup>35</sup> Here we might argue that Darwin means that it is Mother Nature that chooses or 'selects' for us. We might assume that Natural Selection is not a blind process. In other words, metaphorically the process of Natural Selection can be interpreted in this context as an intentional agency; the readers might be tempted to assume that it is nature that selects, rejects, preserves, adds up or works. However, Wallace suggests that

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<sup>33</sup> Ruse, 2003, 168-173.

<sup>34</sup> Solan, 2005, 159.

<sup>35</sup> Darwin, 1998, 65.

Natural Selection should not be conceived as an intentional process.<sup>36</sup> In the same manner the researcher, Dieter Wandschneider argues that Darwinism is limited to "casual patterns of explanation" and the rejection of every teleological interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

In the 'Origin of Species' the argument is that the gradual appearance of different species and the gradual divergence of character was not guided by any intelligent designer; it was rather guided by what Darwin defines as unintentional, unguided or blind law of nature. The different species were not independently created but appeared gradually during history from other very small number of species.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, since the process of Natural Selection is not intentional we cannot conceive the appearance of the human eye according to the teleological argument. Dawkins argues that what we might mistakenly conceive as the 'watchmaker' is actually a blind process.<sup>39</sup> Hence, Darwin's naturalism means that the blind and unaided process of Natural Selection should not be interpreted in any mentalist manner. Natural selection does not imply an element of conscious choice. There is no intervention by a creative designer in the process and the difference between man and other animals is a difference of degree. Humans do not have a different kind of mental powers but the difference with other animals is a difference of degree.<sup>40</sup>

For our purposes it is important to reconsider the idea of Natural Selection as an intentional process or teleology since this kind of

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<sup>36</sup> Wallace, 1998, VII- XXIII.

<sup>37</sup> Wandschneider, 2005, 196-215.

<sup>38</sup> "Natural Selection leads to the divergence of character...On the view that each species has been independently created, I can see no explanation of this great fact in the classification of all organic beings; but, to the best of my judgment, it is explained through inheritance and the complex action of natural selection", Darwin, 1998, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Dawkins, 1986.

<sup>40</sup> Darwin, 2010, 17-39.

interpretation was adopted at least apparently by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's harsh critique on Darwin was well known by Ortega. In his lectures Ortega appropriated few features of Nietzsche's critique of Darwin although he also acknowledged the importance of distinguishing between naturalism and the mentalist explanations. In his third lecture in Buenos Aires from 1916 Ortega argues that human life is not to be understood as adaptation to the surrounding. He suggests that life should rather be conceived as an 'artificial creative act that is consisted of the being enhancement and progress'.<sup>41</sup> Here we are encountering a puzzle that can be considered as a contradiction or can also point out that we have to examine this argument within a larger frame of Ortega's thought. The idea of progress might suggest the existence of teleology, but I believe the apparent contradiction can easily be overcome.

We have seen that Ortega argues that there is a necessity to separate between the objectives of philosophy and biology. This separation allows him to argue that a philosopher like Nietzsche should refrain himself from suggesting the biologist what the ultimate objective of life is.<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche suggests the idea of Will to Power as might be understood as nature's intentional goal. How then should we interpret Ortega's argument that life is consisted of self enhancement and progress that is not natural but is rather 'artificial'? Can it lead us to assume that Ortega does not maintain the necessary boundaries between philosophy and the naturalism, boundaries that he himself argued that other philosophers should always take into consideration?

