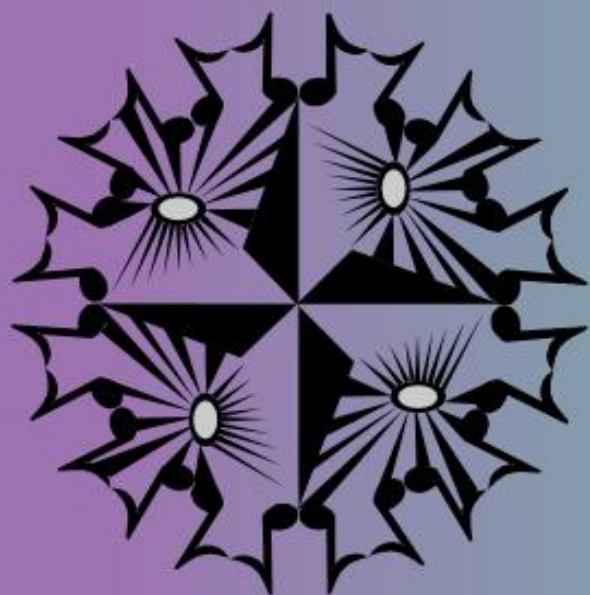


Friedrich Nietzsche
On the Use and Abuse
of History for Life



Translated by Ian Johnston

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Nietzsche
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In the following English text the comments in square brackets and the footnotes have been added by the translator.

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ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF HISTORY FOR LIFE

PREFACE

“Incidentally, I despise everything which merely instructs me without increasing or immediately enlivening my activity.” These are Goethe’s words. With them, as with a heartfelt expression of *Ceterum censeo*, our consideration of the worth and the worthlessness of history may begin.¹ For this work is to set down why, in the spirit of Goethe’s words, we must in all seriousness despise instruction without vitality, knowledge which enervates activity, and history as an expensive surplus of knowledge and a luxury, because we still lack what is still most essential to us and because what is superfluous is hostile to what is essential. To be sure, we need history. But we need it in a manner different from the way in which the spoiled idler in the garden of knowledge uses it, no matter how elegantly he may look down on our coarse and graceless needs and distresses. That is, we need it for life and for action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and from action or for merely glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to serve history only insofar as it serves living. But there is a degree of doing history and valuing it through which life atrophies and degenerates. To bring this phenomenon to light as a remarkable symptom of our time is now every bit as necessary as it may be painful.

I have tried to describe a feeling which has often enough tormented me. I take my revenge on this feeling when I expose it to the general public. Perhaps with such a description someone or other will have reason to point out to me that he also knows this sensation but that I have not felt it with sufficient purity and naturalness and definitely have not expressed myself with the appropriate certainty and mature experience. Perhaps one or two will respond in this way. However, most people will tell me that this feeling is totally wrong, unnatural, abominable, and absolutely forbidden, that with it, in fact, I have shown myself unworthy of the powerful historical tendency of the times, as it has been, by common knowledge, observed for the past two generations, particularly among the Germans. Whatever the reaction, now that I dare to expose myself with this natural description of my feeling, common decency will be fostered rather than shamed, because I am providing an opportunity for many people to make polite pronouncements about a contemporary trend like the one just mentioned. Moreover, I obtain for myself something of even more value to me

¹Goethe: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1739-1842), Germany’s most famous literary genius; *Ceterum censeo*: “I judge otherwise,” a Latin expression made famous by Cato the Elder (c. 200 BC) in his attacks on Carthage.

than respectability: I become publicly instructed and set straight about our times.

This essay is also out of touch with the times because here I am trying for once to see as a contemporary disgrace, infirmity, and defect something of which our age is justifiably proud, its historical culture. For I believe, in fact, that we are all suffering from a consumptive historical fever and at least should recognize that we are afflicted with it. If Goethe with good reason said that with our virtues we simultaneously cultivate our faults as well and if, as everyone knows, a hypertrophic virtue—as the historical sense of our age appears to me to be—can serve to destroy a people just as well as a hypertrophic vice, then people may make allowance for me just this once. Also, in my defence I should not conceal the fact that the experiences which aroused in me these feelings of torment I have derived for the most part from myself and from others only for the purpose of comparison and that, insofar as I am a student of more ancient times, particularly the Greeks, I come as a child of these present times to such anachronistic experiences concerning myself. But I must be allowed to ascribe this much to myself on account of my profession as a classical philologist, for I would not know what sense classical philology would have in our age unless it is to be effective by its inappropriateness for the times, that is, in opposition to the age, thus working on the age, and, we hope, for the benefit of a coming time.

1

Observe the herd which is grazing beside you. It does not know what yesterday or today is. It springs around, eats, rests, digests, jumps up again, and so from morning to night and from day to day, with its likes and dislikes closely tied to the peg of the moment, and thus is neither melancholy nor weary. To witness this is difficult for man, because he boasts to himself that his human condition is better than the beast's and yet looks with jealousy at its happiness. For he wishes only to live like the beast, neither weary with things nor in pain, and yet he wants it in vain, because he does not desire it as the animal does. One day the man demands of the beast: "Why do you not talk to me about your happiness and only gaze at me?" The beast wants to answer, too, and say: "That comes about because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say." But by then the beast has already forgotten this reply and remains silent, so that the man keeps on wondering about it.

But he also wonders about himself, that he is not able to learn to forget and that he always hangs onto the past. No matter how far or how fast he may run, the chain runs with him. It is something amazing: the moment, in one sudden motion there, in one sudden motion gone, before nothing, afterwards nothing, nevertheless comes back again as a ghost and disturbs

the tranquillity of a later moment. A leaf is continuously released from the roll of time, falls out, flutters away—and suddenly flutters back again into the man's lap. For the man says, "I remember," and envies the beast, which immediately forgets and sees each moment really perish, sink back in cloud and night, and vanish forever. Thus, the beast lives *unhistorically*. For it goes into the present like a number without any odd fraction left over; it does not know how to play a part, hides nothing, and appears in each moment exactly and entirely what it is. And so a beast can be nothing other than honest. The human being, by contrast, braces himself against the large and ever-increasing burden of the past, which pushes him down or bows him over. It makes his way difficult, like an invisible and dark weight, which he can for appearances' sake at some point deny and which he is only too happy to deny in his interactions with his peers, in order to awaken their envy. Therefore, it moves him, as if he imagined a lost paradise, to see the grazing herd or, something more closely familiar, the child, which does not yet have a past to deny and plays in blissful blindness between the fences of the past and future. Nonetheless, this game must be upset for the child. It will be summoned all too soon out of its forgetfulness. For it learns to understand the expression "It was," that password with which struggle, suffering, and weariness come over human beings, so as to remind it what its existence basically is—a past tense that is never over and done with. If death finally brings the longed-for forgetting, nevertheless, in the process, at the same moment it destroys the present and life and thus impresses its seal on that knowledge that existence is only an uninterrupted living in the past [*Gewesensein*], something which exists for the purpose of self-denial, self-destruction, and self-contradiction.

If happiness or a reaching out for new happiness is in some sense or other what holds the living person onto life and pushes him forward into continued living, then perhaps no philosopher has more justification than the cynic. For the happiness of the beast, like that of the complete cynic, is the living proof of the rightness of cynicism. The smallest happiness, if only it is uninterrupted and makes one happy, is incomparably more happiness than the greatest which comes only as an episode, as a mood, so to speak, as an amazing interruption between nothing but boredom, desire, and deprivation. However, with the smallest and with the greatest happiness there is always one way in which happiness becomes happiness: through the ability to forget or, to express the matter in a more scholarly fashion, through the capacity, for as long as the happiness lasts, to sense things *unhistorically*. Anyone who cannot set himself down on the crest of the moment, forgetting everything from the past, who is not capable of standing on a single point, like a goddess of victory, without dizziness and fear, will never know what happiness is, and, even worse, he will never do

anything to make other people happy. Imagine the most extreme example, a person who did not possess the power of forgetting at all, who would be condemned to see everywhere a coming into being. Such a person no longer believes in his own being, no longer believes in himself, sees everything in moving points flowing out of each other, and loses himself in this stream of becoming. He will, like the true pupil of Heraclitus, finally hardly dare any more to lift his finger.² Forgetting belongs to all action, just as not only light but also darkness belong in the life of all organic things. A person who wanted to feel utterly and only historically would be like someone who had been forced to abstain from sleep or like the beast that is to continue its life only from rumination to constantly repeated rumination. And so it is possible to live almost without remembering, indeed, to live happily, as the beast demonstrates, but it is completely and utterly impossible to live at all without forgetting. Or, to explain myself even more simply concerning my thesis: *There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of the historical sense, through which something living comes to harm and finally perishes, whether it is a person or a people or a cul-ture.*

In order to determine this degree of history and, through that, the borderline at which the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present, we would have to know precisely how great the *plastic force* of a person, a people, or a culture is. I mean that force of growing in a different way out of oneself, of reshaping and incorporating the past and the foreign, of healing wounds, compensating for what has been lost, rebuilding shattered forms out of one's self. There are people who possess so little of this force that they bleed to death incurably from a single experience, a single pain, often even from a single tender injustice, as from a really small bloody scratch. On the other hand, there are people whom the wildest and most horrific accidents in life and even actions of their own wickedness injure so little that right in the middle of these experiences or shortly after they bring the issue to a reasonable state of well being and a sort of quiet conscience. The stronger the roots which the innermost nature of a person has, the more he will appropriate or forcibly take from the past. And if we were to imagine the most powerful and most immense nature, then we would recognize there that for it there would be no frontier at all over which the historical sense would be able to grow or cause damage. Everything in the past, in its own and in the most alien, this nature would draw upon, take it into itself, and, as it were, transform into blood. What such a nature does not subjugate it knows how to forget. It is there no more. The horizon is closed and complete, and nothing can recall that there still are men, passions, doctrines, and purposes beyond it. And this is a general principle: each living being can become healthy,

²Heraclitus: pre-Socratic Greek philosopher (c. 500 BC).

strong, and fertile only within a horizon. If it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself and too egotistical to enclose its own view within an alien one, then it wastes away there, pale or weary, to an early death. Cheerfulness, good conscience, joyful action, trust in what is to come—all these depend, with the individual as with a people, on the following facts: that there is a line which divides what is observable and bright from what is unilluminated and dark, that we know how to forget at the right time just as well as we remember at the right time, that we feel with powerful instinct the time when we must perceive historically and when unhistorically. This is the specific principle which the reader is invited to consider: *that for the health of a single individual, a people, and a culture the unhistorical and the historical are equally essential.*

Now, at this point everyone makes the initial observation that a person's historical knowledge and feeling can be very limited, his horizon hemmed in like that of an inhabitant of an Alpine valley; in every judgment he might set down an injustice and in every experience he may mistakenly assume he was the first to have it, and nevertheless, in spite of all injustice and every mistake he stands there in invincible health and vigour and fills every eye with joy, while close beside him the far more just and scholarly person grows ill and collapses, because the lines of his horizon are always being shifted about restlessly once again, because he cannot wriggle out of the much softer nets of his justices and truths to strong willing and desiring. By contrast, we saw the beast, which is completely unhistorical and which lives almost in the middle of a sort of horizon of points, and yet which exists with a certain happiness, at least without weariness and pretense. Thus, we will have to assess the capacity of being able to feel to a certain degree unhistorically as more important and more basic, to the extent that in it lies the foundation above which something right, healthy, and great, something truly human, can generally first grow. The unhistorical is like an enveloping atmosphere in which alone life generates itself, only to disappear again with the destruction of this atmosphere. The truth is that, in the process by which the human being, in thinking, reflecting, comparing, separating, and combining, first limits that unhistorical element, the process by which inside that surrounding misty cloud a bright gleaming beam of light first arises, only then, through the power of using the past for living and making history again out of what has happened, does a person first become a person. But in an excess of history the human being stops once more; and without that cover of the unhistorical he would never have started and dared to start. Where do the actions occur which human beings are capable of doing without previously having gone into that misty patch of the unhistorical? Or to set pictures to one side and to grasp an example for illustration: imagine a man whom a violent passion, for a woman or for a great idea, shakes up and draws forward.

How his world is changed for him! Looking backwards, he feels blind; listening to the side he hears the strangeness like a dull sound empty of meaning. What he is generally aware of he has never yet perceived as so true, so perceptibly close, coloured, resounding, illuminated, as if he is comprehending with all the senses simultaneously. All his estimates of worth are altered and devalued. He is unable any longer to value so many things, because he can hardly feel them any more. He asks himself whether he has been the fool of strange words and strange opinions all this time. He is surprised that his memory turns tirelessly in a circle but is nevertheless too weak and tired just to make a single leap out of this circle. It is the most unjust condition of the world, narrow, thankless with respect to the past, blind to dangers, deaf to warnings, a small living vortex in a dead sea of night and forgetting. But this condition—unhistorical, thoroughly anti-historical—is the birthing womb not only of an unjust deed but even more of every just deed, and no artist would achieve his picture, no field marshal his victory, and no people its freedom, without previously having desired and striven for them in that sort of unhistorical condition. As the active person, according to what Goethe said, is always without conscience, so he is also always without knowledge. He forgets most things in order to do one thing; he is unjust towards what lies behind him and knows only one right, the right of what is to come into being now. So every active person loves his deed infinitely more than it deserves to be loved, and the best deeds happen in such an excess of love that they would certainly have to be unworthy of this love, even if their worth were otherwise incalculably great.

Should a person be in a position to sniff out and catch the fragrance in many examples of this unhistorical atmosphere, in which every great historical event has arisen, then such a person might perhaps be able, as a knowledgeable being, to elevate himself to a *superhistorical* standpoint, in the way Niebuhr once described it as a possible result of historical observations: “In one thing at least,” he says, “is history, clearly and thoroughly grasped, useful, the fact that one knows, as even the greatest and highest spirits of our human race do not know, how their eyes have acquired by chance the way in which they see and the way in which they forcefully demand that everyone see, forcefully, that is, because the intensity of their awareness is particularly great. Someone who has not, through many illustrations, precisely determined, known, and grasped this point is overthrown by the appearance of a mighty spirit who in a given shape presents the highest form of passionate dedication.”³ We could call such a standpoint *superhistorical*, because a person who assumes such a stance could feel no more temptation to continue living and to participate in history,

³Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831), a prominent German statesman and historian.

since he would have recognized the *single* condition of every event, that blindness and injustice in the soul of the man of action. He himself would have been cured from now on of still taking history excessively seriously. But he would have learned, for every person and for every experience, among the Greeks or Turks, from a moment of the first or of the nineteenth century, to answer for himself the questions how and why people lived. Anyone who asks his acquaintances whether they would like to live through the last ten or twenty years over again will easily perceive which of them has been previously educated for that superhistorical point of view. For they will probably all answer “No!”, but they will substantiate that “No!” differently. Some of them perhaps with the hope “But the next twenty years will be better.” Those are the ones of whom David Hume mockingly says:

And from the dregs of life hope to receive,
What the first sprightly running could not give.⁴

We wish to call these the historical people. The glance into the past pushes them into the future, fires their spirit to take up life for a longer time yet, kindles the hope that justice may still come and that happiness sits behind the mountain up which they are tramping. These historical people believe that the meaning of existence will come increasingly to light in the course of its own *process*. Therefore, they look backwards only to understand the present by considering the previous process and to learn to desire the future more keenly. In spite of all their history, they do not understand at all how unhistorically they think and act and also how their concern with history stands, not in service to pure knowledge, but to living.

But that question whose first answer we have heard can be answered again in a different way, that is, once more with a “No!” but with a “No!” that has a different grounding. The denial comes from the superhistorical person, who does not see salvation in the process and for whom the world is much more complete and has attained its end in every single moment. What could ten new years teach that the past ten years have not been able to teach!

Now, whether the meaning of the theory is happiness or resignation, or virtue, or repentance, on that issue the superhistorical people have never been united. But contrary to all the historical ways of considering the past, they do come to full unanimity on the following principle: the past and the present are one and the same, that is, in all their multiplicity typically identical, and as unchanging types everywhere and always present, they

⁴David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish philosopher. The quotation comes from John Dryden’s play *Aurengzebe*, 4.1. Nietzsche offers the quotation in English.

are a motionless picture of immutable values and an eternally similar meaning. Just as the hundreds of different languages correspond to the same typically permanent needs of people, so that someone who understood these needs could learn nothing new from all the languages, in the same way the superhistorical thinker illuminates for himself all the histories of people and of individuals from within, guessing like a clairvoyant the original sense of the different hieroglyphics and gradually even growing tired avoiding the constantly new streams of written signals streaming forth. For, in the endless excess of what is happening, how is he not to reach saturation, supersaturation, and, yes, even revulsion, so that the most daring one is perhaps finally ready, with Giacomo Leopardi, to say to his heart:

Nothing lives which would be worthy
of your striving, and the earth deserves not a sigh.
Pain and boredom is our being and the world is excrement,
—nothing else.
Calm yourself.⁵

However, let us leave the superhistorical people to their revulsion and their wisdom. Today for once we much prefer to become joyful in our hearts with our lack of wisdom and to make the day a good one for ourselves as active and progressive people, as those who revere the process. Let our evaluation of the historical be only a western bias, if only from within this bias we at least move forward and do not remain still! If only we always just learn better to carry on history for the purposes of *living!* For we wish happily to concede that the superhistorical people possess more wisdom than we do, if only, that is, we may be confident that we possess more life than they do. For in this way, at any rate, our lack of wisdom will have more of a future than their wisdom. Moreover, so as to remove the slightest doubt about the meaning of this contrast between living and wisdom, I wish to reinforce my argument with a method well established from time immemorial: I will immediately establish a few theses.

