

Observation of Human Nature and Eddie Rickenbacker's Common Sense Realism

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (June 2023)



Edward Rickenbacker next to his Nieuport 28, Toul, France (National Archives)

Yes, there is a poetry in the sky. There is poetry in the clouds, in the moon, in the sun, in every phase of the universe.—Eddie Rickenbacker, An Autobiography

Philosophical reflection is impossible without observation of the world around us. The absence of observation gives us

useless abstractions, baseless theories, and destructive ideologies. Knowledge and wisdom are the fruit of observation. Yet observation and a keen sense of space and time are only the beginning of knowledge, for the greater concern is how to appropriate our perception of human experience to a life well lived.

A life molded on observation of human reality does not find it fruitful to telegraph its findings in abstractions, for it is unpredictable how abstractions affect individuals. A person's ability to organize human experience into meaningful and purposeful cohesion ultimately depends on an individual's capacity for inference. This is also a question of temperament, vision, and vocation. This is one reason why common sense is a finer tool for making sense of human existence than smart-sounding abstractions.

Common sense guides man through the daily maze of perceptions that man must organize. It is common sense that provides man with the most effective, practical, and reliable metrics about human reality. In addition, common sense acts as a checks and balances that sheds light on lazy human perception—or the lack thereof—of physical reality.

Circa 2023, the principles of human nature and reality that Western civilization has brought to light are now well seasoned and irrefutable. Whether in science, philosophical reflection or cultural and social/political organization, these principles are on display for thoughtful people who pay heed to the world of man and natural processes.

Intelligence and Human Reality

Intelligence uncovers objective principles of nature and human reality; hypocrisy, affectation, and ideology destroy them. As far as human nature is concerned, there is nothing new under the stars. This is a question of man's capacity for inference;

natural psychology and intelligence, truly.

The sophomoric notion of utopians and opportunists, as the case may be, that man can perfect human nature in order to achieve a 'higher consciousness' brings about violence and misery. Human history has proven this to be the case time and again.

Philosophical self-reflection remains the best tool that man has to assuage the contingencies of human reality. The ancient Greek historian, Thucydides, a man who died in 399/398 B.C., came to this realization when he writes, "history is philosophy teaching by example." *Oh lá lá, c'est trop nouvelle!* Just don't tell this to the barbarians at the gate.

Discerning minds embrace the realization that culture and the civilizations that man creates and destroys operate in cycles, like the seasons. These cycles are the unnecessary result of failed ideas, bad will, and a penchant for destruction that wipe out the truth-bearing insights of clear-headed, good-willed persons. This is why fashionable theories that violate the long-standing relationship between truth and human nature only appeal to short-sighted, ideologically rabid individuals.

In the twenty-first century, philosophical reflection can no longer afford to feign intelligence and appeal to utopian social-political experimentation. To continue to do so will bring about an untold apocalypse. Marcus Aurelius' visionary thought can enlighten us: "Philosophy is a modest profession, all simplicity and plain dealing. Never try to seduce me into solemn pretentiousness."

Early Twentieth Century Optimism

The start of the twentieth century was a time of optimism brought about by the prospect of mechanization and the promise of alleviating the daily toil of work. This was a time of

innovation and inventions that were to revolutionize daily life.

Self-discipline, prescient observation of the world, and the failings of human nature are the mother of invention and industry. Human events, more so than history, tell no lies. There can be no true understanding of history without paying attention to human events. Two of the inventions that would come to define the dawn of the twentieth century are the automobile and the airplane. Both blossomed in a very short period of time.

Eddie Rickenbacker, Flyer and Man Extraordinaire

Captain Eddie Rickenbacker (1890-1973) lived what can be considered by all accounts a remarkable life. He is remembered as a pilot ace with the 95th Air Squadron during World War I, with 26 kills.



World War I was the first time that airplanes were used in combat. Only a short time prior to WWI airplanes were called flying machines. The psychology of people at that time viewed airplanes as machines that fly. The excitement that mechanization generated in the lives of people at the start of

the twentieth century can be characterized as originating in innocence and curiosity, two staple characteristics of healthy human beings that have vanished from the world today.