The teleological argument according to which the organic world is not just thrown together randomly, but works and functions towards a certain end was well known to Nietzsche. The idea of an intelligent designer is adopted in theology and philosophy, and therefore it

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<sup>41</sup> Ortega, 1996, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Ortega, 1996, 68.

seems implausible that Nietzsche himself who is a renowned critic of rationalist philosophy and theology adopted this point of view. In section 13 of his book 'Beyond Good and Evil' Nietzsche writes that we have to be careful and not to adopt any teleological explanations when we are to discuss human life.<sup>43</sup> In this manner it seems that Nietzsche follows the naturalistic explanation of human life and that he does not add up any teleological explanation to the natural processes. Nietzsche looks here as a philosopher within the boundaries of naturalism. However, in many places in his writings Nietzsche describes the Will to Power as a will 'towards' (zu, auf) an intentional goal. Furthermore, Nietzsche takes Darwin to claim that the organism' has its own goal- survival.<sup>44</sup> Is the Darwinian idea of Natural Selection interpreted here beyond the limits of naturalism? In the 'Will to Power' the idea of Natural Selection seems as an idea that is not interpreted on a purely natural basis. In his *Will to Power* Nietzsche assumes that there exists a conscious intentional process in the natural world according to which everything is aiming towards enhancing its own power.<sup>45</sup>

In his lectures Ortega implicitly argues that Nietzsche's teleological interpretation of Darwin and the proposition of a teleological explanation to nature can lead to a misinterpretation of Darwinism. Furthermore, Ortega maintains that it can also lead to what he defines as the inability to remember the difference between the objectives of philosophy and biology. But as we have seen Ortega

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<sup>43</sup> "In short, here, as elsewhere else, let us beware of *superfluous* teleological principles! - one which is the instinct of self-preservation (we owe it to Spinoza's inconsistency). Nietzsche, 1997, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Anti-Darwin. As for the celebrated "struggle for life, it seems to me, in the meantime, to be more asserted than proved. It occurs, but only as an exception; the general aspect of life is *not* a state of want or hunger; it is rather a state of opulence, luxuriance, and even absurd prodigality, - where there is a struggle, it is a struggle for power", Nietzsche, 2004, 46.

<sup>45</sup> More on the tension between naturalism and teleology in Nietzsche's concept of *Will to Power* can be read in Richardson, 2004.

himself also argued in his third lecture that the Darwinian concept of adaptation to nature is a 'secondary operation' (operación secundaria) while the enhancement of the self should be understood as the first and prior operation. Life's changes are not a passive response to a physical medium but rather a process guided towards self enhancement:

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Darwinian theory governed the laboratories. Darwinism supposes that the regulated objective of each and every vital phenomenon is adaptation to the medium. Living is to adapt, living is understood as an act, secondary operation; respect for the medium, this law together with its variations or its capricious variations rules the forms of the organic being... In Front of this point of view, comes another old and new vigor. According to this, life is not a secondary activity that only replies to the agent of the physical medium. Life is an artificial act of creativity that consists in expanding and growing of the being (ser).<sup>46</sup>

In this section we can notice that Ortega contradicts his own effort to stress the differences between the goals of biology and philosophy. This kind of interpretation of Ortega's thought is possible. However, I believe that when Ortega argues that life is moving towards self enhancement he means that this might be the way the philosopher wants (or more correctly he as a philosopher wants) to explain life. The philosopher cannot adopt the natural explanation of life. Since the philosopher is not restricted to naturalism he is allowed to present what he conceives as the real or the ethical goal of human life. This goal should not necessarily be restricted to the naturalistic explanation of the human life. In order to elaborate this way of interpretation of Ortega's argument we need first to closely reconsider Ortega's attitude towards the Darwinian description of life's goal and then to reexamine Ortega's own perspective regarding the evolution of human mind.

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<sup>46</sup> Ortega, 1996, 78-79.