A historical phenomenon, purely and completely known and resolved into an object of knowledge, is, for the person who has recognized it, dead. For in it that person has perceived the delusion, the injustice, the blind passion, and in general the entire dark temporal horizon of that phenomenon and, at the same time, in the process he perceives its historical power. This power has now become for him, as a knower, powerless, but perhaps not yet for him as a living person.

⁵Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) a famous Italian poet. Nietzsche quotes the lines in German.

History, conceived as pure science, once it became sovereign, would be a kind of conclusion to living and a final reckoning for humanity.⁶ The historical culture, by contrast, is something healthy which bodes well for the future only when it comes with a powerful new stream of life, a developing culture, for example, and thus only at those times when it is ruled and led on by a higher power and does not itself govern and lead.

Insofar as history stands in the service of life, it stands in the service of an unhistorical power and will therefore, in this subordinate position, never be able to and should never become pure science, the way mathematics is, for example. However, the problem to what degree living generally requires the services of history is one of the most important questions and concerns with respect to the health of a human being, or a people, or a culture. For with a certain excess of history, living crumbles away and degenerates, and through this decay history itself also finally degenerates.

2

However, the fact that living requires the services of history must be understood just as clearly as the principle, which will be demonstrated later, that an excess of history harms the living person. In three respects history belongs to the living person: it belongs to him as an active and striving person; it belongs to him as a person who preserves and reveres; it belongs to him as a suffering person in need of emancipation. This trinity of relationships corresponds to a trinity of methods for history, to the extent that one may make the distinctions, a *monumental* method, an *antiquarian* method, and a *critical* method.

History belongs, above all, to the active and powerful man, the one who fights a great battle, who needs the exemplary men, teachers, and comforters and cannot find them among his contemporary companions. That is the way history belonged to Schiller: for our age is so bad, said Goethe, that the poet no longer encounters any useful nature in the human life surrounding him. In considering the active men, Polybius, for example, calls political history the right preparation for ruling a state and the most outstanding teacher, something which, through the memory of other people's accidents, advises us to bear changes in fortune with resolution.⁷ Anyone who has learned to recognize the sense of history in this way must get annoyed to see inquisitive travellers or painstaking micrologists clam-

⁶Here and throughout this book, Nietzsche uses the word *Wissenschaft* (translated as *science*) to denote all modern scholarship based on research into the facts. The word is not by any means confined to those subjects we commonly designate as science in the educational curriculum (i.e., natural science subjects, like physics, chemistry, and biology).

⁷Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), well-known German dramatist, poet, and philosopher. Polybius (203-120 BC), Greek historian.

bering all over the pyramids of the great things of the past. There, in the place where he finds the stimulation to imitate and to make things better, he does not wish to come across an idler who prowls around greedy for distraction or sensation, as if among the heaped-up art treasures of a gallery. In order not to despair and feel disgust in the midst of weak and hopeless idlers, surrounded by apparently active, but in reality only agitated and fidgeting companions, the active man looks behind him and interrupts the path to his goal to take a momentary deep breath. His purpose is some happiness or other, perhaps not his own, often that of a people or of humanity collectively. He runs back away from resignation and uses history as a way of fighting resignation. For the most part, no reward beckons him on, other than fame, that is, becoming a candidate for an honoured place in the temple of history, where he himself can be, in his turn, a teacher, consoler, and advisor for those who come later. For his orders state: whatever once was able to expand the idea of "Human being" and to satisfy it more beautifully must also constantly be present in order that it remain eternally possible. That the great moments in the struggle of single individuals make up a chain, that in them a range of mountains of humanity are joined over thousands of years, that for me the loftiest thing of such a moment from the distant past is still vital, bright, and great—that is the basic idea of the faith in humanity which expresses itself in the demand for a *monumental* history. However, with this very demand that greatness should be eternal there is ignited the most dreadful struggle. For everything else still living cries out "No!" The monumental should not be created—that is the opposition's slogan. The dull habit, the small and the base, filling all corners of the world, like a heavy atmosphere clouding around everything great, casts itself as a barrier, deceiving, dampening, and suffocating along the road which greatness has to go towards immortality. This way, however, leads through human brains! Through the brains of anxious and short-lived animals, who always come back to the same needs and who with difficulty fend off their destruction for a little while. For as a first priority they want only one thing: to live at any price. Who might suppose among them that difficult torch race of monumental history, through which alone greatness lives once more! Nevertheless, a few of them always wake up again, those who, by a look back at past greatness and strengthened by their observation, feel so blessed, as if the life of human beings is a beautiful thing, as if it is indeed the most beautiful fruit of this bitter plant to know that in earlier times one man once went through this existence proud and strong, another with profundity, a third with pity and a desire to help—all however leaving behind *one* teaching: that the person lives most beautifully who does not think about existence. If the common man considers this time span with such melancholy seriousness and longing, those men on their way to immortality and to monumental history knew how to treat things with an Olympian laughter or

at least a lofty scorn. Often they climbed with irony into their graves, for what was there of them to bury! Surely only what had always impressed them as cinders, garbage, vanity, animality and what now sinks into oblivion, long after it was exposed to their contempt. But one thing will live on, the monogram of their most essential individual essence, a work, a deed, an uncommon inspiration, a creation. That will live, because no later world can do without it. In this most blissful form fame is indeed something more than the dearest piece of our *amour propre*, as Schopenhauer has called it. It is the belief in the unity and continuity of the greatness of all times. It is a protest against the changes of the generations and against transience!⁸

Now, what purpose is served for contemporary man by the monumental consideration of the past, by busying himself with the classical and rare person of earlier times? He derives from that the fact that the greatness which was once there at all events once was *possible* and therefore really will be possible once again. He goes along his path more bravely, for now the doubt which falls over him in weaker hours, that he might perhaps be wishing for the impossible, is beaten back from the field. Let us assume that somebody believes it would take no more than a hundred productive men, effective people brought up in a new spirit, to get rid of what has become culturally fashionable in German right now, how must it strengthen him to perceive that the culture of the Renaissance raised itself on the shoulders of such a crowd of a hundred men.

Nevertheless, to learn right away something new from the same example, how fleeting and weak, how imprecise that comparison would be! If the comparison is to carry out that powerful effect, how much of the difference must be missed in the process. How forcefully must the individuality of the past be wrenched into a general shape, with all its sharp corners and angles broken off for the sake of the correspondence! In fact, basically something that once was possible could appear possible a second time only if the Pythagoreans were correct in thinking that with the same constellations of the celestial bodies the same phenomenon on the Earth also had to repeat itself, even in small single particulars, so that when the stars have a particular position relative to each other, a Stoic and an Epicurean will, in an eternal recurrence, unite and assassinate Caesar and, with another stellar position, Columbus will eternally rediscover America.⁹ Only if the earth were always to begin its theatrical performance once

⁸ . . . *amour propre*: vain self esteem. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), an important German philosopher immediately before Nietzsche.

⁹ . . . *Pythagoreans*: follower of Pythagoras, a 6th century Greek philosopher. The phrase "a Stoic and an Epicurean" is a reference to Brutus and Cassius who led the conspiracy to murder Julius Caesar in 44 BC.

again after the fifth act, if it were certain that the same knot of motives, the same *deus ex machina*, the same catastrophe returned in determined intervals, could the powerful man desire monumental history in complete iconic *truthfulness*, that is, each fact in its precisely described particularity and unity, and thus probably not before astronomers have once again become astrologers.¹⁰ Until that time monumental history will not be able to produce that full truthfulness. It will always bring closer what is unlike, generalize, and finally make things equal. It will always tone down the difference in motives and events, in order to set down the monumental *effectus [effect]*, that is, the exemplary effect worthy of imitation, at the cost of the *causae [cause]*. Thus, because monumental history turns away as much as possible from the cause, we can call it with less exaggeration a collection of “effects in themselves,” of events which will have an effect on all ages. What is celebrated in folk festivals and in religious or military remembrance days is essentially such an “effect in itself.” It is the thing which does not let the ambitious sleep, which for enterprising people lies like an amulet on the heart, but it is not the true historical interconnection between causes and effects, which, fully recognized, would only prove that never again could anything completely the same fall out in the dice throw of future contingency.

As long as the soul of historical writing lies in the great *driving impulses* which a powerful man derives from it, as long as the past must be written about as worthy of imitation, as capable of being imitated, with the possibility of a second occurrence, history is definitely in danger of becoming somewhat altered, reinterpreted into something beautiful, and thus coming close to free poeticizing. Indeed, there are times when one cannot distinguish at all between a monumental past and a mythic fiction, for exactly the same impulses can be derived from one of those worlds as from the other. Thus, if the monumental consideration of the past *rules over* the other forms of analyzing it, I mean, over the antiquarian and the critical methods, then the past itself suffers *harm*. Really large parts of it are forgotten, despised, and flow off like an uninterrupted grey flood, and only a few embellished facts raise themselves up above, like islands. Something unnatural and miraculous strikes our vision of the remarkable people who become especially visible, just like the golden hips which the pupils of Pythagoras wished to attribute to their master. Monumental history deceives through its analogies. With its seductive similarities, it attracts the spirited man to daring acts and the enthusiastic man to fanaticism. If we imagine this history really in the hands and heads of talented egoists

¹⁰ *deus ex machina* (meaning *god from the machine*) is a phrase denoting an improbable conclusion to a drama, often involving theatrical machinery (e.g., a god descending from on high).

and wild crowds of evil rascals, then empires are destroyed, leaders assassinated, wars and revolutions instigated, and the number of historical “effects in themselves,” that is, effects without adequate causes, increased once more. So much for the reminders of the injuries which monumental history can cause among great and active people, whether they were good or evil. But look at what it brings about when the impotent and inactive empower themselves with it and use it!

Let us take the simplest and most frequent example. If we imagine to ourselves uncultured and weakly cultured natures energized and armed by monumental cultural history, against whom will they now direct their weapons? Against their hereditary enemies, the strong cultural spirits and thus against the only ones who are able to learn truly from that history, that is, for life, and to convert what they have learned into a higher practice [*Praxis*]. For them the path will be blocked and the air darkened, if people dance around a half-understood monument of some great past or other, like truly zealous idolaters, as if they wanted to state: “See, this is the true and real culture. Why concern yourself with those who are transforming themselves and wanting something new!” Apparently this dancing swarm possesses even the privilege of “good taste.” For the creative person always stands at a disadvantage with respect to someone who merely looks on and does not put his own hands to work, just as, for example, the political know-it-all has always been wiser, more just, and more considerate than the ruling statesman. But if we want to transfer into the realm of art the use of plebiscites and of the numerical majority and, as it were, require the artist to stand in his own defence before the forum of aesthetically inert types, then we can take an oath in advance that he will be condemned, not in spite of but precisely *because* of the fact that his judges have solemnly proclaimed the canon of monumental art (that is, in accordance with the official explanation of art which in all ages “has had effects”). Whereas, for the judges all art which is not yet monumental, because it is contemporary, is always, first, unnecessary, second, without pure tendencies, and, third, lacking that authority of history. On the other hand, their instinct tells them that art can be struck dead by art. The monumental is definitely not to rise up once more. And for that their instinct uses precisely what has the authority of the monumental from the past. And so they are connoisseurs of art because they generally like to get rid of art. They behave as if they were doctors, while basically they are concerned with mixing poisons. Thus, they develop their languages and their taste, in order to explain in their discriminating way why they so persistently disapprove of all the nourishing artistic food offered to them. For they do not want greatness to arise. Their method is to say: “See! Greatness is already there!” In truth, this greatness that is already there is of as little concern to them as what is emerging. Of that their life bears

witness. Monumental history is the theatrical costume in which they pretend that their hatred of the powerful and the great of their time is a fulfilling admiration for the strong and the great of past times. In this, through disguise they invert the real sense of that method of historical observation into its opposite. Whether they clearly know it or not, they certainly act as if their motto were: let the dead bury the living.

Each of the three existing types of history is right only for a *single* soil and a *single* climate; on every other one it grows up into a destructive weed. If a man who wants to create greatness uses the past at all, then he will empower himself through monumental history. On the other hand, someone who wishes to emphasize what is customary and what is traditionally valued cultivates the past as an antiquarian historian. Only the person whose breast is oppressed by a present need and who wants to cast off his load at any price has a need for critical history, that is, history which sits in judgment and passes judgment. From the thoughtless transplanting of growing things stem many ills: the critical man without need, the antiquarian without reverence, and the authority on greatness without the ability for greatness are the sort who turn into weeds estranged from their natural mother earth and therefore into degenerate growths.

3

History belongs secondly to the man who preserves and honours, to the person who with faith and love looks back in the direction from which he has come, where he has been. Through this reverence he, as it were, gives thanks for his existence. While he nurtures with a gentle hand what has stood from time immemorial, he wants to preserve the conditions under which he came into existence for those who are to come after him. And so he serves life. The possession of his ancestors' household goods changes the ideas in such a soul, for those goods are far more likely to take possession of his soul. The small, limited, crumbling, and archaic keep their own worth and integrity, because the conserving and honouring soul of the antiquarian person settles on these things and there prepares for itself a secret nest. The history of his city becomes for him the history of his own self. He understands the walls, the turreted gate, the dictate of the city council, and the folk festival like an illustrated diary of his youth, and he rediscovers for himself in all this his force, his purpose, his passion, his opinion, his foolishness, and his bad habits. He says to himself, here one could live, for here one can live, and here one will be able to go on living, because we are tenacious and do not collapse overnight. Thus, with this "We" he looks back over the amazing past lives of individuals and feels himself as the spirit of the house, the family, and the city. From time to time he personally greets from the distant, obscure, and confused centuries the soul of his people as his own soul. Feeling his way back, having a

premonition of things, a scent of almost lost tracks, an instinctively correct reading even of a past which has been written over, a swift understanding of the erased and reused parchments, which have, in fact, been erased and written over many times—these are his gifts and his virtues. With them stands Goethe in front of the memorial to Erwin von Steinbach.¹¹ In the storm of his feeling the veil of the historical cloud spread out between them was torn apart. He saw again the German work for the first time, “appearing out of the strong, rough German soul.” Such a sense and attraction led the Italians of the Renaissance and reawoke in their poets the old Italian genius, to a “wonderfully renewed sound of the ancient lyre,” as Jakob Burckhardt says.¹² But that antiquarian historical sense of reverence has the highest value when it infuses into the modest, raw, even meagre conditions in which an individual or a people lives a simple moving feeling of pleasure and satisfaction, in the way, for example, Niebuhr admits with honest sincerity he could live happily on moor and heath among free farmers who have a history, without missing art. How could history better serve living than by the fact that it thus links the less-favoured races and populations to their home region and home traditions, keeps them settled there, and prevents them from roaming around in foreign places looking for something better and, in search of that, fighting competitive wars? Sometimes it seems as if it is an obstinacy and lack of understanding which keeps individuals, as it were, screwed tight to these companions and surroundings, to this arduous daily routine, to these bare mountain ridges, but it is the most healthy lack of understanding, the most beneficial to the community, as anyone knows who has clearly experienced the frightening effects of an adventurous desire to wander away, sometimes even among entire hordes of people, or who sees close up the condition of a people which has lost faith in its ancient history and has fallen into a restless cosmopolitan choice and a constant search for novelty after novelty. The opposite feeling, the sense of well being of a tree for its roots, the happiness to know oneself in a manner not entirely arbitrary and accidental, but as someone who has grown out of a past, as an heir, flower, and fruit, and thus to have one’s existence excused, indeed justified—this is what people nowadays lovingly describe as the real historical sense.

Now, that is naturally not the condition in which a person would be most capable of dissolving the past into pure knowledge. Thus, we also perceive here what we discerned in connection with monumental history, that the past itself suffers, so long as history serves life and is ruled by the drive for

¹¹Erwin von Steinbach (1244-1318), a famous medieval German architect who built Strasburg Cathedral.

