Quickwrite: In three sentences or less, what is human nature and how is it created/formed?

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The stone is given its existence; it need not fight for being what it is—a stone in the field. Man has to be himself in spite of unfavorable circumstances; that means he has to make his own existence at every single moment. He is given the abstract possibility of existing, but not the reality. This he has to conquer hour after hour. Man must earn his life, not only economically but metaphysically.

And all this for what reason? Obviously...because man’s being and nature’s being do not fully coincide. Because man’s being is made of such strange stuff as to be partly akin to nature and partly not, at once natural and extranatural, a kind of ontological centaur, half immersed in nature, half transcending it. Dante would have likened him to a boat drawn up on the beach with one end of its keel in the water and the other in the sand. What is natural in him is realized by itself; it presents no problem. That is precisely why man does not consider it his true being. His extranatural part, on the other hand, is not there from the outset and of itself; it is but an aspiration, a project of life. And this we feel to be our true being; we call it our personality, our self...

If the reader reflects a little upon the meaning of the entity he calls his life, he will find that it is the attempt to carry out a definite program or project of existence. And his self—each man’s self—is nothing but this devised program...Thus man begins by being something that has no reality, neither corporeal nor spiritual; he is a project as such, something which is not yet but aspires to be. One may object that there can be no program without somebody having it, without an idea, a mind, a soul, or whatever it is called. I cannot discuss this thoroughly because it would mean embarking on a course of philosophy. But I will say this: although the project of being a great financier has to be conceived of in an idea, “being” the project is different from holding the idea. In fact, I find no difficulty in thinking this idea but I am very far from being this project.
Here we come upon the formidable and unparalleled character which makes man unique in the universe. We are dealing—and let the disquieting strangeness of the case be well noted—with an entity whose being consists not in what it is already, but in what it is not yet, a being that consists in not-yet-being. Everything else in the world is what it is. An entity whose mode of being consists in what it is already, whose potentiality coincides at once with his reality, we call a “thing.” Things are given their being ready-made…

At every moment of my life there open before me diverse possibilities: I can do this or that. If I do this, I shall be A the moment after; if I do that, I shall be B. At the present moment the reader may stop reading me or may go on. And, however slight the importance of this article, according as he does the one or the other the reader will be A or will be B, will have made of himself an A or a B. Man is the entity that makes itself...

...This alone I come upon, this alone is given me: circumstance. It is too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a conception of life, to “ideate” the character he is going to be. Whether he be original or a plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself.

That among these possibilities I must choose. Hence, I am free. But be it well understood, I am free by compulsion, whether I wish to be or not...To be free means to be...able to be other than what one was, to be unable to install oneself once and for all in any given being...

Man invents for himself a program of life...He essays this form of life, attempts to realize this imaginary character he has resolved to be. He embarks on the essay full of illusions and prosecutes the experiment with thoroughness...But meanwhile the experience has made apparent the shortcomings and limitations of the said program of life. It does not solve all the difficulties, and it creates new ones of its own. When first seen it was full face, with the light shining upon it: hence the illusions, the enthusiasm, the delights believed in store. With the back view its inadequacy is straightway revealed. Man thinks out another program of life. But this second program is drawn up in the light, not only of circumstance, but also of the first. One aims at avoiding in the new project the drawbacks of the old. In the second, therefore, the first is still active; it is preserved in order to be avoided. Inexorably man shrinks from being what he was. On the second project of being..., there follows a third, forged in the light of the second and the first, and so on. Man “goes on being” and “unbeing”—living. He goes on accumulating being—the past; he goes on making for himself a being through his dialectical series of experiments...
...Man is what has happened to him, what he has done. Other things might have happened to him or have been done by him, but what did in fact happen to him and was done by him, this constitutes a relentless trajectory of experiences that he carries on his back as the vagabond his bundle of all he possesses. Man is a substantial emigrant on a pilgrimage of being, and it is accordingly meaningless to set limits to what he is capable of being. In this initial illimitableness of possibilities that characterizes one who has no nature there stands out only one fixed, preestablished and given line by which he may chart his course, only one limit: the past. The experiments already made with life narrow man’s future. If we do not know what he is going to be, we know what he is not going to be. Man lives in view of the past.

Man, in a word, has no nature; what he has is—history. Expressed differently: what nature is to things, history, res gestae, is to man.

1. Number the paragraphs.
2. Define terms you don’t understand in the margins.
3. Highlight important claims/arguments.
4. Created two text-based questions, level two or three, to help guide our Socratic Seminar.
   Text-based Question One: In paragraph___, ________________
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   ______________________________________________________
   Question Two:________________________________________
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5. Summarize Ortega’s views on human nature (What does he think?).
   Summary: In *Man Has No Nature*, Ortega argues that_________
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6. Assess and reflect upon Ortega’s views on human nature (What do you think?).
   Reflection: I think ________________________________________
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