## **V. The Darwinians and the Goal of Life.**

In his third lecture in Buenos Aires Ortega examines the biologists' analysis of the purpose of each organ in the human body. He starts by asking what the biologist's or the philosopher's definition of the goal of life is? This is a question common to both the philosopher and the biologist and each one tends to present another objective. Ortega argues that the Darwinians conceive the objective of life as an ability to adapt to the physical surrounding. In his opinion the philosopher cannot follow the manner in which the Darwinist defines life's goal as an adaptation to nature. This explanation seems for Ortega too naturalistic for a philosopher to be able to adopt it. According to Ortega the definition of life's objective is in the realm of ethics and therefore the Darwinist explanation cannot be applicable for the philosopher. Since the definition of life's objective is "the biggest problem of man" the philosopher cannot leave this question to be solved by the biologist.<sup>47</sup> Philosophy deals with the ultimate questions of ethics and metaphysics. Since the definition of life's goal is ethical the philosopher's duty is to suggest what the real life goal is. Hence, the philosopher's duty is to contemplate on the problem according to ethical premises and to suggest another definition of life's goal. The philosopher's definition cannot stem from biology but rather has to be based on ethical arguments. In this section we will reconsider how important it is for Ortega to maintain the separation between the goals of philosophy and those of biology. This separation is central in his thought and allows him to argue that both the Darwinist and the philosopher's definitions of life are plausible and legitimate. Furthermore, the separation between ethics and biology

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<sup>47</sup> "Este es un problema de ética, el más grande problema del hombre", Ortega, 1996, 76.

will enable Ortega to reconsider the human character and its vocation along the lines of both biology and ethics.

First Ortega concentrates on explaining the difference between instrument and objective and he begins by presenting the naturalistic argument. The naturalistic analysis of the human organs focuses on the medium that each organ is responsible to serve. The human organs have different and certain functions. Since the human mind is also an organ, the naturalist argues that it is also designed in order to serve for a certain function. In the same manner as all the other organs in the human body the human mind is responsible to assist the human preservation; the human mind has to be analyzed according to the function it has to serve. A biologist who tries to explain what the function of the organ is usually focuses on showing the organ's utility for the entire body. For the biologist the form of our body and the way the organism moves are also conceived as tools that are aimed to serve a certain goal. For example, the heart does not beat for its own sake. The heart beat is a function designed to bring blood in order to assist the other organs to function effectively; the heart has a certain function. Each organ is a medium that is supposed to serve a purpose. The organ is designed in a manner that will enable it to function effectively. The organ's ability to serve well as a medium for the goal of adaptation of the human body to the physical surrounding is examined according to utilitarian criterions. This is the explanation for the function of each organ and it seems that Ortega tends to accept this argument as a plausible explanation.

However, while Ortega accepts the biological description of the function of each organ he argues that the real problem is to explain what the final objective of all the organs is. He argues that the biologists (and the philosophers) debate on this question: "What is the objective for which all of life serves as a medium. This is the question

that the biologists debate".<sup>48</sup> According to Ortega, the biologists cannot reach an agreement and cannot decide what the objective of life is; an objective is that all the organs together are supposed to serve. This argument of Ortega may seem implausible since we know that Ortega could have presented the idea of survival or self-preservation, ideas that were familiar to him at least through Nietzsche's critique from which he himself had cited in his previous lecture. We can assume that Ortega refrains at this point from presenting the idea of self-preservation because of a central reason: the necessity to separate between the objectives of ethics and those of biology. Ortega assumes that it is not the role of the philosopher to decide for the biologists: "It is not urgent to solve this question now because it is a subject for biology".<sup>49</sup>

At this point we can see again that the separation between the objectives of philosophy or ethics and biology is central for understanding Ortega's attitude towards Darwinism. The repeated argument is that the philosopher cannot assign goals for the biologist's description of life. Furthermore, as we have seen before in the third lecture Ortega also refrained himself from presenting or reexamining the goals that the biologists themselves assigned to life. At that point in his lecture Ortega only mentions what the Darwinists consider as life's goal and does not consider other viewpoints. Why is it important for him to mention only the Darwinian point of view during this part of his lecture? Ortega does not give any explicit reason, but his choice to present the Darwinist point of view (in a manner that he conceives as unsettled in biology) might suggest that Ortega recognizes the social and scientific importance of Darwinism. Therefore, we need to ask how according to Ortega the Darwinians

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<sup>48</sup> "Cuál sea el fin a quien todo lo vital sirve como medio es cosa que discuten los biólogos", Ortega, 1996, 76.