¹²Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), Swiss historian of art and culture.

living. To speak with some freedom through an illustration, the tree feels its roots more than it can see them. This feeling, however, measures their size by the size and strength of its visible branches. If the tree makes a mistake here, then how mistaken it will be about the entire forest around it! From that forest the tree only knows and feels something insofar as this hinders or helps it, but not otherwise. The antiquarian sense of a person, a civic community, or an entire people always has a very highly restricted field of vision. It does not perceive most things at all, and the few things which it does perceive it looks at far too closely and in isolation. It cannot measure it and therefore takes everything as equally important. Thus, for the antiquarian sense each single thing is too important. For it assigns to the things of the past no differences in value and proportions which would distinguish things from each other fairly, but always measures the mass and proportions of things only with reference to the antiquarian individual or people looking back into the past.

Here there is always a very imminent danger: in the end everything old and past, especially what still enters a field of vision, is simply taken as equally worthy of reverence, but everything which does not fit this respect for ancient things, like the new and the coming into being, is rejected and treated as hostile. So even the Greeks tolerated the hieratic style of their plastic arts alongside the free and the great styles. Indeed, they not only later tolerated the pointed noses and the frosty smiles, but even made them into an elegant fashion. When the sense of a people is hardened like this, when history serves the life of the past in such a way that it buries further living, especially higher living, when the historical sense no longer conserves life, but mummifies it, then the tree dies unnaturally, from the top gradually down to the roots, and at last even the roots are generally destroyed. Antiquarian history itself degenerates in that moment when it no longer inspires and fills with enthusiasm the fresh life of the present. Then reverence withers away. The scholarly habit lives on without it and orbits in an egotistical and self-satisfied manner around its own centre. Then we get a glimpse of the wretched spectacle of a blind mania for collecting, a restless compiling together of everything that ever existed. The man envelops himself in a mouldy smell. With the antiquarian style, he manages to corrupt even a more significant talent, a nobler need, into an insatiable lust for novelty, a desire for everything really old. Often he sinks so low that he is finally satisfied with any nourishment and takes pleasure in gobbling up even the dust of biographical rubbish.

But even when this degeneration does not enter into it, when antiquarian history does not lose the basis upon which it alone can take root as a cure for living, enough dangers still constantly remain, especially if it becomes too powerful and grows over the other ways of dealing with the past. Antiquarian history knows only how to *preserve* life, not how to generate

it. Therefore, it always undervalues what is coming into being, because it has no instinctive feel for it, the way, for example, monumental history has. Thus, antiquarian history hinders that powerful willing of new things; it cripples the active man, who always, as an active person, will and must set aside reverence to some extent. The fact that something has become old now gives birth to the demand that it must be immortal, for when a person reckons what every such ancient fact—an old custom of his fathers, a religious belief, an inherited political right—has undergone throughout its existence, what a sum of reverence and admiration from individuals and generations ever since, then it seems presumptuous or even criminal to replace such an antiquity with something new and to set up in opposition to such a numerous cluster of revered and admired things the single fact of what is coming into being and what is present.

Here it becomes clear how, often enough, a *third* method of analyzing the past is necessary for human beings, alongside the monumental and the antiquarian: the *critical* method. Once again this is in the service of living. In order to be able to live, a person must have the power and from time to time use it to break a past and to dissolve it. He manages to do this by dragging the past before the court of justice, investigating it meticulously, and finally condemning it. Every past is worthy of condemnation, for that is how it stands with human things: in them human force and weakness have always been strong. Here it is not righteousness which sits in the judgment seat or, even less, mercy which announces judgment, but life alone, that dark, driving, insatiable self-desiring force. Its sentence is always unmerciful, always unjust, because it never flows out of a pure spring of knowledge, but in most cases the sentence would be like that anyway, even if righteousness itself were to utter it. "For everything that arises is *worthy of perishing*. Therefore, it would be better that nothing arose." It requires a great deal of power to be able to live and to forget just how much living and being unjust are one and the same. Luther himself once voiced the opinion that the world only came into being through the forgetfulness of God; for if God had thought about "heavy artillery," he would not have made the world. From time to time, however, this same life, which uses forgetting, demands the temporary destruction of this forgetfulness. For it should be made quite clear how unjust the existence of something or other is, a right, a caste, a dynasty, for example, and how much this thing really merits destruction. For if its past is analyzed critically, then we grasp with a knife at its roots and go cruelly beyond all reverence. It is always a dangerous process, that is, dangerous for life itself. And people or ages serving life in this way, by judging and destroying a past, are always dangerous and in danger. For since we are now the products of earlier generations, we are also the products of their aberrations, passions, mistakes, even crimes. It is impossible to loose oneself from this

chain entirely. When we condemn those mistakes and consider ourselves released from them, then we have not overcome the fact that we are derived from them. In the best case, we bring the matter to a conflict between our inherited customary nature and our knowledge, in fact, even to a war between a new strict discipline and how we have been brought up and what has been congenital to us from time immemorial. We cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature atrophies. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were, a past *a posteriori* [*after the fact*], out of which we may be descended in opposition to the one from which we are descended, always a dangerous attempt, because it is so difficult to find a borderline to the denial of the past and because the second natures usually are weaker than the first. Too often what remains is a case of someone who understands the good without doing it, because we also understand what is better without being able to do it. But here and there victory is nevertheless achieved, and for the combatants, for those who make use of critical history for living, there is even a remarkable consolation, namely, they know that that first nature was at one time or another once a second nature and that every victorious second nature becomes a first nature.

4

These are the services which history can carry out for living. Every person and every people, according to its goals, forces, and needs, uses a certain knowledge of the past, sometimes as monumental history, sometimes as antiquarian history, and sometimes as critical history, but not as a crowd of pure thinkers merely peering at life, not as people eager for knowledge, individuals only satisfied by knowledge, for whom an increase of knowledge is the goal itself, but always only for the purpose of living and, in addition, under the command and the highest guidance of this purpose. This is the natural relationship to history of an age, a culture, and a people: summoned up by hunger, regulated by the degree of the need, held to limits by the plastic power within, the fact that the understanding of the past is desired at all times only to serve the future and the present, not to weaken the present, not to uproot a forceful living future. All that is simple, as the truth is simple, and is also immediately convincing even to someone who has not first been provided a historical proof of it.

And now for a quick look at our time! We are frightened and run back. Where has all the clarity gone, all the naturalness and purity of that connection between life and history? How confusedly, excessively, and anxiously this problem now streams before our eyes! Does the fault lie with us, the observers? Or has the constellation of life and history truly altered, because a powerful and hostile star has interposed itself between them? Other people might point out that we have seen things incorrectly.

We, however, wish to state what we think we see. For it is true that such a star has come in between, an illuminating and beautiful star. The constellation has truly changed—*through science, through the demand that history is to be a science*. Now not only does life no longer rule and control knowledge about the past, but also all the border markings have been ripped up, and everything that ever existed has come crashing down onto people. All perspectives have also been moved as far back as there has been a coming into being, far back into the endless depths. No generation ever saw such an incalculable spectacle as is shown now by the science of universal becoming, by history. Of course, history even demonstrates this with the dangerous boldness of its motto: *Fiat veritas, pereat vita*.¹³

Let us now picture to ourselves the spiritual result produced by this process in the soul of the modern man. Historical knowledge streams out of inexhaustible sources in on him, always renewing itself with more. Strange and disconnected things push forward. Memory opens all its gates and is nevertheless not open wide enough. Nature strives its utmost to receive these strange guests, to arrange and honour them. But these are at war with each other, and it appears necessary to overcome and restrain them all forcefully, in order not to destroy oneself in their conflict. Habituation to such a disorderly, stormy, and warring household gradually becomes a second nature, although it is immediately beyond question that this second nature is much weaker, much more restless, and entirely less healthy than the first. Modern man finally drags a huge crowd of indigestible rocks of knowledge around with him, which then occasionally audibly bang around in his body, as it says in fairy tales. Through this noise the most characteristic property of this modern man reveals itself: the remarkable contrast between an inside to which nothing on the outside corresponds and an outside to which nothing inside corresponds, a opposition of which ancient peoples were ignorant. Knowledge, taken up to excess without hunger, even in opposition to any need, now works no longer as a motive which reshapes and has a drive toward the outside. It stays hidden in a certain chaotic inner world, which that modern man describes with a strange pride as an “Inwardness” peculiar to him. Thus, people say that we have the content and that only the form is lacking. But with respect to every living person this is a totally improper contradiction. For that very reason our modern culture is not something living, because it does not let itself be understood at all without that contradiction; that is, it is really no true culture, but only a way of knowing about culture. There remain in it thoughts of culture, feelings of culture, but no cultural imperatives come from it. In contrast to this, what then really motivates and moves outward

¹³The Latin reads “Let the truth be done, and let life perish.” This is a reworking of the well-known Latin saying “*Fiat justitia ruat caelum*” meaning “Let justice be done though the heavens fall” (i.e., justice at all costs).

into visible action often amounts to not much more than a trivial convention, a pathetic imitation, or even a crude grimace. At that point the inner feeling is probably resting, like the snake which has swallowed an entire rabbit and then lies down contentedly still in the sunlight and avoids all movements other than the most essential. The inner process, that is now the entire business, that essentially is "culture." Everyone who wanders by has only one wish, that such a culture does not collapse from indigestion. Think, for example, of a Greek going past such a culture. He would perceive that for more recent people "educated" and "historically educated" appear to belong together, as if they were one and the same and distinguished only by the number of words. If he talked of his own principle that it is possible for an *individual* to be very educated and nevertheless not to be historically educated at all, then people would think they had not heard him correctly and shake their heads. That famous small nation from a not too distant past, I mean those very Greeks, in the period of their greatest power protected an unhistorical sense tenaciously. A contemporary person magically forced to return back into that world would presumably find the Greeks very "uneducated." In that reaction, of course, the secret of modern culture, so scrupulously disguised, would be exposed to public ridicule. For we modern people have nothing at all which comes from us. Only because we fill and overfill ourselves with foreign ages, customs, arts, philosophies, religions, and discoveries do we become something worthy of consideration, that is, like wandering encyclopaedias, as some ancient Greek who strayed into our age would perhaps put it. However, people encounter the entire value of encyclopaedias only in what is inside, in the contents, not in what is on the outside or in the binding and on the cover. Thus, all modern culture is essentially inner. The bookbinder has printed on the outside a phrase he knows by heart, something to this effect: Handbook of inner culture for external barbarians. In fact, this contrast between inner and outer makes the outer even more barbaric than it would have to be, if a rough people were evolving out of themselves only according to their basic needs. For what means does nature still have at its disposal to overcome the super-abundance forcing itself on it? Only one means, to take it as lightly as possible in order to shove it aside again quickly and dispose of it. From that arises a habit of not taking real things seriously any more. From that arises the "weak personality," as a result of which reality, what exists, makes only an insignificant impression. Finally on the outside people become constantly more negligent and more comfortable and widen the disturbing gulf between content and form until they are insensitive to the barbarism, so long as the memory is always newly stimulated, so long as constantly new things worthy of knowledge flow by, which can be neatly packaged in the compartments of memory. The culture of a people, as the contrast to that barbarism, was once described—with some justice, in my view—as a unity

of the artistic style in all expressions of the life of a people. This description must not be misunderstood, as if the issue were an opposition between barbarism and a *beautiful* style. The people to whom we ascribe a culture should in everything real only exist in a vital unity and not be split apart so miserably into inner and outer, into content and form. Anyone who wants to strive after and foster the culture of a people should strive after and foster this higher unity and, for the sake of a true culture, work to destroy the modern notion of being cultured. He should dare to think about how the health of a people which has been disturbed by history could be restored, how a people could find its instinct once again and with that its integrity.

Now I want to speak bluntly about us Germans of the present day. It is our lot to suffer more than other people from that weakness of the personality and from the contradiction between content and form. Form is commonly accepted by us Germans as a convention, as a disguise and a pretence, and is thus, when not hated, then at any rate not loved. It would be even more just to say that we have an extraordinary anxiety about the word convention and probably about the fact of convention as well. In this anxiety, the German abandoned the French school, for he wanted to become more natural and thereby more German. Now, however, with this “thereby” he seems to have made a miscalculation: having run off away from the school of convention, he now let himself go how and where he had the mere desire to go, and basically imitated haphazardly whatever he wanted in semi-forgetfulness of what in earlier times he imitated meticulously and often happily. Thus, measured against earlier times, even nowadays people still live according to a slipshod, incorrect French convention, as all our moving, standing, conversing, clothing, and dwelling demonstrate. While people believe they are escaping back to the natural, they think only about letting themselves go, about comfort, and about the smallest possible amount of self-control. Wander through a German city: everything is conventional, compared to the particular national characteristics of foreign cities. This shows itself in negatives: all is colourless, worn out, badly copied, apathetic. Each man goes about as he wishes, but not in response to a forceful desire rich in ideas, but following the laws which the general haste, along with the general desire for comfort, establish. A piece of clothing, whose invention required no brain power, whose production took no time, an article of clothing derived from foreigners and imitated as casually as possible, instantly counts among the Germans as a contribution to German national dress. The sense of form they disavow with perfect irony, for indeed they do have *the sense of the content*: after all, they are the renowned people of the inward life.

However, there is now a well-known danger with this inwardness: the content itself, which people assume they cannot see at all from the

outside, may at some point disappear. From the outside, however, people would not notice either its absence or its earlier presence. But even if people think that, in any case, the German people are as far as possible from this danger, the foreigner will always have a certain justification when he levels the accusation at us that our inner life is too weak and unorganized to be effective on the outside and to give itself a shape. This inward life can to a rare degree well prove delicately sensitive, serious, strong, and sincere, and perhaps even richer than the inner lives of other peoples. But as a totality it remains weak, because all the beautiful threads are not tied together into a powerful knot. Thus, the visible act is not the total action and self-revelation of this inwardness, but only a weak or crude attempt of a few strands or other to will something whose appearance might for once pass muster as the totality. And so one cannot judge the German at all according to a single action. As an individual he is still completely hidden after this action. As is well known, he must be measured by his thoughts and feelings, and he expresses these nowadays in his books. If only these very books did not awaken, in recent times more than ever, a doubt about whether the famous inwardness is really still sitting in its inaccessible little temple. It would be a horrible idea that one day it may have vanished and now the only thing still left behind is the externality, that arrogant, clumsy, and respectfully unkempt externality, as the hallmark of the German. Almost as terrible as if that inwardness, without people being able to see it, sat inside, counterfeit, coloured, painted over, and had become an actress, if not something worse, as, for example, Grillparzer, who stood on the sidelines as a quiet observer, appears to assume about his experience as a dramatist in the theatre: "We feel with abstractions," he says; "we hardly know any more how feeling expresses itself among our contemporaries. We let our feelings jump about in ways they no longer do nowadays. Shakespeare has destroyed everything for us moderns."¹⁴

This is a single example, perhaps too quickly generalized. But how fearful would his justified generalization be if the individual cases should force themselves upon the observer far too frequently; how despairingly the statement would echo: "We Germans feel with abstractions; we have all been corrupted by history," a statement which would destroy at the root every hope for a national culture still to come, for every hope of that kind grows out of the faith in the authenticity and the immediacy of German feeling, from the belief in the undamaged inner life. What is there still to be hoped for or still believed, if the wellspring of believing and hoping has deteriorated, if the inner life has learned to leap about, to dance, to put on make up, and to express itself with abstraction and calculation and gradu-

¹⁴Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872), Austrian dramatist.

ally to lose itself? And how is the great productive spirit still to maintain himself among a people which is no longer sure of its unified inner life and which falls apart into sections, with a miseducated and seduced inner life among the cultured and an inaccessible inner life among the uneducated? How is he to keep going if the unity of the people's feeling gets lost, if, in addition, he knows that the very part which calls itself the cultured portion of the people and which arrogates to itself a right to the national artistic spirit has false and dyed feeling. Here and there the judgment and taste of individuals may themselves have become finer and more sublimated, but that is no compensation for him. It torments the productive spirit to have to speak, as it were, only to one sect and no longer to be necessary within his own people. Perhaps he would now sooner bury his treasure, since it disgusts him to be exquisitely patronized by one sect, while his heart is full of pity for all. The instinct of the people no longer comes to meet him. It is useless to stretch out his arms toward it in yearning. What now still remains for him, other than to turn his enthusiastic hate against that restricting prohibition, against the barriers erected in the so-called culture of his people, in order at least, as a judge, to condemn what for him, the living person and the producer of life, is destruction and degradation? Thus, he exchanges the deep understanding of his own fate for the divine pleasure of the creator and helper and ends up a lonely man of knowledge, a supersaturated wise man. It is the most painful spectacle. Generally whoever sees it will recognize a holy need here. He tells himself: here it is necessary to give assistance; that higher unity in the nature and soul of a people must be established once more; that gulf between the inner and the outer must disappear again under the hammer blows of necessity. What means should he now reach for? But what remains for him now other than his deep understanding? By speaking out on this and spreading awareness of it, by sowing from his full hands, he hopes to plant a need. And out of the strong need will one day arise the strong deed. And so that I leave no doubt where I derive the example of that need, that necessity, that knowledge, here my testimony should stand explicitly, that it is *German unity* in that highest sense which we are striving for and striving for more passionately than for political reunification, *the unity of the German spirit and life after the destruction of the opposition of form and content, of inwardness and convention.*

In five respects the supersaturation of an age in history seems to me hostile and dangerous to life. Through such an excess that hitherto mentioned contrast between inner and outer is produced and, in the process, the personality is weakened; through this excess an age is caught up in the fantasy that it possesses the rarest virtue, justice, in a higher degree than any other time; through this excess the instincts of a people are dis-

rupted, and the individual no less than the totality is hindered from developing maturely; through this excess the always dangerous belief in the old age of humanity takes root, the belief that we are late arrivals and epigones; through this excess an age attains the dangerous mood of irony about itself and, from that, an even more dangerous mood of cynicism. In this, however, it increasingly ripens towards a cleverly egotistical practice, through which the forces of life are crippled and finally destroyed.

