



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

DEPARTMENT FOR  
CONTINUING EDUCATION

# Philosophy of History

Week 5: Nietzsche (I)

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UNZEITGEMÄSSE  
BETRACHTUNGEN

VON

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ZWEITES STÜCK:

VOM NUTZEN UND NACHTHEIL

DER HISTORIE FÜR DAS LERNEN.

LEIPZIG.  
VERLAG VON F. W. FRIEDRICH.  
1874.

# 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life'

## 'history'

- *Historie*, not *Geschichte*
- the knowledge we have of the past (whatever it might amount to), not the totality of the human past (and future)
- 'historical sense' human beings have or can have

## 'uses'

- teleological ?
- the sense we have of the past is to serve and sustain human life in the present
- the *telos* not one which is to be understood as being realized *in and through* history; rather in some sense external to history

- *‘there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture.’ (§1¶3/62)*
- *‘the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture’ (§1¶4/63)*

# 2 temporalities (first contrast)

## unhistorical

- the absence of a sense of time (living in the present)

## historical

- the sense of time (burdened by past [and future])
- Our temporal/historical sense needs to be limited, to have horizons, in order for us to live healthily and vigorously, to create and act. Too much history is pernicious: *forgetting is necessary*

# 2 temporalities (second contrast)

## historical

- the sense of time (burdened by past [and future])

## suprahistorical

- seeing through history, and accessing the timelessness which underlies it and which is endlessly repeated within it
- similar to tragic insight as described in *The Birth of Tragedy*?

# So three temporalities:

- *unhistorical*: animal/child; being completely in the present; having a horizon; happiness, action.
- *historical*: human; being related to, burdened by the past (driven into the future); history as problem.
- *suprahistorical*: quasi-divine?; grasp of the unhistorical in history; insight into history itself (as ordinarily understood) as illusion.

# ways in which 'history stands in the service of life' (§1¶12/67)

1. monumental
2. antiquarian
3. critical

# analysis of the three ways

- a. the type of person whom the particular use of history assists;
- b. how it discloses the historical domain;
- c. the possible danger the use presents;
- d. how it might be thought to fail as history

# monumental

- ‘That the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain, that this chain unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks, that the summit of such a long-ago moment shall be for me still living, bright and great – that is the fundamental idea of the faith in humanity which finds expression in the demand for a monumental history.’ (§2¶2/68)

- ‘greatness was once *possible*’ (§2¶3/69)
- ‘relay-race of monumental history’ (§2¶2/68)
- ‘Monumental history is the masquerade costume in which their hatred of the great and powerful of their own age is disguised as satiated admiration for the great and powerful of past ages [...]; whether they are aware of it or not, they act as though their motto were: let the dead bury the living.’ (§2¶6/72)

# antiquarian

- ‘veneration of the past’ (§3¶1/73)
- ‘degenerates [and] is no longer animated and inspired by the fresh life of the present [...] no longer conserves life but mummifies it’ (§3¶3/75)

# critical

- the past: ‘worthy to be condemned’
- ‘human violence and weakness’ (§3¶5/76)
- ‘For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain.’ (§3¶5/76)

use of history	appropriate person:	danger for life	fails as history
<b><i>critical</i></b>	‘one who suffers and is in need of liberation’	overly destructive	denies continuity
<b><i>antiquarian</i></b>	‘one who preserves and venerates’	reactionary, repressive	undiscriminating, narrow
<b><i>monumental</i></b>	‘one who acts and strives’	canonical sclerosis	fictionalizes

[The ‘one who...’ quotes are from §2¶1/67]

one needs ‘a certain kind of knowledge of the past, now in the form of monumental, now of antiquarian, now of critical history’ (§4¶1/77)

the three uses reflect *within* the historical the distinction *between* the unhistorical, historical and suprahistorical:

<b>temporality</b>	<b>use of history</b>
unhistorical	critical
historical	antiquarian
suprahistorical	monumental

# a *fourth* kind of history

- *history as science*
- Ranke: displaying the past 'as it really was'
- four problems (summarized §5¶1/83):
  1. weakening of personality (§§4-5)
  2. attitude towards the past (§6)
  3. inhibiting aspirations towards the future (§7)
  4. the 'end of history' (§§8-9)

# ‘weakened personality’

- ‘As the Roman of the imperial era became un-Roman in relation to the world which stood at his service, as he lost himself in the flood of foreigners which came streaming in and degenerated in the midst of the cosmopolitan carnival of gods, arts and customs, so the same must happen to modern man who allows his artists in history to go on preparing a world exhibition for him [...].’ (§5¶2/83)

# inhibiting future aspirations

- ‘When the historical sense reigns *without restraint*, and all its consequences are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live.’ (§7¶1/95)

# the end of history?

## **'ironic modesty'**

- we are epigones
- the old age of humanity ?
- narrative of decline

## **arrogance**

- humanity now at its zenith
- Hegel (§8¶4-5/104-105)
- narrative of progress

- ‘But the human race is a tough and persistent thing and will not permit its progress forwards or backwards to be viewed in terms of millennia, or indeed hardly in terms of hundreds of millennia; that is to say, it will not be viewed as a whole *at all* by that infinitesimal atom, the individual man.’  
(§8¶1/101)

# history as itself the *solution*

- ‘the origin of historical culture [...] *must* itself be known historically, history *must* itself resolve the problem of history, knowledge *must* turn its sting against itself – this threefold *must* is the imperative of the “new age”, supposing this age really does contain anything new, powerful, original and promising more life.’ (§8¶2/102-103)

# history gives us access to:

- ‘the original ancient Greek world of greatness, naturalness and humanity [where we] *discover the reality of an essentially unhistorical culture and one which is nonetheless, or rather on that account, an inexpressibly richer and more vital culture*’ (§8¶2/103)

# cure for the ‘historical sickness’

- ‘the unhistorical and the suprahistorical [...]. With the word “the unhistorical” I designate the art and power of *forgetting* and of enclosing oneself within a bounded horizon; I call “suprahistorical” the powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, towards *art* and *religion*.’ (§10 ¶¶7-9/120)