<sup>49</sup> "Pero aún reducidos a la finalidad biológica, no nos urge ahora resolver la cuestión entre otras porque es asunto para el biólogo", Ortega, 1996, 76.

explained the goal of life. Ortega asserts that for the Darwinians the goal of all the organs is to serve as a medium for another ultimate goal. For the Darwinians the ultimate goal is the ability to adapt to the physical environment.<sup>50</sup>

Ortega's argument is that not all the biologists concur with the definition regarding the ultimate goal of the biological organism; however he does not intend to examine the other biological definitions apart from the Darwinian one. The Darwinists conceive the ability of the biological organs to adapt to nature as a goal while others may present other goals. However it is very important to stress the central point that for the philosopher all the biologists are basing their explanation on naturalism. Therefore, Ortega concludes that the philosopher should not ascribe any goals of life for the biologist since for the philosopher the real goal of life is ethical and it stands beyond the naturalistic explanation. Hence, here we see again how Ortega separates between the ethic's way of defining what life's goal is and the biological definition of the goal of the human organism. According to Ortega, the ultimate question of the life's goal is an ethical problem that should be handled by the philosophers and not by the biologists:

What is the objective that all the vital (organs) serve as a medium is a thing that the biologist debate. I refer strictly to the biological objective, the objective of the individual organism. I am not referring here to the objective or the ultimate meaning that is given to life in the universe: here it is an ethical problem, the biggest problem of the human being.<sup>51</sup>

This explanation of Ortega obligates us to reconsider his interpretation of Darwinians explanations of life's goal. It seems that Ortega is aware of the importance of ethic and cannot accept the narrow naturalist description of the goal of human life. This separation between two kind of human goals- one naturalistic and the other

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<sup>50</sup> "Para el darwinismo triunfante de la pasada centuria el fin de la vida, el resorte esencial de la vida, la adaptación al medio físico", Ortega, 1996, 76.

<sup>51</sup> Ortega, 1996, 76.

ethical, suggests the understanding of the necessary separation between what there is and what there ought to be. This approach to the objectives of the philosopher and the biologist does not necessarily suggest any implicit intention to deny or diminish the importance of Darwinism. I believe that this attitude is aimed to acknowledge the limits of the Darwin's theory. This separation is not based on an argument that considers the 'struggle for survival' as dangerous or totally unethical. On the contrary, Ortega is not aiming to disrespect the Darwinians. The only serious interest that we can learn from the lecture is that there are two realms: the realm of what there is and the realm of what there ought to be. In the following sections we will see how this analysis relates to Ortega's central ideas regarding the mind and the human vocation.

## **VI. Human Reason: From Vital Utility towards Looking for the Truth for Itself.**

The dialogue with Darwin and the biological explanation of human mind and character appears in almost all of Ortega's lectures in Argentina. The discussion in these lectures revolves around psychology or more specifically around the behaviorist theory and the biologist explanation of human mind. The discussion suggested by Ortega is aimed to explain two central new ideas:

1. A theory of knowledge that aims to present an alternative to the traditional debate between idealism and realism. This important theory that considers human life as a 'radical reality' is examined in the historiography about Ortega.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The researchers are basing their arguments on ideas from Ortega's other writings. The nine lectures in Argentina are hardly examined.

2. Another central idea is the concept of human vocation. I believe that Ortega is interested here in examining the idea of human vocation along and beyond the lines of the biologist's explanation. On the one hand, the vocation cannot be conceived metaphysically, religiously or mystically since it has its roots in evolution. Since Ortega does not conceive evolution in a mentalist manner he does not believe that the human vocation is part of a designed plan. On the other hand, human vocation is a 'born' (nativo) system of preferences. Therefore, these human tendencies and preferences might be conceived as if they were meant intentionally to be designed in a special way.<sup>53</sup>

In this section I would like to concentrate on one central concept of Ortega that I believe is developed as part of the dialogue he maintains with the biologists. The human character and its vocation is an idea that is aimed to overcome the limited Darwinian description while being able to stay within the Darwinian discourse. My argument here is that we need to reconsider Ortega's description as an idea that originates from a dialogue with Darwin. In order to present this argument we need first to examine the way in which Ortega describes the evolution of human cognition and the evolution of the human objective of knowing.