And now back to our first statement: modern man suffers from a weakened personality. Just as the Roman in the time of the Caesars became un-Roman with regard to the area of the earth standing at his disposal, as he lost himself among the foreign things streaming in and degenerated with the cosmopolitan carnival of gods, customs, and arts, so matters must go with the modern person who continually allows his historical artists to prepare the celebration of a world market fair. He has become a spectator, enjoying himself and wandering around, converted into a condition in which even great wars and huge revolutions are hardly able to change anything momentarily. The war has not yet ended, and already it is transformed on printed paper a hundred thousand times over; it is already being promoted as the newest stimulant for the exhausted palate of those greedy for history. It appears almost impossible that a strong and full tone will be produced even by the most powerful plucking of the strings. It dies away again immediately; in the next moment it is already growing fainter, softly evaporating without force into history. To state the matter in moral terms: you do not manage to hold onto what is noble any more; your deeds are sudden bangs, not rolling thunder. If the very greatest and most wonderful thing is accomplished, it must nevertheless move to Hades silently without any fuss. For art runs away when you instantly throw over your actions the roof of the historical marquee. The person who wants to understand, calculate, and grasp in an instant, where he should in an enduring shock hang onto the unknowable as something sublime, may be called intelligent, but only in the sense in which Schiller speaks of the understanding of the intelligent person: he does not see some things which even the child sees; he does not hear some things which even the child hears; these "things" are precisely the most important thing. Because he does not understand this, his understanding is more childish than the child and more simplistic than simple mindedness, in spite of the many shrewd wrinkles on his parchment-like features and the virtuoso practice of his fingers unraveling complexities. The reason is that he has destroyed and lost his instinct. Now he can no longer let the reins hang loose, trusting the "divine animal," when his understanding wavers and his road leads through deserts. Thus, the individual becomes timid and unsure and can no longer believe in himself. He sinks into himself, into the inner life. That means here only into the piled-up jumble of scholarly data which does not

work towards the outside, instruction which does not become living. If we look for a moment from outside, then we notice how the expulsion of instinct by history has converted people almost into nothing but *abstractis* [*abstractions*] and shadows. No one gambles his identity on that instinct any more. Instead he masks himself as cultured man, as scholar, as poet, as politician. If we seize such masks because we believe the matter is something serious and not merely a puppet show—for they all paper themselves over with seriousness— then we suddenly have only rags and bright patches in our hands. Therefore, we should no longer allow ourselves to be deceived and should yell at them, “Strip off your jackets or be what you seem.” No longer should everyone with seriousness in his blood turn into a Don Quixote, for he has something better to do than to keep getting into fights with such illusory realities. In any case, however, he must keenly inspect each mask, cry “Halt! Who goes there?” and pull the mask down onto its neck. Strange! We should have thought that history encouraged human beings above all to be *honest*, even if only an honest fool. This has always been its effect. But nowadays it is no longer that! Historical culture and the common uniform of the middle class both rule at the same time. While never before has there been such sonorous talk of the “free personality,” we never once see personalities, to say nothing of free people, but only anxiously disguised universal people. The individual has drawn himself back into the inner life: on the outside we no longer observe any of him. This being the case, we might not be certain whether, in general, there could be causes without effects. Or should a race of eunuchs be necessary as a guard over the great historical harem of the world? For them, of course, pure objectivity is well and truly established on their faces. However, it does seem almost as if it was their assignment to stand guardian over history, so that nothing comes out of it other than just histories, but without events, to ensure that through it no personalities become “free,” that is, true to themselves and true with respect to others in word and deed. Only through this truthfulness will the need, the inner misery of the modern man, see the light of day, and in place of that anxiously concealed convention and masquerade, art and religion will be able to enter as true helpers, in order to cultivate a common culture corresponding to real needs, culture which does not, like the present universal education, just teach one to lie to oneself about these needs and thus to become a wandering lie.

In what an unnatural, artificial, and definitely unworthy position must the most sincere of all sciences, the truly naked goddess Philosophy, be in a time which suffers from universal education. In such a world of compulsory external uniformity she remains the learned monologue of the solitary stroller, an individual’s accidental hunting trophy, a hidden parlour secret, or harmless prattle between academic old men and children. No

one is allowed to venture on fulfilling the law of philosophy in himself. No one lives philosophically, with that simple manly truth, which acted forcefully on a man in ancient times, wherever he was and whatever he did, to behave as a Stoic if he had once promised to be true to the Stoa. All modern philosophy is political and police-like, restricted to the appearance of learning through the ruling powers, churches, academies, customs, and human cowardice. What remains in it are sighs of "If only" or the knowledge of "Once upon a time." If philosophy wants to be more than an inner knowledge which holds one back and has no active effect, then it has no rights in the heart of historical education. If only the modern human being were, in general, courageous and decisive, if he were even in his hostility not just an inner being, he would banish philosophy. Thus, he contents himself by modestly covering up her nudity. Yes, people think, write, print, speak, and teach philosophically; to this extent almost everything is allowed. Only in action, in so-called living, are things otherwise. There only one thing is always allowed, and everything else is simply impossible. So historical culture wills it. Are they still human beings, we ask ourselves then, or perhaps only thinking, writing, and speaking machines?

Of Shakespeare Goethe once said, "No one hated the material costume more than he. He understood really well the inner costume of human beings, and here all people are alike. People say he presented the Romans excellently. I do not find that. They are nothing but inveterate Englishmen, but naturally they are human beings, people from the ground up, and the Roman toga suits them well enough." Now, I ask if it might also be possible to lead out our contemporary men of letters, men of the people, officials, and politicians as Romans. It will not work at all, because they are not human beings, but only physical compendia and, as it were, concrete abstractions. If they should have character and their own style, this is all buried so deep that it has no power whatsoever to wriggle out into the daylight. If they are to be human beings, then they are that only for the man "who tests the kidneys." For everyone else they are something other, not human beings, not gods, not animals, but historically educated pictures, completely and utterly education, picture, form without demonstrable content, unfortunately only bad form and, in addition, uniform. And in this sense may my claim be understood and considered: *History is borne only by strong personalities; the weak personalities it obliterates completely.* It comes down to this: history bewilders feeling and sensing where these are not strong enough to measure the past against themselves. Anyone who does not dare any longer to trust himself but who involuntarily seeks advice from history about his feelings by asking "What should I feel here?" in his timidity gradually becomes an actor and plays a role, usually, in fact, many roles, and therefore he plays each badly and superficially. Little by little all congruence between the man and his

historical sphere fails. We see small pushy young men associating with the Romans as if they were their equals. They rummage around and dig away in the remnants of the Greek poets, as if even these were *corpora* [bodies] ready for their post-mortem examination and were as *vilia* [vile] as their own literary *corpora* might be. Suppose there is a concern in one man's case with Democritus, then the question always on my lips is this: Why not Heraclitus? Or Philo? Or Bacon? Or Descartes? and so on to one's heart's content. And then, why just a philosopher? Why not a poet, an orator? And why particularly a Greek? Why not an Englishman, a Turk? Is the past then not large enough to find something, so that you do not make yourself look so gratuitously ridiculous by comparison? But, as I have mentioned, it is a race of eunuchs; for a eunuch one woman is like another, in effect, merely a woman, the woman-in-itself, the eternally unapproachable, and so what drives them is something indifferent, so long as history itself remains splendidly "objective" and, of course, protected by precisely the sort of people who could never create history themselves. And since the eternally feminine will never draw you upward, then you pull her down to yourselves and assume, since you are neuters, that history is also a neuter.¹⁵ However, so that people do not think that I am serious in comparing history with the eternally feminine, I wish to express myself much more clearly: I consider that history is the opposite of the eternally masculine, but for those who are "historically educated" through and through it must be quite unimportant whether history is one or the other. But whatever the case, such people are themselves neither male nor female, not something common to both, but always only neuter or, to express myself in a more learned way, they are just the eternally objective.

If personalities are, first of all, as has been described, deflated to an eternal loss of subjectivity or, as people say, to objectivity, then nothing more can work on them. Let something good and right come about, in action, poetry, or music. Immediately the person emptied out by his education looks out over the work and asks about the history of the author. If this author has already created a number of things, immediately the person must allow himself to point out the earlier and the presumed future progress of the author's development; right away he will bring in others for comparative purposes, he will dissect and rip apart the choice of the author's material and his treatment, and will, in his wisdom, fit the work together again anew, in general giving him advice and setting him right. Let the most astonishing thing occur; the crowd of historical neutrals is always in place ready to assess the author even from a great distance. Momentarily the echo resounds, but always as "Criticism." A short time

¹⁵The reference here is to the closing lines of Goethe's *Faust*, Part 2, "the eternal feminine draws us upward."

before, however, the critic did not permit himself to dream that such an event was possible. The work never achieves an effect, but only more "Criticism," and the criticism itself, in its turn, has no effect, but leads only to further criticism. In this business people have agreed to consider a lot of criticism as an effect and a little criticism or none as a failure. Basically, however, everything remains as in the past, even with this "effect." True, people chat for a while about something new, and then about something else new, and in between do what they always have done. The historical education of our critics no longer permits an effect on our real understanding, namely, something that produces an effect on life and action. On the blackest writing they impress immediately their blotting paper, to the most delightful drawing they apply their thick brush strokes, which are to be considered corrections. And then everything is over once again. However, their critical pens never cease flying, for they have lost power over them and are led on by them rather than leading them. It is precisely in this excess of their critical ejaculations, in the lack of control over themselves, in what the Romans call *impotentia* [*impotence*], that the weakness of the modern personality reveals itself.

6

However, let us leave this weakness. Let us rather turn to a much-praised strength of the modern person, with the truly awkward question whether, on account of his well-known historical "Objectivity," he has a right to call himself strong, that is, *just*, and just to a higher degree than the people of other times. Is it true that this objectivity originates from a heightened need and demand for justice? Or does it, as an effect with quite different causes, merely create the appearance that justice might be its real cause? Does this objectivity perhaps tempt one to a bias concerning the virtues of modern man, a bias which is detrimental because it is far too flattering? Socrates considered it an illness close to insanity to imagine oneself in possession of a virtue and not to possess it. Certainly such conceit is more dangerous than the opposite delusion, suffering from a mistake or vice. For through the latter delusion it is perhaps still possible to become better. The former conceit, however, makes a person or a time daily worse, and thus, in this case, less just.

It is true that no one has a higher claim on our veneration than the man who possesses the drive and the power for justice. For in justice are united and hidden the highest and rarest virtues, as in a bottomless sea that receives streams from all sides and absorbs them into itself. The hand of the just man authorized to sit in judgment no longer trembles when it holds the scales. Unsparringly he puts on weight after weight even against himself. His eye does not become dim when the scale pans rise and fall, and his voice rings out neither hard nor broken when he delivers the

verdict. If he were a cold daemon of knowledge, then he would spread out around him the ice-cold atmosphere of a terrifying superhuman majesty, which we would have to be afraid of and not revere. But since he is a human being and yet is trying to rise above venial doubt to a strong certainty, above a patient leniency to an imperative "You must," above the rare virtue of magnanimity to the rarest virtue of all, justice, since he now is like this daemon, but from the very beginning without being anything other than a poor human being, and above all, since in each moment he has to atone for his humanity and be tragically consumed by an impossible virtue, all this places him on a lonely height, as the example of the human race *most worthy of reverence*. For he wants truth, not merely as cold knowledge without consequences, but as the ordering and punishing judge, truth not as a selfish possession of the individual but as the sacred entitlement to shift all the boundary stones of egotistical possessions, in a word, truth as the Last Judgment and not at all as something like the captured trophy desired by the individual hunter. Only insofar as the truthful man has the unconditional will to be just is the striving after truth, which is so thoughtlessly glorified everywhere, something great. By contrast, in the case of duller eyes, a large number of very different sorts of drives, like curiosity, the flight from boredom, resentment, vanity, playfulness, which have nothing at all to do with the truth, blend in with that striving for truth, which has its roots in justice. So the world does indeed seem to be full of such people who "serve the truth," and yet the virtue of justice is very seldom present, even more rarely recognized, and almost always hated to the death; whereas, the crowd of the apparently virtuous in every age marches around with honour and a great public display. In truth, few people serve truthfulness, because only a few have the purity of will to be just, and even among these, the fewest have the strength to be capable of being just. It is certainly not enough to have only the will for justice. And the most horrible sufferings among human beings have come directly from the drive for justice without the power of judgment. For this reason the general welfare would require nothing more than to scatter the seeds of the power of judgment as widely as possible, so that the fanatic remained distinguishable from the judge and blind desire to be a judge distinguishable from the conscious power to be able to judge. But where would one find a means of cultivating the power of judgment! Thus, when there is talk of truth and justice, people will remain in an eternal wavering hesitation whether a fanatic or a judge is talking to them. Hence, we should forgive them if they have always welcomed with special kindness these "servers of the truth" who possess neither the will nor the power to judge and who set themselves the task of searching for knowledge which is "pure and without consequences" or, more clearly, of searching for the truth from which nothing emerges. There are a great many trivial truths; there are problems that never require effort, let alone

any self-sacrifice, in order for one to judge them correctly. In this realm of the trivial and the safe, a person indeed succeeds in becoming a cold daemon of knowledge. And yet! When, in especially favourable times, whole cohorts of learned people and researchers are turned into such daemons, it always remains unfortunately possible that the time in question suffers from a lack of strict and great justice, in short, of the noblest kernel of the so-called drive to the truth.

Let us now place before our eyes the historical virtuoso of the present age. Is he the most just man of his time? It is true that he has cultivated in himself such a tenderness and sensitivity of feeling that for him nothing human is far distant. The most different times and people ring out at once from his lyre in harmonious tones. He has become a tuneful passive thing, which through its resounding tone also works on other passive things of the same type, until finally the entire air of an age is full of such delicate reverberations, twanging away in concord. But, in my view, in every original historical major chord we hear only its overtone, so to speak: the sturdiness and power of the original can no longer be sensed in the celestially thin and sharp sound of the strings. Whereas the original tone usually aroused actions, needs, and terrors, this lulls us to sleep and makes us weak hedonists. It is as if we have arranged the *Eroica Symphony* for two flutes and use it for dreamy opium smokers. By that we may now measure among these virtuosi how things will stand concerning the highest demands of modern man for a loftier and purer justice; this virtue never has anything pleasant, knows no attractive feelings, and is hard and terrifying. Measured by that, how low even magnanimity stands now on the ladder of virtues, magnanimity, the characteristic of a few rare historians! But for many more it is a matter only of tolerance, of allowing to remain valid what cannot be once and for all denied, of editing and glossing over in a moderate and benevolent way, of a clever acceptance of the fact that the inexperienced man interprets it as a virtue of justice if the past is generally explained without harsh accents and without an expression of hatred. But only the superior power can judge. Weakness must tolerate, unless it wishes to feign strength and turn justice on the judgment seat into a performing actress. Now, there still remains one fearful species of historian: efficient, severe, and honest characters, but with narrow heads. Here good will to be just is present, together with strong feeling in the judgments. But all their judicial pronouncements are false, roughly for the same reasons that the judgments of the ordinary sworn juries are false. And so how unlikely the frequency of historical talent is! To say nothing at all here about the disguised egoists and fellow travellers, who adopt a thoroughly objective demeanour for the insidious games they play. And by the same token to say nothing of the entirely unthinking people who write as historians in the naive belief that their own age is exactly right in all its

popular views and that to write by the standards of this age generally amounts to being right, a faith in which every religion lives and about which, in the case of religions, there is nothing more to say. Those naive historians call "Objectivity" the process of measuring past opinions and deeds by the universal public opinions of the moment. Here they find the canon of all truths. Their work is to adapt the past to contemporary triviality. By contrast, they call "subjective" all history writing which does not take those popular opinions as canonical.