Not long after the start of WWI, airplanes were outfitted with machine guns. At that time being a pilot was an unprecedented, dangerous profession: cavalry of the sky.

Eddie Rickenbacker was also a successful automobile racer and manufacturer, a high-level military advisor, and President of Eastern Airlines. He published three insightful books: *Seven Came Through*, *Fighting the Flying Circus* and *Rickenbacker: An Autobiography*.

Seven Came Through details Rickenbacker's harrowing ordeal of being adrift on a raft in the Pacific Ocean for 24 days, after the B-17 that he was flying in ran out of fuel. The book contains his now famous essay "Message to America."

As a young boy Rickenbacker was taught by his father to appreciate that machines need to be useful. He writes in *Rickenbacker: An Autobiography*: "...Papa asked me to remember two things: He told me never to get mixed up with a machine I didn't know how to control and that there was no value in a machine that didn't serve a useful purpose." This is a testament to the idea that the time-consuming, energy-draining process of creating useful machines enable the mind to become focused on singular objectives.

Rickenbacker writes in his eponymous autobiography how his father was proud of his work, and that he was contributing to the building of a nation: "He was proud of his work. He realized that in his own way he was helping to build America. He had come from a tiny country in which three languages were spoken. Now he was in one great country with one language, one common goal."

The Wright Brothers, Glenn Curtiss, and William Boeing, to cite only a few early aviation visionaries, are fine examples

of meticulous planning and the resolve needed to build their flying machines. The idea that machines should serve a purpose is consistent with the life-affirming worldview of a time of toil and scarcity. In our own time, we now know what happens to vision and industriousness in a time of plenty.

After working many odd jobs as a young man, Rickenbacker found work as an automobile mechanic and racecar driver. Both of these jobs would mark him as a man. When WWI began, Rickenbacker learned to fly.

Rickenbacker joined the United States Army Air Service, reaching the rank of Captain, with the now legendary 94th 'Hat in the Ring' Aero Squadron. He was an Ace of Aces during WWI, bringing down 26 enemy airplanes.

Rickenbacker was awarded the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Medal for Merit, and in France, the Legion of Honour and Croix de Guerre. After the war, he created the Rickenbacker Car Company and bought the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which he managed for ten years. In 1938 he became GM of Eastern Air Lines.

In addition to his published books, Rickenbacker also published several important articles on economics and the spread of communism throughout the world, including "Conservatism Must Face up to Liberalism" (1961) and "Americanism vs. Communism" (1969).

Rickenbacker: A Biography is a remarkable book, insightful and prescient about the nature of man, the world, and the future of both. Rickenbacker is brilliant in his assessment that the 'center' cannot hold under the social/political direction, namely the spread of communism throughout the world, the world embarked on after WWII. The book was published in 1967, and even before then, Rickenbacker was foresighted about the imminent danger that communist China would pose for the world: "On my travels through the Orient in 1962, I was informed by

authorities with whom I spoke that the grand design of the leaders of communist China was to infiltrate, guerilla fashion, into the so-called 'rural' areas of the world—Asia, Africa and Latin America.”

Table of Contents

Pedro Blas González is Professor of Philosophy in Florida. He earned his doctoral degree in Philosophy at DePaul University in 1995. Dr. González has published extensively on leading Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. His books have included [*Unamuno: A Lyrical Essay*](#), [*Ortega's 'Revolt of the Masses' and the Triumph of the New Man*](#), [*Fragments: Essays in Subjectivity, Individuality and Autonomy*](#) and [*Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega's Philosophy of Subjectivity*](#). He also published a translation and introduction of José Ortega y Gasset's last work to appear in English, "Medio siglo de Filosofía" (1951) in [*Philosophy Today*](#) Vol. 42 Issue 2 (Summer 1998). His most recent book is [*Philosophical Perspective on Cinema*](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [**@NERIconoclast**](#)