In biology we describe the different human organs as a system of utile functions. The legs, ears, eyes have different functions and their utility is examined according to how well they serve for certain needs. Human consciousness (consciencia) has also a function; it is supposed to serve the human for certain needs he has to accomplish. Hence, in order to understand these needs we have to analyze the mind's function according to the principle of vital utility. Ortega's argument is that the process of perception of reality serves also a certain function:

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<sup>53</sup> Ortega, 1996, 128.

"In principal there is nothing that exists in the individual that cannot be understood according to its vital utility. One of these functions is what we define as consciousness".<sup>54</sup> This argument of Ortega implies that in the same manner as all the human biological organs the human mind cannot be described in a spiritual manner. Here it seems that Ortega follows the guiding lines of naturalism. It seems that Ortega who will later crystallize a metaphysical conception of human life does not try to refute the naturalistic assumption according to which all events in the universe are natural. The act of knowing the immediate surrounding is the same as all the natural phenomena that occur in the human body. This argument that follows the naturalist theory helps Ortega avoid dealing with the metaphysical puzzle of how the mental process can causally influence the non-mental process.

Although he adopts a naturalistic attitude towards the mind we can notice that in his other lectures Ortega is presenting arguments that can be understood as a way to refute any interpretation of the human act of knowing in a pure naturalist manner:

1. In his seventh lecture Ortega criticizes those who make equivalence between the human psyche and the brain. He claims that understanding the 'brain' (cerebro) as an equivalent to the human psyche signifies an effort to return to the traditional 'myth' of the human soul. Identifying the brain with the psyche is a reduction of psychology to physiology. Hence, Ortega stresses the necessity to overcome what he conceives as a kind of reductionism. His effort to stress the difference between psychology and physiology is evident and symbolizes an intention to go beyond the naturalization of the mind.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ortega, 1996, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Ortega, 1996, 130-31.

2. Another important argument is to be found in his eighth lecture. Here, Ortega argues that there is a necessity to separate between two conceptions of the mind: the mind as something that is composed of things on the one hand or as an entity that performs acts on the other hand. Human mind is to be described according to the acts it makes; our psyche is pure activity (*actividad*). Ortega does not elaborate what he exactly means by this description of the psyche as activity. It seems as an idea that resembles to Brentano and Husserl's intentionality since he also explicitly mentions the importance of their ideas: "The reference to objects, intentionality is the character or the plasma that differentiates and distinguishes the psyche. We are separating here from the modern doctrines; with this (idea) we are trying to overcome modernity".<sup>56</sup> It is important to stress that this argument according to which the brain should not be conceived as a 'thing', can also be conceived as part of the general critique on traditional metaphysical speculations regarding the existence of the human soul or pure spiritual entity. However, in the same manner it might also be understood as part of a critique on the conception of the human mind in a naturalist manner, a conception that Ortega presented in the first and fourth lectures.<sup>57</sup>

In his first lecture Ortega presented a naturalistic conception of the human mind. However, when we reexamine it closely we can see that there is also a simultaneous effort to avoid from referring to the mind as a pure natural process. One possible way to solve this puzzle can be made when we consider how Ortega perceives the descent of man and the evolution of cognition. In his lectures Ortega tries to

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<sup>56</sup> Ortega, 1996, 148.

<sup>57</sup> Ortega, 1996, 148.

present two opposite descriptions of the human mind. I believe that what separates between these two different descriptions of the same phenomena can be explained by the process of evolution.

The fact that Ortega conceives the brain as a natural organ that has a certain function does not prevent our ability to focus on another way in which he describes the mind. I believe that Ortega tries to crystallize a plausible argument that might allow us to settle between these two opposite functions of the mind. We can understand his choice to reconcile between the two opposite conceptions by trying to perceive how he depicts human character and its vocation as a product of Natural Selection.