And might not an illusion have crept into even the highest interpretation of the word objectivity? For with this word, people understand a condition in the historian in which he looks at an event in all its motives and consequences with such purity that they have no effect at all on his subject. They mean that aesthetic phenomenon, that state of being detached from one's personal interests, with which the painter in a stormy landscape, under lightning and thunder, or on the moving sea looks at his inner picture and, in the process, forgets his own person. Thus, people also demand from the historian the artistic tranquillity and the complete immersion in things. However, it is a myth that the picture which things bring out in a person constituted in this way reflects the empirical essence of things. Or is it the case that through their own activity, as it were, at these times things depict themselves, draw a good likeness of themselves, or photograph themselves on a purely passive medium?

This would be a mythology and, on top of that, a bad one. In addition, people might forget that that very moment is the most powerful and most spontaneous creative moment in the inner life of the artist, a moment of composition of the very highest order, whose result may well be a true artistic picture, not a historically true one. To think of history as objective in this way is the silent work of the dramatist, that is, to think of everything one after the other, to weave the isolated details into a totality, always on the condition that a unity of the plan in the material has to be established, if it is not inherent in it. Thus, man spins a web over the past and tames it; in this way he expresses his artistic impulse, but not his drive for truth, his drive for justice. Objectivity and justice have nothing to do with each other. One might imagine a historical writing which had no drop of the common empirical truth in it and yet which might be entitled to claim the highest rating on a scale of objectivity. Indeed, Grillparzer ventures to clarify this point. "What is history then other than the way in which the spirit of man takes in the *events which are impenetrable* to him, something in which only God knows whether there is a relationship holding it together, in which that spirit replaces something incomprehensible with something comprehensible, from the outside underwrites with his ideas of purposefulness a totality which really can be known only from within, and also assumes chance events, where a thousand small

causes were at work. At any one time everyone has his own individual necessity so that millions of trends run next to each other in parallel, crooked, and straight lines, intersect each other, help, hinder, flow forward and backwards, thus taking on in relation to each other the character of chance and, to say nothing of the effects of natural events, therefore render it impossible to prove a compelling, all-encompassing necessity for events." However, it is precisely such necessity, the result of that "objective" look at the matter at hand, which is supposed to be revealed! This is an assumption which, when it is voiced as dogma by the historian, can only assume an odd form. Schiller, in fact, is completely clear concerning the essential subjectivity of this assumption, when he says of the historian: "One phenomenon after another begins to liberate itself from blind contingency and lawless freedom and to become joined as a coordinated link into a harmonious totality, *which, of course, is present only in its depiction.*" But how should we consider the assertion made in good faith by a famous historical virtuoso, a claim hovering artificially between tautology and absurdity: "The fact is that all human action and striving are subordinate to the light and often unnoticed but powerful and irresistible progress of things"? In such a statement we do not feel any enigmatic wisdom expressing itself as obvious illogic, as in the saying of Goethe's gardener, "Nature may let itself be forced but not compelled," or in the inscription on a booth in a fair ground, as Swift tells it, "Here you can see the largest elephant in the world except itself." For what is, in fact, the difference between the actions and the drives of men and the process of things? Besides, it strikes me that such historians, like that one from whom we quoted a sentence, cease to instruct as soon as they generalize and then reveal a sense of their own weakness in their obscurities. In other sciences generalizations are the most important thing, insofar as they contain laws. However, if statements like the one we quoted were to serve as valid laws, one would have to reply that then the work of the writer of history is changed, for what remains generally true in such statements, once we remove the irreconcilably dark remainder we spoke about, is well known and even trivial. For it will be visibly apparent to everyone in the smallest area of experience. However, for that reason to inconvenience entire peoples and to spend wearisome years of work on the subject amounts to nothing more than, as in the natural sciences, to pile experiment on experiment long after the law can be inferred from the present store of experiments. Incidentally, according to Zoellner, natural science nowadays allegedly suffers from a senseless excess of experimentation.¹⁶ If the value of a drama is to lie only in the main and concluding ideas, then drama itself would be the furthest possible route to the goal, crooked and laborious. And thus I hope history can realize that its significance is not in

¹⁶Johann Karl Friedrich Zoellner (1834-1882), a well-known German astronomer.

universal ideas, like some sort of blossom or fruit, but that its value comes directly from reworking a well-known, perhaps habitual theme, a daily melody, in a stimulating way, elevating it, intensifying it to an inclusive symbol, and thus allowing one to make out in the original theme an entire world of profundity, power, and beauty.

What is appropriate, however, in this process, before everything else, is a great artistic potential, a creative hovering above and a loving immersion in the empirical data, a further poetical composing on the given types—to this process objectivity certainly belongs, but as a positive quality. But too often objectivity is only a phrase. Instead of that inwardly flashing, externally unmoving and mysterious composure in the artist's eyes, the affectation of composure emerges, just as the lack of pathos and moral power habitually disguises itself in a biting coldness of expression. In certain cases, the banality of the conviction ventures to appear, that wisdom of every man, which merely because of its tediousness creates the impression of a calm, unexcited person, in order to pass muster as that artistic condition in which the subject is silent and becomes completely imperceptible. So everything which generally does not rouse emotion is sought out, and the driest expression is precisely the correct one. Indeed, people go as far as to assume that the person whom a moment in the past *does not affect in the slightest* is competent to present it. Philologists and Greeks frequently behave towards each other in this way. They do not concern themselves with each other in the least. And people also call this "objectivity"! Now, it is precisely in those places where the highest and rarest matter is to be presented, that it is absolutely outrageous to find the solemn state of indifference, something put on for show, the acquired flat and sober art of seeking out motives, especially when the *vanity* of the historian drives toward this objective behaviour of indifference. Incidentally, with such authors people should base their judgment more closely on the principle that each man's vanity is inversely proportional to his understanding. No, at least be honest! Do not seek the appearance of the artistic power truly called objectivity, and do not seek the appearance of justice, if you have not been ordained for the fearful vocation of the just man. As if it also were the work of every age to have to be just in relation to everything that has ever been! In fact, times and generations never have the right to be the judges of all earlier times and generations. Such a troublesome task always falls only to individuals, indeed, to the rarest people. Who compels you to judge? And so, just test yourselves, whether you could be just, if you wanted to! As judges you would have to stand higher than what is being judged, whereas, you have only come later. The guests who come last to the table should in all fairness receive the last places. And you wish to have the first? Then at least do something of the

highest and best order. Perhaps people will then really make a place for you, even if you come at the end.

You can interpret the past only on the basis of the highest power of the present. Only in the strongest tension of your noblest characteristics will you surmise what from the past is great and worth knowing and preserving. Like by like! Otherwise you drag the past down to your level. Do not believe a piece of historical writing if it does not spring out of the head of the rarest of spirits. You will always perceive the quality of its spirit if it is forced to express something universal or to repeat once more something universally known. The true historian must have the power of reshaping the universally known into what has never been heard and to announce what is universal so simply and deeply that people overlook the simplicity in the profundity and the profundity in the simplicity. No person can be simultaneously a great historian, an artistic person, and a numskull. On the other hand, people should not rate as insignificant the workers who run around shaking things and sifting through them, on the ground that they will certainly not be able to become great historians. Even less should we confuse these workers with great historians. Instead, we should see them as the necessary colleagues and manual labourers in the service of the master, in something like the way the French, with greater naiveté than is possible among the Germans, were accustomed to speak of the *historians of Monsieur Thiers*.¹⁷ These workers should gradually become great scholars, but for that very reason cannot ever become masters. An eminently learned man and a great numskull—those certainly go together more easily under a *single* hat.

Thus, the person of experience and reflection writes history. Anyone who has not lived through something greater and higher than everyone else will not know how to interpret anything great and lofty from the past. The utterance of the past is always an oracular pronouncement. You will understand it only as a master builder of the future and as a person who knows about the present. People now explain the extraordinarily deep and far-reaching effect of Delphi by the particular fact that the Delphic priests had precise knowledge about the past.¹⁸ It is appropriate now to understand that only the man who builds the future has a right to judge the past. In order to look ahead, set yourselves an important goal, and at the same time control that voluptuous analytical drive with which you now lay waste the present and render almost impossible all tranquillity, all peaceful growth and maturing. Draw around yourself the fence of a large and extensive hope, an optimistic striving. Create in yourselves a picture to

¹⁷Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), well-known French historian.

¹⁸Delphi was the site of the most famous oracle in ancient Greece, where for centuries people went to obtain advice on personal and political matters.

which the future is to correspond, and forget the myth that you are epigones. You have enough to plan and to invent when you ponder that future life. But in considering history do not ask that she show you the "How?" and the "With what?" If, however, you live your life in the history of great men, then you will learn from her the supreme command: to become mature and flee away from that paralyzing and restricting upbringing of the age, which sees advantages for itself in not allowing you to become mature, in order to rule and exploit you, the immature. And when you ask after biographies, then do not ask for those with the refrain "Mr. Soandso and His Age" but for those whose title page must read "A Fighter Against His Age." Fill your souls with Plutarch, and dare to believe in yourselves when you have faith in his heroes.¹⁹ With a hundred people raised in such an unmodern way, that is, people who have become mature and familiar with the heroic, one could permanently silence the entire noisy pseudo-culture of this age.

7

When the historical sense reigns *unchecked* and drags along with it all its consequences, it uproots the future, because it destroys illusions and takes from existing things the atmosphere in which they alone can live. Historical justice, even if it is practised truly and with a purity of conviction, is therefore a fearful virtue, because it always undermines what is living and brings about its downfall. Its judgment is always an annihilation. If behind the historical drive no constructive urge is at work, if things are not destroyed and cleared away so that a future, something already alive in hope, builds its dwelling on the liberated ground, if justice alone rules, then the creative instinct is enfeebled and disheartened. For example, a religion which is to be turned into historical knowledge under the power of pure justice, a religion which is to be scientifically understood through and through, is by the end of this process immediately destroyed. The reason for this is that in the historical method of reckoning so many false, crude, inhuman, absurd, and violent things always emerge that the pious atmosphere of illusion in which alone everything that wants to live can live necessarily disappears. But only in love, only in a love overshadowed by illusion, does a person create, that is, only in the unconditional belief in what is perfect and right. Anything which compels a person no longer to love unconditionally cuts away the roots of his power. He must wither up, that is, become dishonest. In effects like this, history is opposed by art. And only when history undertakes to be turned into an art work and thus to become a purely artistic picture can it perhaps maintain the instincts or even arouse them. Such historical writing, however, would go completely against the analytical and inartistic trends of our time; indeed, they would

¹⁹Plutarch c. 46-77, Greek historian famous for his celebration of great men's lives.

consider it counterfeit. But history which only destroys, without an inner drive to build guiding it, in the long run makes its implements blasé and unnatural. For such people destroy illusions, and “whoever destroys illusions in himself and others is punished by the sternest tyrant, nature.”²⁰ True, for a fairly long time one can keep oneself really busy with history completely harmlessly and thoughtlessly, as if it were an occupation as good as any other. The newer Theology, in particular, seems to have become involved with history purely harmlessly, and even now it hardly wishes to notice that, in doing so, it stands, probably very much against its will, in the service of Voltaire’s *écrasez*.²¹ No one should assume that behind this there is a new powerfully constructive instinct. For that we would have to let the so-called Protestant Union be considered the maternal womb of a new religion and someone like lawyer Holtzendorf (the editor of and chief spokesman for the even more questionable Protestant Bible) as John at the River Jordan.²² For some time perhaps the Hegelian philosophy still clouding older heads will assist in promoting that harmlessness, somewhat in the way that people differentiate the “Idea of Christianity” from its manifold incomplete “apparent forms” and convince themselves it is really just a matter of the “preferred tendency of the idea” to reveal itself in ever purer forms, and finally as certainly the purest of all and the most transparent, that is, the hardly visible form in the brain of the present *theologus liberalis vulgaris* [*liberal theologian for the rabble*]. However, if we listen to this purest of all Christianities expressing itself concerning the earlier impure forms of Christianity, then the uninvolved listener often has the impression that the talk is not about Christianity at all, but of—now, what are we to think if we find Christianity described by the “greatest theologian of the century” as the religion which makes the claim that “it can be felt in all true and even in a few other barely possible religions” and when the “true church” is to be the one which “becomes a flowing mass, where there is no outline, where each part finds itself sometimes here, sometimes there, and everything mingles peacefully with everything else.” Once again, what are we to think?²³

What we can learn from Christianity, how under the effect of a historicizing treatment it has become blasé and unnatural, until finally a fully historical, that is, an impartial treatment dissolves it into pure knowledge

²⁰The quotation comes from Goethe.

²¹Voltaire (1694-1778), very famous French essayist, playwright, and man of letters. His slogan “*écrasez l’infame*” [*crush the infamy*] became a famous rallying cry against religious superstition and the abuses carried out by the church.

²²The Protestant Union was a long-standing military alliance of the Protestant states in Germany.

²³The “greatest theologian of the century” is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), an important Protestant thinker.

about Christianity and thereby destroys it, that fact we can study in everything which has life. It ceases to live when it is completely dissected, and it exists in pain and sickness, if we start to practice historical dissection on it. There are people who believe in a revolutionary and reforming art of healing in German music among German people. They get angry and consider it an injustice committed against the most living aspect of our culture when even such men as Mozart and Beethoven are inundated nowadays with the entire scholarly welter of biographical detail and are compelled through the systematic torture of historical criticism to answer to a thousand importunate questions. Through this method, is it not the case that something which has definitely not yet exhausted its living effects is dismissed as irrelevant or at least paralyzed, because we direct our curiosity at countless microscopic details of the life and the work and seek problems of knowledge in places where we should learn to live and to forget all problems? Think about a pair of such modern biographers set in the birth place of Christianity or of Luther's Reformation. Their dispassionate pragmatic curiosity would immediately manage to make every spiritual *actio in distans* [action at a distance] impossible, just as the most wretched animal can prevent the origin of the most powerful oak by gobbling down the acorn. All living things need an atmosphere around them, a secret circle of darkness. If this veil is taken from them, if people condemn a religion, an art, a genius to orbit like a star without an atmosphere, then they should no longer wonder about their rapid decay and the way they become hard and barren. That is the way it is now with all great things "which never succeed without some delusion," as Hans Sachs says in the *Meistersinger*.²⁴

But every people, indeed every person, who wishes to become *mature*, also needs such an enveloping delusion, such a protecting and veiling cloud. Today, however, people generally despise becoming mature, because they honour history more than living. In fact, people exult over the fact that now "science is beginning to rule over living." It is possible that people will attain that goal, but it is certain that a life so governed is not worth much, because it is much less *living* and it establishes a life for the future far less than does the previous life governed, not by knowledge, but by instinct and powerful illusory images. But, as stated, it is clearly not to be the era of people who have become fully developed and mature, of harmonious personalities, but the era of common work which is as useful as possible. That, however, amounts simply to the fact that people are to be trained for the purposes of the time, in order to get to work with their hands as promptly as possible. They are to labour in the factories of universal

²⁴Hans Sachs (1494-1576) was the most famous of the medieval German master singers and a character in Richard Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger*.

utilities before they are mature, indeed, so that in the process they really no longer become mature, because this would be a luxury which would deprive the “labour market” of a lot of power. We blind some birds, so that they sing more beautifully. I do not think that people nowadays sing more beautifully than their grandfathers, but I do know this: we blind them early. But the method, the disreputable method which people use to blind them, is *excessively bright, excessively sudden, and excessively changing* light. The young person is whipped through all the millennia. Youngsters who understand nothing about a war, a diplomatic action, or a trade policy are considered worthy of being introduced to political history. But then, just as the young person races through history, so we moderns race through the store rooms of art and listen to concerts. We really do feel that something sounds different from something else, that something has a different effect from something else. Constantly losing this feeling of surprise, becoming excessively astonished no longer about anything, finally allowing oneself to enjoy everything—people call that the historical sense, historical culture. Without saying anything to gloss over what I am saying: the mass of stuff streaming in is so great, what is strange, barbaric, and forceful, “concentrated in a dreadful cluster,” presses so overpoweringly on the young soul that it knows how to rescue itself only with a deliberate apathy. Where a keener and stronger consciousness is firmly established, then indeed a very different feeling appears: disgust. The young man has become so homeless and has doubts about all customs and ideas. Now he knows this fact: in every age things have been different, and what you are like is irrelevant. In melancholy absence of feeling he lets opinion after opinion flow past him and understands the feeling in Holderlein’s words in response to his reading of Laertius Diogenes concerning the life and teaching of the Greek philosophers: “Here I have also experienced more of what I have already come across sometimes, that what passes temporarily by and what comes and goes in human thoughts and systems strike me as almost more tragic than the fates which we usually call the only realities.”²⁵ No, such an overwhelming, anaesthetizing, and powerful historicizing is certainly not required for the young, as the ancients demonstrate, and is, indeed, dangerous in the highest degree, as more recent people reveal. But now let us really look at the historical student, the inheritor of a blasé attitude, already apparent all too early, almost in childhood. Now the “method” in personal work, the right grip and the elegant tone of the master’s manner, have become his own. An entire isolated little chapter of the past has fallen victim to his keen mind and the method he has learned. He has already produced, indeed, in prouder language, he has “created.” He has now become a

²⁵Holderlein (1770-1843), important German Romantic poet. Laertius Diogenes, a biographer of the Greek philosophers in the third century.

servant of truth through his actions and a master in the world empire of history. If, as a child, he was already “prepared,” now he is already over-prepared. One needs only to shake him for wisdom to fall into one’s lap with a rattle. But the wisdom is rotten, and each apple has its own worm. Believe me on this point: when people work in the scientific factory and are to become useful before they are mature, then science itself is quickly ruined, just as the slaves used too early in this factory are ruined. I regret that we even find it necessary to use the verbal jargon of the slave holder and employer to describe such relationships, which should be thought of as free from utility, free from life’s needs, but the words “Factory, labour market, bargain, exploitation,” uttered like all the words assisting egoism, spontaneously press themselves on the lips when we want to describe the youngest generation of scholars. The stolid mediocrity becomes ever more mediocre, science becomes ever more practical economically. Essentially all the most recent scholars are wise in only a *single* point, and in that naturally wiser than all people of the past. In all other points they are, to speak with care, only infinitely different from all the scholars of the old stamp. Nevertheless they demand respect and perquisites for themselves, as if the state and public opinion were under an obligation to consider the new coins just as valuable as the old. The labourers have made a working compact among themselves and decreed that genius is superfluous because each labourer is stamped as a genius. Presumably a later time will consider how they have piled up a structure, not built it together. To those who tirelessly proclaim the modern cry of combat and sacrifice “Division of labour! In rows and tiers!” we can once and for all say clearly and firmly: If you want to advance science as quickly as possible, you will destroy it as quickly as possible, just as you destroy hens, which you artificially compel to lay eggs much too quickly. Well, in the last decades science has been promoted at an astonishing rate. But take a look now at the scholars, the exhausted hens. There are in truth no “harmonious” natures. They can only cackle more than before, because they lay eggs more often. Naturally, however, the eggs have become constantly smaller (although the books have grown constantly thicker). As the final natural result, things resign themselves to the commonly loved “Popularizing” of science (in addition to the “Feminization” and “Infantization”), that is, the notorious tailoring of the scientific coat to the body of the “motley public” (I am attempting here for once to cultivate a type of cutting German to describe an activity appropriate to tailors). Goethe saw an abuse in this and demanded that sciences should have an effect on the external world only through an *enhanced praxis*. Besides, to the older generations of scholars such an abuse appeared for good reasons difficult and tiresome. For similarly good reasons it comes easily to the younger scholars, because they themselves, with the exception of a really small corner of knowledge, are very much the motley public and carry its needs in themselves. They only need to

settle themselves down comfortably for once in order for them to succeed in opening up even their own small area of study to the miscellaneous needs of popular curiosity. People pretend that behind this action of making themselves comfortable stands the title “the modest condescension of the scholar for his people”; while at bottom the scholar, to the extent that he is not a learned man but a member of the rabble, is only descending into himself. If you create for yourself the idea of a “people,” then you can never think sufficiently nobly and highly of it. If you thought highly of a people, then you would also be compassionate towards them and would be on your guard against offering them your historical nitric acid as a living and refreshing drink. But at the deepest level you think little of the people, because you are permitted to have no true and confidently based respect for their future, and you operate as practical pessimists, I mean as people led by the premonition of destruction, people who thus become indifferent and permissive towards the welfare of others, in fact, even towards their own. If only the soil still supports *us*! And if it no longer carries us, then that is also all right. In this way they feel and live an *ironic* existence.

8

In fact, it should seem odd, although not contradictory, when to the age which so audibly and insisently is in the habit of bursting out in the most carefree exultation over its historical culture, I nevertheless ascribe a kind of *ironical self-consciousness*, a presentiment which hovers all around it that here is nothing to rejoice about, a fear that perhaps soon all the celebrations over historical knowledge will be gone. Goethe proposed to us a similar enigma with respect to a single personality in his remarkable characterization of Newton: he found at bottom (or more correctly, at the top) of his being “a dark premonition of his own error,” something like the expression, noticeable in solitary moments, of a consciousness with a superior power of judgment, which had gained a certain ironical perspective over the essential nature dwelling inside him. Thus we find, particularly in the greater and more highly developed historical people, a consciousness, often toned down to a universal skepticism, of how much folly and superstition are in the belief that the education of a people must be so overwhelmingly historical as it is now, but it has been precisely the most powerful people, that is, powerful in deeds and works, who have lived differently and have raised their young people differently. However, that folly and that superstition suit us—so runs the skeptical objection—us, the late comers, the faded last shoots of more powerful and more happily courageous generations, us, in whom one can see realized Herod’s prophecy that one day people would be born with instant grey beards and that Zeus would exterminate this generation as soon as that sign became visible to him. But historical culture is really a kind of congenital grey-

haired condition, and those who bear its mark from childhood on would have to come to the instinctive belief in the *old age of humanity*. However, in old age what is suitable now is an old person's occupation, that is, looking back, tallying the accounts, balancing the books, seeking through memories consolation in what used to be—in short, a historical culture. The human race, however, is a tough and persistent thing and does not wish to have its steps forward and backwards viewed according to millennia, or indeed hardly according to hundreds of thousands of years. That is, it does *not at all* wish to be viewed as a totality by the infinitely small atomic particle of the individual person. Then what will a couple of thousand years signify (or, put another way, the time period of thirty-four consecutive human lives, reckoned at sixty years each) so that we can still speak of the beginning of such a time as still the "Youth of Mankind" and the end of it as already the "Old Age of Mankind"? Is it not much more the case that in this paralyzing belief in an already faded humanity there sticks the misunderstanding of an idea of Christian theology inherited from the Middle Ages, the idea of the imminent end of the world, of the nervously awaited judgment? Has that idea really put on new clothes through the intensified need of history to judge, as if our time, the last of all possible, has been authorized to consider itself the universal courthouse for everything in the past, something which Christian belief awaited, not from human beings at all, but from the "Son of Man"? In earlier times this was, for humanity as well as for the individual, a loudly proclaimed "*memento mori*," an always tormenting barb and, so to speak, the summit of medieval knowledge and conscience. The phrase of more recent times, called out in a contrasting response, "*memento vivere*," sounds, to speak openly, still quite timid, is not a full-throated cry, and has something almost dishonest about it.²⁶ For humanity still sits firmly on the *memento mori* and betrays the fact through its universal need for history. In spite of the most powerful beating of its wings, knowledge cannot tear itself loose in freedom. A deep feeling of hopelessness is left over and has taken on that historical colouring, because of which all higher education and culture are now melancholy and dark. A religion which of all the hours of a person's life considers the last the most important, which predicts the end of all earthy life and condemns all living people to live in the fifth act of the tragedy, certainly arouses the deepest and noblest forces, but it is hostile to all new cultivation, daring undertakings, and free desiring. It resists every flight into the unknown, because there it does not love and does not hope. It lets what is coming into being push forward only unwillingly, so that at the right time it can force it to the side or sacrifice it as a seducer of being, as a liar about the worth of existence. What the Florentines did when, under the influence of Savonarola's sermons calling for repentance, they orga-

²⁶*Memento mori*: a reminder that one will die; *memento vivere*: a reminder to live.

nized those famous sacrificial fires of paintings, manuscripts, mirrors, and masks, Christianity would like to do with every culture which rouses one to renewed striving and which leads to that slogan *memento vivere*.²⁷ And if it is not possible to achieve this directly, without a digressio—that is, through superior force—then it attains its goal nonetheless if it unites itself with historical culture, for the most part even without its knowledge, and now, speaking out through historical knowledge, with a shrug of its shoulders, rejects all becoming and thus disseminates the feeling of the person who has come much too late and who has the characteristics of an epigone, in short, of the person born with grey hair. The stringent and profoundly serious consideration of the worthlessness of everything which has happened, of the way in which the world in its maturity is ready for judgment, has evaporated to a skeptical consciousness that it is in any case good to know everything that has happened, because it is too late to do anything better. Thus the historical sense makes its servants passive and retrospective. It is almost the case that only in momentary forgetfulness, when that very sense is intermittent, does the patient suffering from the historical fever become active, so that, as soon as the action is over and done with, he may dissect his deed, through analytical consideration prevent any further effects, and finally flay it for “History.” In this sense, we are still living in the Middle Ages, and history is still a disguised theology, in exactly the same way that the reverence with which the unscientific laity treat the scientific caste is a reverence inherited from the clergy. What people in earlier times gave the church, people now give, although in scantier amounts, to scientific knowledge. However, the fact that people give was something the church brought about in earlier times, not something first done by the modern spirit, which, along with its other good characteristics, instead has something stingy about it, as is well known, and is, so far as the preeminent virtue of generosity is concerned, a miser.

Perhaps this observation is not pleasant, perhaps no more pleasant than that derivation of the excess of history from the medieval *memento mori* and from the hopelessness which Christianity carries in its heart concerning all future ages of earthly existence. But at any rate people should replace the explanation which I have put down only hesitantly with better explanations. For the origin of historical culture and its inherent and completely radical opposition to the spirit of a “new age,” of a “modern consciousness”—this origin *must* itself, in its turn, be understood historically. History *must* itself resolve the problem of history itself. Knowledge *must* turn its barbs against itself. This triple *Must* is the spiritual imperative of the “new age,” if there is in it truly something new, powerful, full of vital

²⁷Girolama Savonarola (1452-1498), an Italian religious reformer hostile to the Renaissance.

promise, and original. Or could it be the case that, to leave the Romance peoples out of consideration, that we Germans, in all higher matters of culture, have always had to be merely “followers” just because that is the only thing we *could* be, as William Wackernagel once expressed it in a statement well worth thinking about: “We Germans are a nation of followers. With all our higher knowledge and even with our faith, we are still only successors of the old world. Even those who are certainly hostile to this and do not want it are constantly breathing the spirit of Christianity along with the immortal spirit of old classical culture, and if anyone were to succeed in separating out these two elements from the living air which envelops the inner man, then not much would be left over with which one might still eke out a spiritual life.”²⁸ But even if we wanted to reassure ourselves happily about this calling to be the followers of antiquity, even if we would only make up our minds to take the calling as something right, urgent, serious, and great, and would recognize in this urgency our designated and unique privilege, nonetheless we would find it necessary to ask whether it must always be our purpose to be *pupils of a declining antiquity*. At some time or other we might be permitted gradually to set our goal somewhat higher and further, at some time or other we might be permitted to praise ourselves for having reworked so fruitfully and splendidly the spirit of Alexandrian-Roman culture in ourselves also through our universal history, so that now, as the most noble reward we might be allowed to set ourselves the still more monumental task of getting back behind and above this Alexandrian world and seeking out our models of the courageous gaze in the ancient Greek original world of the great, the natural, and the human. *But that is the place where we also find the reality of an essentially unhistorical culture, a culture nevertheless, or rather therefore, unspeakably rich and vital.* Even if we Germans were nothing but followers, then if we looked at such a culture as a legacy we had appropriated, there could be nothing greater or prouder for us than to be followers.

As a result we should say only this and nothing but this: that even the often distressingly strange thought that we are epigones, nobly thought out, can guarantee important effects and a richly hopeful desire for the future, both for the individual and for a people, to the extent that we understand ourselves as the heirs and followers of astonishing classical powers and see in that our legacy and our spur, and thus not as pale and withered late arrivals of powerful races, who scrape out a cold living as antiquarians and gravediggers of those races. Such late arrivals naturally live an ironic existence. Destruction follows closely on the heels of their limping passage through life. They shudder in the face of that, when they

²⁸Wilhelm Wackernagel (1806-1869), German philologist.

derive enjoyment from the past, for they are living memories, and yet their thoughts are senseless without someone to inherit them. Thus, the dark premonition envelops them that their life may be an injustice, for no future life can justify it.

However, if we were to imagine such antiquarian late comers suddenly exchanging that painfully ironic moderation for impudence, and if we imagine them to ourselves as if they were reporting with a ringing voice: "The race is at its peak, because now for the first time it has the knowledge of itself and has become clear to itself," then we would have a performance in which, as in an allegory, the enigmatic meaning of a certain very famous philosophy is deciphered for German culture. I believe that there has been no dangerous variation or change in German culture in this century which has not become more dangerous through the monstrous influence of this philosophy of Hegel, an influence which continues to flow right up to the present moment.²⁹ The belief that one is a late comer of the age is truly crippling and disorienting, but it must appear fearful and destructive when such a belief one day with a bold reversal idolizes this late comer as the true meaning and purpose of everything which has happened before, when his knowledgeable misery is equated to the completion of world history. Such a way of thinking has made the Germans accustomed to talk about the "World Process" and to justify their own time as the necessary result of this World Process. Such a way of thinking has set up history as the single sovereign, in the place of the other spiritual powers, culture and religion, insofar as history is "the self-realizing idea" and "the dialectic of the spirits of peoples" and the "universal judge."

People have scornfully called this Hegelian understanding of history God's stroll on the earth; but this God for His part was first created by history. This God, however, became intelligible and comprehensible to himself inside Hegelian brain cases and has already ascended all the dialectically possible steps of His being right up to that self-revelation, so that for Hegel the summit and end point of the World Process coincided with his own individual existence in Berlin. In fact, he ought to have said that everything coming after him should, in fact, be valued only as a musical coda of the world historical rondo, or even more truly, as superfluous. He did not say that. Instead, he planted in the generations leavened by him that admiration for the "Power of History," which transforms practically every moment into a naked admiration of success and leads to idolatrous worship of the factual. For this service people nowadays commonly repeat the very mythological and, beyond that, truly German expression "to take the facts into account." But once a person has learned to stoop down and

²⁹Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), German philosopher who saw history as the pro-gressive realization of an idea.

to bow his head before the "Power of History," he finally nods his "Yes" mechanically, in the Chinese fashion, to every power, whether it is a government or public opinion or a numerical majority, and moves his limbs precisely to the rhythm of strings pulled by some "power" or other. If every success contains within itself a rational necessity, if every event is the victory of the logical or the "Idea," then just get down quickly and kneel now before the entire ladder of "success"! What? Are there no ruling mythologies any more? Religions are dying out? Just look at the religion of the power of history; pay attention to the priests of the mythology of the Idea and their knees all covered in cuts! Surely all the virtues come only in the wake of this new faith? Or is it not unselfishness when the historical person lets himself be emptied out into an objective glass mirror? Is it not generosity to dispense with all the force in heaven and on earth, so that in every power people worship pure force in itself? Is it not justice to have a scale balance of powers always in one's hands and to watch closely what sinks down as the stronger and heavier? And what a school of respectability such a way of thinking about history is! To take everything objectively, to get angry about nothing, to love nothing, to understand everything, how gentle and flexible that makes people. And even if one man brought up in this school becomes publicly angry at some point and gets annoyed, we can be happy about that, for we know it is really only intended as an artistic expression; it is *ira* and *studium*, and yet entirely *sine ira et studio*.³⁰

What antiquated thoughts I have in my heart about such a complex of mythology and virtue! But they should come out for once, even if people may just go on laughing all the time. Therefore, I would say this: history constantly impresses on us "It was once" and the moral "You should not" or "You ought not to have." So history turns into a compendium of what is factually immoral. How seriously mistaken would the person be who also considered history the judge of this factual immorality! For example, it is offensive to morality that a Raphael had to die at thirty-six years of age; such a being should not have died.³¹ Now, if you want to come to the help of history, as the apologist for what actually happened, then you will say that Raphael expressed everything that was in him; with a longer life he would have been able to create something beautiful only as a similar beauty, and not as something newly beautifully, and so on. In so doing, you would be the devil's advocate for the very reason that you make success, the fact, your idol; whereas, the fact is always dumb and at all

³⁰*Ira*: the Latin word for anger; *studium*: the Latin word for study. The expression *sine ira et studio* (without anger and without partiality) originates with the Roman historian Tacitus (60-120) and is frequently used to describe an "objective" (i.e., emotion free) style of writing history.