The application of the principle of vital utility (*utilidad vital*) to the human process of gaining knowledge on the surrounding means that truth or the things in the world are conceived according to the restricted subjective point of view. This principle leads to a separation between things as they are conceived by us and things as they really are in the world without our subjective utile perception of them. Applying the concept of vital utility to the act of knowing leads Ortega to argue that at the beginning of the evolution of the human species the brain functioned as a "utilitarian deformation of reality".<sup>58</sup> However, it seems that Ortega believes there is also much evidence that this historical period has gradually changed: "the biological evolution is long, but it is important to (show) its manifestation. Therefore I have to make this summary".<sup>59</sup> The summary is presented explicitly in the first and the fourth lectures although it is also shortly represented in other lectures. Ortega's argument is that at the beginning of evolution to know meant to enable the human to act in a useful manner without any interest in finding the truth as it is for itself. However, later in human evolution to know becomes a goal for its own sake. At a certain

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<sup>58</sup> Ortega, 1996, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Ortega, 1996, 48.

point the process of knowing 'abandons' (abandona) the principle of utility. Here we find the central point in Ortega's understanding of the implications of the gradual evolution; at this point we can also notice the importance of Darwin's Theory of Evolution in Ortega's description of the act of knowing. However, Ortega does not try to explain what he conceives as the causes of the historical change. We can only see that for him the historical change is probably most notable in the appearance of philosophy and metaphysics in Greece. Ortega says that "it is very interesting that there is a moment in human history", in which few people in Greece started to be surprised by the nature of the things around them and started to reflect on their real nature.<sup>60</sup> The causes of the change are not analyzed by Ortega and he only argues that the birth of rationality appeared when the Asiatic people immigrated to Greece. At the arrival to Greece these immigrants under the leadership of Tales started to ask what the nature of things is: "Tales de Mileto is the first person who abandons the mythology... he starts asking "what the thing is?"<sup>61</sup>. This change as it is depicted by Ortega is not only another small historical change but a radical change in the gradual and long evolution of the human being. Ortega implicitly suggests that this change is one of the most important changes in human evolution. Philosophy and the quest for ultimate truth, and its call to re-examine our basic assumptions about reality, represents an inflection point in evolution of human attitudes towards the world—before, we had mythological thinking, after we had philosophy. The results of this ostensibly gradual change have been historically dramatic.

This historical change is represented in extreme manner by the modern rationalist. The rationalist believes that human thought can set us free from any utilitarian attitudes and can help us know the real

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<sup>60</sup> Ortega, 1996, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Ortega, 1996, 47.

nature of things. In his lectures Ortega has a rather complicated attitude towards rationalism. On the one hand, he criticizes the rationalists for forgetting the origin of the process of knowing: the long process of evolution. On the other hand, Ortega believes that the consequences of gradual evolution and the overcoming of the constraint of utility can allow us freedom, a freedom to follow or not to follow our vocation.<sup>62</sup>

## **VII. Human Character and its Vocation.**

Each human being has different preferences, attitudes and predilections. As some people do it is of course possible to treat the existence of these personal preferences as a wonder. The mystic will define it as a vocation or destiny designed for each human being. Since for the mystic the experience of human vocation is a wonder, he is not troubled to give a detailed explanation for the causes of the phenomena. The mystic's main effort is to explain the possible consequences of the phenomena on a person's life. Ortega adopts a concept that has mystical resonance; however he aims to go further than the mystic. In his lectures he argues that each person or people have different human tendencies and characteristics. The perspective we have is part of our tendencies. Ortega's effort is to analyze the process in which the human character has been shaped. His main argument is that each human has a "system of preferences that are produced by nature".<sup>63</sup>

Ortega argues that one person might be practical while the other is more theoretical, there is one who is interested in art while other person may be even totally blind to the art. Is there a possibility to

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<sup>62</sup> Ortega, 1996, 94.