³¹Raphael (1483-1520), one of the greatest Italian painters of the Renaissance.

times has looked more like a calf than a god. Besides, as apologists for history, you are prompted by ignorance. Simply because you do not know what such a *natura naturans* like Raphael is, it does not make you hot to hear that such a person was and will never be again.³² In Goethe's case, recently someone wanted to teach us that with his eighty-two years he had lived a full life, and yet I would happily trade a couple of years of the "washed up" Goethe for an entire cart full of fresh ultra-modern lifetimes, in order still to share in conversations like the ones Goethe conducted with Eckermann and in this way remain protected from all the contemporary teachings of the legionaries of the moment. In comparison with such dead people, how few living people have any right to live! That the many live and that those few are no longer alive is nothing but a brutal truth, that is, an incorrigible stupidity, a blatant "That is the case," in contrast to the moral "It should not have been so." Yes, in contrast to the moral! For let people speak about whatever virtue they want, about righteousness, generosity, courage, wisdom, and human sympathy—it is always virtuous precisely because it rebels against that blind power of the factual, against the tyranny of the real, and submits itself to laws which are not the laws of that historical fluctuation. It always swims against the historical waves, whether fighting its passions as the closest stupid facts of its existence or whether committing itself to truthfulness, while the lies spin around it their glittering webs. If history were in general nothing more than "the world system of passion and error," then human beings would have to read it in the way Goethe summoned us to read *Werther*, exactly as if it cried out "Be a man and do not follow me!"³³ Fortunately history also preserves the memory of the great fighters *against history*, that is, against the blind force of the real and thus puts itself right in the pillory, because it brings out directly as the essential historical natures those who worried so little about the "Thus it is," in order instead to follow with a more cheerful pride a "So it should be." Not to drag their race to the grave but to found a new race—that drives them ceaselessly forwards, and even if they were born latecomers, there is an art of living which makes them forget this. The generations to come will know them only as first comers.

9

Is our age perhaps such a first comer? In fact, the vehemence of its historical sense is so great and expresses itself in such a universal and simply unlimited way that at least in this the coming ages will assess its quality as

³²*Natura naturans*: This Latin phrase means literally "nature naturing." The phrase is a term for an essential creative or divine force.

³³Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) helped to define the Romantic hero and brought Goethe great early success.

a first comer, if in fact there are going to be *coming ages* at all, understood in the sense of culture. But right here there remains a serious doubt. Close by the pride of the modern man stands his irony about his very self, his consciousness that he must live in a historicizing and, as it were, a twilight mood, his fear that in future he will be totally unable to rescue any more of his youthful hopes and youthful powers. Here and there people go even further, into *cynicism*, and justify the passage of history, indeed, of the whole development of the world, as essentially for the use of modern man, according to the cynical rule that things had to turn out just as they are going right now, that man had to be nothing other than what people now are, and that against this "had to" no one is entitled to rebel. A person who cannot maintain an ironical stance takes refuge in the sense of well being which comes from this sort of cynicism. In addition, the last decade offers him as a gift one of its most beautiful inventions, a rounded and sonorous phrase for such cynicism: it calls his style of living totally mindlessly and in keeping with the times, "the full dedication of the personality to the World Process." The personality and the World Process! The World Process and the personality of the turnip flea! If only people did not have to hear all the time the hyperbole of all hyperboles, the word World, World, World, when really each person should speak in all honesty only of Men, Men, Men! Heirs of the Greeks and Romans? Of Christianity? All that appears as nothing to those cynics. But heirs of the World Process! High points and targets of the World Process! Sense and solution of all riddles of becoming in general expressed in the modern man, the ripest fruit of the tree of knowledge!—I call that a swollen feeling of elation. By this symbol are the first comers of all ages known, even if they have come along right at the end. Historical considerations have never yet flown so far afield, not even in their dreams. For now the history of human beings is only the continuation of the history of animals and plants. Indeed, even in the furthest depths of the sea the historical universalist still finds the traces of himself, as living slime; he gazes in astonishment, as if at a miracle, at the immense route which human beings have already passed through and trembles at the sight of the even more astonishing miracle, at modern man himself, who has the ability to survey this route. He stands high and proud on the pyramid of the World Process. As he sets down on the top of it the keystone of his knowledge, he appears to call out to nature listening all around, "We are at the goal; we are the goal; we are the perfection of nature."

Arrogant European of the nineteenth century, you are raving! Your knowledge does not complete nature, but only kills your own. For once just measure your height as a knower against your depth as a person who can do something. Of course, you clamber on the solar rays of knowledge upward towards heaven, but you also climb downward to chaos. Your way

of going, that is, clambering about as a knower, is your fate. The ground and floor move back away from you into the unknown; for your life there are no supports any more, but only spider's threads, which every new grasp of your knowledge rips apart.

But no more serious talk about this, for it is possible to say something more cheerful.

The incredibly thoughtless fragmenting and fraying of all the fundamentals, their disintegration into a constantly flowing and dissolving becoming, the inexhaustible spinning away and historicizing of all that has come into being because of modern men, the great garden spiders in the knots of the cosmic net, that may keep the moralists, the artists, the devout, as well as the statesman, busy and worried. Today it should for once cheer us up, because we see all this in the gleaming magical mirror of a *philosophical writer of parodies*, in whose head the age has come to an ironical consciousness of itself, a consciousness clear "all the way to wickedness" (to speak in Goethe's style). Hegel once taught us, "when the spirit makes a sudden turn, then we philosophers are also there." Our age has made a turn into self-irony, and, lo and behold, E. von Hartmann was also at hand and had written his famous *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, or, to speak more clearly, his philosophy of unconscious irony. Rarely have we read a more amusing invention and a more philosophically roguish prank than Hartmann's.³⁴ Anyone who is not enlightened by him about *Becoming*, who is not really set right on the inside, is truly ripe for existing in the past. The start and the goal of the World Process, from the first motions of consciousness right to the state of being hurled back into nothingness, together with the precisely defined task of our generation for the World Process, all presented from such a wittily inventive font of inspiration of the unconscious and illuminated with an apocalyptic light, with everything so deceptively imitative of an unsophisticated seriousness, as if it were really serious philosophy and not merely a philosophical joke, such a totality makes its creator one of the preeminent writers of philosophical parody of all times. So let us sacrifice on his altar, sacrifice to him, the inventor of a truly universal medicine, a lock of hair, to steal an expression of admiration from Schleiermacher. For what medicine would be healthier against the excess of historical culture than Hartmann's parody of all world history?

If we wanted a truly matter-of-fact account of what Hartmann is telling us from his smoky tripod stool of unconscious irony, then we would say that he is telling us that our age would have to be just the way it is if humanity

³⁴Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906), German philosopher, who published his first book, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*, in 1869.

is ever going to get seriously fed up with this existence. That is what we believe in our hearts. That frightening fossilizing of the age, that anxious rattling of the bones, which David Strauss has described for us in his naive way as the most beautiful reality, is justified in Hartmann not only retrospectively *ex causis efficientibus*, but even looking ahead, *ex causa finali*.³⁵ The joker lets the light of the Day of Judgment stream over our time and finds that our age is very good, especially for the person who wants to suffer as strongly as possible from the indigestible nature of life and who cannot wish that Doomsday comes quickly enough. True, Hartmann calls the age which humanity is now approaching the “time of manhood.” But that maturity is, according to his own description, the fortunate condition where there is still only “pure mediocrity” and art is “some evening farce for the Berlin stockbroker,” where “geniuses are no longer a requirement of the age, because that means casting pearls before swine or because the age has progressed to a more important level, beyond the stage for which geniuses are appropriate,” that is, to that stage of social development in which each worker “with a period of work which allows him sufficient leisure for his intellectual development leads a comfortable existence.” You rogue of all rogues, you speak of the yearning of contemporary humanity, but you also know what sort of ghost will stand at the end of this maturity of humanity as the result of that intellectual development to solid mediocrity—disgust. Things stand in a state of visible wretchedness, but they will still get much more wretched, “before our eyes the Antichrist reaches out further and further around him”—but things *must* be so, things *must* come about this way, because for all that we are on the best route—to disgust with all existing things. “Thus, go forward vigorously into the World Process as a worker in the vineyard of the Lord, for the process is the only thing which can lead to redemption.”

The vineyard of the Lord! The process! For redemption! Who does not see and hear in this the historical culture which knows only the word “becoming” as it intentionally disguises itself in a misshapen parody, as it expresses through the grotesque grimacing mask held up in front of its face the most willful things about itself! For what does this last mischievous summons to the workers in the vineyard essentially want from them? In what work are they to strive vigorously forwards? Or, to ask the question in another way, what has the historically educated man, the modern fanatic of the process swimming and drowning in the flood of becoming, still left to do, in order at some point to reap that disgust, the expensive grapes of that vineyard? He has to do nothing other than to continue living as he has been living, to continue loving what he has been

³⁵David Strauss (1808-1874), German theologian and writer who wrote on the historical Jesus; *ex causis efficientibus*: from efficient causes, i.e., as the result of certain mechanical processes; *ex causa finali*: from a final cause, i.e., as having a higher moral purpose.

loving, to continue hating what he has been hating, and to continue reading the newspapers which he has been reading. For him there is only *one* sin, to live differently from the way he has been living. But we are told the way he has been living with the excessive clarity of something written in stone by that famous page with the sentences in large print, thanks to which the entire kingdom of the contemporary cultural rabble is caught up in a blind rapture and frenzy of delight, because they believe that in these sentences they read their own justification, indeed, their own justification in the light of the apocalypse. For the unconscious writer of parody has required of each one of them "the complete dedication of his personality to the World Process in pursuit of its goal, for the sake of the redemption of the world," or still more clearly and brightly, "for the time being the affirmation of the will to live is proclaimed as the only correct way, for only in the full dedication to life and its pains, not in cowardly personal renunciation and drawing back, is there something to achieve for the World Process," "the striving for individual denial of the will is just as foolish and useless, in fact even more foolish, than suicide." "The thinking reader will also understand without further suggestions how a practical philosophy built on these principles would look and that such a philosophy cannot contain any divisiveness but only the full reconciliation with life."

The thinking reader will understand it. And people could misunderstand Hartmann! How unspeakably amusing it is that people misunderstand him! Could contemporary Germans be very sensitive? A trusty Englishman finds them lacking a delicacy of perception and even dares to say "in the German mind there does seem to be something splay, something blunt-edged, unhandy and infelicitous." Would the great German writer of parodies really contradict him? In fact, according to Hartmann's explanation, we are approaching "that ideal condition, where the race of mankind consciously makes its own history." But obviously we are quite far from that state, perhaps even more ideal, where humanity reads Hartmann's book with awareness. If that state ever arrives, then no person will let the word "World Process" pass his lips any more, without these lips breaking into a smile. For with that phrase people will remember the time when Hartmann's parodying gospel was listened to, absorbed, disputed, honoured, publicized, and canonized with the stolidly middle-class probity of that "German mind," in fact, with "the strained seriousness of the owl," as Goethe puts it. But the world must go forward. That ideal condition cannot be dreamed up; it must be fought for and won. Only through joy does the way go to redemption, to redemption from that misunderstood owlish seriousness. The time will come in which people wisely refrain from all constructions of the World Process or even of the history of mankind, a time in which people in general no longer consider the masses

but individuals once again, who construct a sort of bridge over the desolate storm of becoming. These individuals do not set out some sort of process, but live timelessly and contemporaneously; thanks to the history which permits such a combination, they live like the republic of geniuses, about which Schopenhauer once explained that one giant shouts out to another across the barren intervals of time and, undisturbed by the wanton and noisy midgets who creep around underneath them, continues their lofty spiritual conversation. The task of history is to be a mediator between them and thus always to provide opportunities and lend energy for the development of greatness. No, the *goal of humanity* cannot lie in its ending, but only in *its highest examples*.

By contrast, of course, our comic person states, with that wonderful dialectic, which is just as genuine as its admirers are worthy of admiration, “With the idea of evolution it would be inconsistent to ascribe to the World Process an infinite length of time in the past, because then each and every imaginable development must have already been gone through; that, however, is not the case” (O you rascal!) “and we are no more able to assign to the process an infinite future period. Both of these would repudiate the idea of evolution towards a final goal” (O, once again, you rascal!) “and would make the World Process like the water drawing of the Danaids.³⁶ The complete victory of the logical over the illogical” (O, you rascal of all rascals!) “must, however, coincide with the temporal end of the World Process, the Day of Judgment.” No, you lucid and mocking spirit, as long as the illogical still prevails to the extent it does today, as long as people can, for example, still talk of the “World Process” with general approval, the way you talk, Judgment Day is still a long way off. For it is still too joyful on this earth; many illusions are still blooming—for instance, the illusion of your contemporaries about you—we are not yet sufficiently ripe to be flung back into your nothingness, for we believe that things here will get even more amusing when people first have started to understand you, you misunderstood man of the unconscious. However, if in spite of this, disgust should come with power, just as you have predicted to your readers, if you should be right in your description of your present and future—and no one has hated both and hated with such disgust as you have—then I am happily prepared to vote with the majority, in the way you have proposed, that next Saturday evening at twelve o’clock precisely your world will go under, and our decree may conclude that from tomorrow on there will be no more time and no newspaper will appear any more. However, perhaps the result will fail to materialize, and we will have made our decree in vain. But then at any rate

³⁶The Danaids are the daughters of Danaus. They killed their husbands and were condemned in Hades to pouring water constantly into leaky jars which could never be filled.

we will not lack the time for a beautiful experiment. We take a balance scale and put in one scale pan Hartmann's unconscious and in the other Hartmann's World Process. There are people who think that they will both weigh exactly the same, for in each scale pan would lie an equally poor word and an equally good jest. Once people come to understand Hartmann's joke, then no one will use Hartmann's talk of "World Process" any more as anything but a joke. In fact, it is high time we moved forward with the entire army of satirical malice against the excesses of the historical sense, against the overindulgent pleasure in the process at the expense of being and living, against the senseless shifting of all perspectives. And in praise of the author of *Philosophy of the Unconscious* it should always be repeated that he was the first to succeed in registering keenly the ridiculousness of the idea of the "World Process" and to allow an even keener appreciation of that ridiculousness through the particular seriousness of his treatment. Why the "world" is there, why "humanity" is there—these should not concern us at all for the time being, unless we want to make a joke. For the presumptuousness of the small human worm is simultaneously the funniest and the most joyful thing on this earthly stage, but why you, as an individual, are there, that is something I am asking you, and if no one else can say it for you, then at least try for once to justify the sense of your existence, as it were, *a posteriori* by establishing for yourself a purpose, a final goal, a "To this end," a high and noble "To this end." If you are destroyed by this, well, I know no better purpose for life than to die in service of the great and the impossible, *animae magnae prodigus*.³⁷ If, by contrast, the doctrines of the sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all ideas, types, and styles, of the lack of all cardinal differences between man and animal—doctrines which I consider true but deadly—are still foisted on the people for yet another generation with the frenzy of instruction which is now customary, then it should take no one by surprise if people destroy themselves in egotistical trifles and misery, through ossification and self-absorption, initially falling apart and ceasing to be a people. Then, in place of this condition, perhaps systems of individual egotism, alliances for the systematic larcenous exploitation of those non-members of the alliance and similar creations of utilitarian nastiness will step forward onto the future scene. Just let people proceed to prepare these creations, to write history from the standpoint of the masses and to seek for those laws in it which are to be inferred from the needs of these masses as well as for the laws of motion of the lowest clay and loam layers of society. To me, the masses seem to be worth a glance only in three respects: first as blurred copies of great men, presented on bad paper with worn out printing plates, then as the resistance against the great men, and finally as working implements of the great. For the rest, let

³⁷*animae magnae prodigus*: filled with a great spirit.

the devil and statistics carry them off! How's that? Might statistics demonstrate that there could be laws in history? Laws? Yes, statistics prove how coarse and disgustingly uniform the masses are. Are we to call the effects of the force of gravity, stupidity, mimicry, love, and hunger—laws? Now, we are willing to concede that point, but by the same token the principle is then established that, as far as there are laws in history, they are worth nothing and history is worth nothing. However, precisely this sort of history nowadays is generally esteemed, the history which takes the large mass tendencies as the important and principal thing in history and considers all great men merely their clearest expression, like bubbles, as it were, which become visible in the watery flood. Thus, the mass is to produce greatness out of itself, and chaos is also to produce order from itself as well. At the end, of course, the hymn is sung to the productive masses. Then, everything which has prevailed upon such masses for a long time and, as people say, has been “a historical power” is called “Great.” But is that not a case of quite deliberately exchanging quantity and quality? When the podgy masses have found some idea or other—for example, a religious idea—quite adequate, has tenaciously defended it, and dragged it along for centuries, then, and only then, the discoverer and founder of that idea is to be great. But why? The most noble and highest things have no effect at all on the masses. The historical success of Christianity, its historical power, tenacity, and duration, all that fortunately proves nothing with respect to the greatness of its founder. Basically, that would act as a proof against him. But between him and that historical success lies a very earthly and dark layer of passion, error, greed for power and honour, the persisting powers of the *imperium romanum*, a layer from which Christianity acquired that earthly taste and scrap of ground which made possible its continued presence in this world and, as it were, gave it its durability.³⁸ Greatness should not depend upon success. Demosthenes had greatness, although at the same time he had no success.³⁹ The purest and most genuine followers of Christianity were always more likely to put their worldly success, their so-called “historical power,” into question and to restrict it rather than to promote it, for they trained themselves to stand outside “the world” and did not worry themselves about the “process of the Christian idea.” That is the reason why they are also for the most part entirely unknown to history and have remained unnamed. To state the issue in a Christian manner: in this way the devil is the regent of the world and the master of success and progress. He is in all historical powers the essential power, and so it will substantially remain, although it may for some time sound quite embarrassing to ears which have become accus-

³⁸*imperium romanum*: imperial power of Rome.