<sup>63</sup> Ortega, 1996, 128.

explain human tendencies and attitudes without using mystical or metaphysical explanation? I believe that Ortega implicitly tries to present an argument that is based on the Theory of Evolution. By describing the human characteristics as products of natural evolution Ortega also implicitly intends to present the philosophical implications of Natural Selection.

Theoretically each human can have the same interest towards each and every thing surrounding him. Attention cannot be given to all the things that exist around us. In order to concentrate on one object or one problem we need to distract ourselves from focusing on another object: "As I was saying, we can only focus ourselves on a single point when we manage to divert our attention from all the others".<sup>64</sup> There is a natural limit to the potential of human attention: a person who is troubled solving a mathematical problem must first distract himself from other problems. Getting to know each person better means we have to try consider towards what objects he gives his attention: "Tell me towards what you attend to and I will tell you who you are".<sup>65</sup> Following this description of Ortega it may seem as if each human has an active role in choosing his predilections and tendencies. Each human is free to choose his own vocation. Furthermore, we have seen that Ortega criticizes Darwin and argues that the evolutionary process of adaptation cannot explain human creativity. Hence we might even argue that Ortega's idea of free will can be described as a capability of wanting to be different in our preferences and purposes. However, I believe that this kind of reading is evidently mistaken. In his lecture he argues that each consciousness has its frame of objects and that frame of mind or what he calls "tessitura" is a product of natural evolution.

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<sup>64</sup> Ortega, 1996, 127.

<sup>65</sup> Ortega, 1996, 128.

The idea of human vocation is very important for understanding how Ortega conceives the human will. By analyzing Ortega's concept of free will we can see that it should be understood as an ability to choose to follow or to refuse to follow our characteristic. A person which has a tendency towards mathematics can choose to distract his attention from other objects around him in order to concentrate on solving a certain problem. He can also choose to refrain from solving the problem. However, this person is not able to choose to have the same tendency towards art or music. The human characteristics or the mind frame are natural products of evolution. In his lecture Ortega refrains himself from describing the origin of mind frame (tessitura): "From where it (the mind frame- tessitura) came from or how it has been shaped, I cannot tell it now and here".<sup>66</sup> Ortega refrains himself from explaining the process of evolution however it is definitely conceived a thing acquired naturally.

The tendencies we have are not actively chosen by us but are rather chosen for us during the long gradual process of evolution. Ortega defines human characteristics as part of the "frame of mind". He suggests that characteristics are "produced by nature" (nativo): "Each individual has a system of preferences produced by nature".<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, since the tendencies and the frame of mind are a product of nature it will be impossible to try and change them: The Spanish thinker Juan de Valdés was right in saying that to change the customs is the same as choosing to die".<sup>68</sup> We can conclude by saying that human vocation is the ability to follow or not to follow our tendencies and preferences. We cannot change our characteristic but we can indeed choose when we want to follow them and when we do not. Liberty exists but within the limits of the frame of our mind,

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<sup>66</sup> Ortega, 1996, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Ortega, 1996, 128.

<sup>68</sup> Ortega, 1996, 129.

perspective and character. These are products of Natural Selection. Ortega implicitly follows Darwin and his critique is rather a conscious intention to hide the deep connection between his and Darwin's thought.

### **VIII. Summary.**

In his writings Ortega referred to the differences between his own philosophy of life and the biological conception of life. The biological conception of Lamarck or Darwin interested him and in his early thought he was influenced by Darwin's concept of Natural Selection. In his later work Ortega presented human life in a manner different from Darwin from many aspects: the focus on the future dimension, the inner desired fantasies of the subject and especially the dissatisfaction from the circumstances. The argument of Ortega was that it is the subject who reforms the environment to its favor. But early in his writings Ortega followed Darwin's Natural Selection and the biological interpretation of the human character stands at the center of his thought. Therefore, we are not allowed to conclude that Ortega's mature philosophy is a Darwinist philosophy, on the contrary. But we also cannot ignore the huge influence the ideas of Darwin had on the thought of the young Ortega. Ortega's conception of vocation of man is an elaboration of Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

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