³⁹Demosthenes (384-322 BC), famous Greek orator who spoke out against the growing power of Macedonia.

tomed to the idolatry of success and historical power. For in this very matter our age has practised giving things new names and has even re-christened the devil. It is certainly a time of great danger: human beings seem to be close to discovering that the egoism of the individual, the group, or the masses has in every age been the lever of historical movements. However, at the same time, people are not at all worried by this discovery. On the contrary, people declaim: Egoism is to be our God. With this new faith people are on the point of building, with the clearest of intentions, future history on egoism. Only it is to be a clever egoism subject to a few limitations, in order that it may consolidate itself in an enduring way. It is the sort of egoism which studies history just in order to acquaint itself with foolish egoism. Through this study people have learned that the state has received a very special mission in the established world system of egoism: the state is to become the patron of all clever egoism, so that, with its military and police forces, it may protect against the frightening outbreak of foolish egoism. For the same purpose history, that is, the history of animals and human beings, is also carefully stirred into the popular masses and working classes, who are dangerous because they are not clever, for people know that a small grain of historical education is capable of breaking the rough and stupefied instincts and desires or diverting them into the path of refined egoism. *In summa*: people are paying attention now, to use E. von Hartmann's words, "to deliberate looking around for a practical domestic structure in their earthly homeland, considering the future with care." The same writer calls such a period the "manhood of mankind" and makes fun about what is now called "Man," as if with that term one is to understand only the sober selfish person; just as in the same way he also prophesies that after such a period of adulthood there comes an appropriate old age, but apparently only with this idea to vent his ridicule on our contemporary old men. For he speaks of the mature tranquillity with which they "review all the chaotic stormy suffering of their past lives and understand the vanity of the previously assumed goals of their striving." No, an adulthood of this sly and historically educated egoism is appropriate to an old age of hostile craving and disgraceful clinging to life and then a final act, with its

last scene of all
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childhood and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ . . . *sans everything*: The quotation is from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Nietzsche quotes the lines in German. I have used Shakespeare's lines, rather than translate the German back again.

Whether the dangers to our life and our culture now come from these desolate, toothless, and tasteless old men, whether they come from those so-called “Men” of Hartmann’s, in opposition to both we wish to hold on with our teeth to our right to our *youth* and not to grow tired of defending, in our youth, the future against those who strike against images of that future. In this fight, however, we would have to acknowledge a particularly unpleasant perception: *that people intentionally promote the excesses of the historical sense from which the present time suffers, they encourage them, and they use them.*

However, people use history against the young, in order to train them for that maturity of egoism which is striven for everywhere; people use it to break the natural aversion of youth through a transfiguring, that is to say, a magically scientific illumination of that manly-unmanly egoism. Yes, people know what a certain predominance of history is capable of; people know it only too well: to uproot the strongest instincts of youth—fire, defiance, forgetting of the self, and love—to dampen down the heat of their sense of justice, to hold back or repress the desire to mature slowly with the contrary desire to be finished quickly, to be useful quickly, and to be productive quickly, to infect the honesty and boldness of feeling with doubts. Indeed, history is itself capable of deceiving the young about their most beautiful privilege, about their power to cultivate in themselves with complete conviction a great idea and to allow an even greater idea to grow forth out of it. A certain excess of history is capable of all this. We have seen it. And this is the reason: through its incessant shifting of the horizons of significance, through the elimination of a surrounding atmosphere, it no longer allows a person to perceive and to act *unhistorically*. He then draws himself from the infinity of his horizon back into himself, into the smallest egoistic region and there must wither away and dry up; he probably achieves cleverness, but never wisdom. He permits himself inner conversations, calculates, and gets along well with the facts, does not boil over, winks, and understands how to seek out his own advantage or that of his party amid the advantages and disadvantages of strangers; he forgets superfluous modesty and thus step by step becomes a “Man” and an “Old Man” on the Hartmann model. But he *should* become this—that is precisely the meaning of the cynical demand nowadays for “the complete dedication of the personality to the World Process,” so far as his goal is concerned, for the sake of the redemption of the world, as that rascal E. von Hartmann assures us. Now, the will and goal of those Hartmann “men” and “old men” is indeed hardly the very redemption of the world. Certainly the world would be more redeemed if it were redeemed from these men and old men. For then the kingdom of youth would come.

Thinking of this position *youth finds itself in*, I cry out “Land, land! Enough and more than enough of the passionate seeking and wandering of the voyage on dark alien seas!” Now finally a coast reveals itself. Whatever it may be, we must land on it. The worst emergency port is better than returning once more to plunging around in hopeless infinite skepticism. If at first we only hold onto the land, we will soon afterwards find the good havens and ease the approach for those who come later.

This journey has been dangerous and exciting. How far we are now from the calm contemplation with which we first saw our ship set out to sea. By investigating the dangers of history, we have found ourselves exposed to all these dangers in the strongest possible way. We ourselves manifestly bear the traces of that suffering which has come over humanity in more recent times as a result of an excess of history. This very treatise shows its modern character, the character of the weak personality, which I will not conceal from myself, in the intemperance of its criticism, in the immaturity of its humanity, in the frequent transitions from irony to cynicism, from pride to skepticism. However, I trust in the inspiring power which, in the place of genius, controls the vessel for me: I trust in *youth*, that it has led me correctly when it requires from me now a *protest against the recent historical education of modern people* and when the protester demands that the human being above all learn to live and to use history only in the *service of the life which he has learned to live*. One must be young to understand this protest. In fact, among the contemporary grey-haired types of our present youth, one can hardly be young enough still to feel what is here essentially being protested against. To help people understand this point I will use an example. In Germany it is not much longer than a hundred years ago that a natural instinct for what people call poetry arose in a few young people. Do people think that the previous generations up to that time and those contemporary with it would never have spoken at all of that art, however inwardly strange and unnatural to them? We know the opposite is true: they thought about “poetry” with loving passion, wrote and argued about it with words about words, words, words. The appearance of that revival of words for living was not the immediate death of those word makers. In a certain sense, they are still alive nowadays, because if, as Gibbon says, for a world to go under only takes time but plenty of time, then in Germany, too, the “land of gradual change,” for a false idea to be destroyed takes nothing but time, but it takes a great deal more time.⁴¹ Nevertheless, today there are perhaps a hundred people more than a hundred years ago who know what poetry is; perhaps one hundred years from now there will be another hundred people more who in the meantime have also learned what culture is and

⁴¹Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), famous English historian.

that the Germans up to this point have had no culture, no matter how much they may talk and boast about it. For them the very general contentment of the Germans with their “culture” would seem just as incredible and stupid as the formerly acclaimed classicism of Gottsched or the appraisal of Ramler as a German Pindar seem to us.⁴² They will perhaps judge that this culture has been only a sort of knowledge about culture and, in addition, a completely false and superficial knowledge. I say false and superficial because people endured the contradiction of life and knowledge, for they did not see anything characteristic of the education of a truly cultured people: that the culture can only grow up and blossom forth out of living. By contrast, with the Germans culture is put up like a paper flower or poured over things like a coating of sugar and therefore it must always remain untruthful and infertile. The German education of the young, however, begins directly from this false and barren idea of culture. Its end goal, imagined in all purity and loftiness, is not at all the freely educated man, but the scholar, the scientific person, indeed, the scientific person who is useful as early as possible, the person who sets himself apart from life in order to understand it really clearly. The product of this education, considered in a properly empirical and general way, is the historically and aesthetically educated Philistine, the precocious and freshly wise chatterer about state, church, and art, the sensorium for thousands of sensations, the inexhaustible stomach which nevertheless does not know what honest hunger and thirst are. The fact that an education with this goal and result is an unnatural education is felt only by the person who is not yet completely developed in it; that is felt only by the instinct of the young, because they still have the instinct of nature, which is first artificially and powerfully broken through that education. But the person who wants to break this education in its turn must assist the young in expressing themselves. He must shine the bright light of ideas to illuminate their unconscious resistance and turn that into an aware consciousness with a powerful voice. How is he to reach such a strange goal?

Above all through the fact that he destroys a superstition, the faith in the *necessity* of that method of education. But people think that there could be no other possibility than our contemporary highly tiresome reality. Just let someone examine the literature of the last decades about the nature of higher schools and education precisely on this point. For all the varieties of proposals and for all the intensity of the opposition, the examiner will to his astonishment and dismay realize how uniform the thinking is about the entire purpose of education, how thoughtlessly people assume that the

⁴²Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), German author and critic; Karl Wilhelm Ramler (1725-1798), German poet; Pindar (518-438 BC), one of the most famous of the ancient Greek poets.

present result, the “educated person,” as the term is now understood, is a necessary and reasonable fundamental basis for all further education. That monotonous orthodoxy would sound something like this: the young person has to begin with a knowledge of culture, not at first with a knowledge of life, and even less with life and experience themselves. Moreover, this knowledge about culture is poured over or stirred into the youth as historical knowledge; that is, his head is filled up with a monstrous number of ideas derived from extremely indirect knowledge of past times and peoples, not from the immediate contemplation of living. His desire to experience something for himself and to feel growing in him a coordinated and living system of his own experiences—such a desire is narcotized and, as it were, made drunk through opulent deceptions, as if it were possible in a few years to sum up in oneself the highest and most remarkable experiences of older times, especially of the greatest ages. It is precisely this insane procedure which leads our young developing artists into the halls of culture and galleries instead of into the workshop of a master and, above all, into the unique workshops of the unique master craftswoman Nature. Yes, as if people were able to acquire their ideas and arts, their actual life’s work, as cursory strollers in the history of past times. Yes, as if life itself were not a craft which must be learned continuously from the ground up and practised diligently, if we are not to let it produce bunglers and chatterers!

Plato considered it necessary that the first generation of his new society (in the perfect state) would be brought up with the help of a powerful *necessary lie*. The children were to learn to believe that they had all already lived a long time dreaming under the earth, where they had been properly kneaded and formed by nature’s master worker. It was impossible to rebel against this past! Impossible to have any effect against the work of the gods! It is to stand as an inviolable law of nature that the person who is born a philosopher has gold in his body, whoever is born as a guard has only silver, and whoever is born as a worker has iron and bronze. Since it is not possible to mix these metals, Plato explains, then it should not be possible ever to overthrow or mix up the order of classes. The faith in the *aeterna veritas* [eternal truth] of this order is the basis of the new education and thus of the new state. Now, the modern German similarly has faith in the *aeterna veritas* of his education, of his style of culture. Nevertheless, this faith would collapse, as the Platonic state would have collapsed, if in opposition to the necessary lie there was for once set up a *necessary truth*: that the German has no culture, because he can have nothing whatsoever on the basis of his education. He wants the flowers without roots and stalk. So he wants them in vain. That is the simple truth, one that is unpleasant and gross, a correct necessary truth.

In this necessary truth, however, *our first generation* must be educated. Certainly they will suffer the greatest difficulties from it, for they must educate themselves through it, in fact, divided against themselves, to new habits and a new nature out of an old and first nature and habits, so that they may be able to say with the ancient Spaniards: “*Defienda me Dios de my,*” God, defend me from myself, that is, from the nature already instilled into me. They must taste that truth drop by drop, as if sampling a bitter and powerful medicine, and each individual of this generation must overcome himself, so as to make a judgment on himself which he might more easily endure as a general judgment concerning an entire age: we are without culture, even more, we are ruined for living, for correct and simple seeing and hearing, for the fortunate grasping of what is closest at hand and natural, and we have up to this moment not yet even the basis of a culture, because we ourselves are not convinced that we have a genuine life within us. Fractured and fallen apart, in everything carved up mechanically into an inner and an outer half, saturated with ideas like dragons’ teeth producing dragon ideas, thus suffering from the sickness of words and without trust in any unique sensation which is not yet franked with words, as such a non-living and yet uncannily lively factory of ideas and words, I still perhaps have the right to say about myself *cogito, ergo sum*, but not *vivo, ergo cogito*.⁴³ That empty “Being,” not that full and green “Living,” is ensured for me. My original feeling guarantees only that I am a thinking being, not that I am a living essence, that I am no *animal*, but at most a *cogital*. First give me life; then I will make a culture out of it for you!—so shouts each individual of this first generation, and all these individuals will recognize each other from this call. Who will make a present of this life to them?

No god and no human being: only their own *youth*: unleash this, and with it you will have liberated life. For it only lay hidden in prison. It has not yet withered away and died—inquire of yourself!

But this unbridled life is sick and must be healed. It is ailing from many ills. Not only does it suffer from the memory of its fetters—it suffers from what is here our principal concern, from the *historical sickness*. The excess of history has seized the plastic force of life. It no longer understands how to make use of the past as a powerful nourishment. The evil is fearsome, and yet! If youth did not have the clairvoyant gift of nature, then no one would know that that is an evil and that a paradise of health has been lost. This same youthfulness surmises, however, also with the healing instinct of this same nature, how this paradise can be won back. It knows the

⁴³*Cogito, ergo sum*: “I think, therefore I am,” a line made famous by the great philosopher René Descartes; *vivo, ergo cogito*: “I live, therefore I think.”

juices for wounds and the medicines to combat the historical sickness, to combat the excess of the historical. What are they called?

Now, people should not be surprised that they are the names of poisons: the antidotes against the historical are called the *unhistorical* and the *superhistorical*. With these names we turn back to the start of our examination and its quiet composure.

With the phrase “the unhistorical” I designate the art and the power of being able to *forget* and to enclose oneself in a *horizon* with borders; “superhistorical” I call the powers which divert the gaze from what is developing back to what gives existence the character of the eternal and the unchanging, to *art* and *religion*. *Science*—for it is science which would talk about poisons—sees in that force, in these powers, opposing forces, for it maintains that only the observation of things is true and right, the scientific way of considering things, which everywhere sees what has come into being as something historical and never as something which exists, something eternal. Science lives in an inner contradiction with the eternalizing powers of art and religion, just as much as it hates forgetfulness, the death of knowledge, when it seeks to remove all limitations of horizons and to hurl human beings into an infinite sea of light without frontiers, a sea bright with waves of acknowledged becoming.

If only a person could live there! Just as the cities collapse in an earthquake and become desolate and the human being, trembling and in haste, erects his house on volcanic ground, so life itself breaks apart and becomes weak and dispirited when the *earthquake of ideas* [*Begriffs-beben*] which science arouses takes from a person the basis of all his certainty and rest, his faith in what is stable and permanent. Is life to rule over knowledge now, over science, or is knowledge to rule over life? Which of the two forces is the higher and decisive one? No one will have any doubt: life is the higher, the ruling power, for knowledge which destroyed life would in the process have destroyed itself. Knowledge presupposes life and has the same interest in preserving life which every being has in its own continuing existence. So science needs a higher supervision and control. A *doctrine of healthy life* is positioned close beside science, and a principle of this doctrine of health would sound like this: the unhistorical and the superhistorical are the natural counter-measures against the excessive growth of history on life, against the historical sickness. It is probable that we, the historically ill, also have to suffer from the countermeasures. But the fact that we suffer from them is no proof against the correctness of the course of treatment we have chosen.

And here I recognize the mission of that *youth*, that first generation of fighters and dragon slayers, which brings forth a more fortunate and more beautiful culture and humanity, without having more of this future hap-

piness and beauty still to come than a promise-filled premonition. This youth will suffer from the evil and the countermeasures simultaneously, and nevertheless it believes it may boast of a more powerful health and in general a more natural nature than the generations before it, the educated “Men” and “Old Men” of the present. However, their mission is to shake the ideas which this present holds about “health” and “culture” and to develop contempt and hatred against such hybrid conceptual monsters. The guaranteed mark of their own stronger health is to be precisely the fact that they, I mean these young people, themselves can use no idea, no party slogan, from the presently circulating currency of words and ideas as a designation of their being, but are convinced only by a power acting in it, a power which fights, eliminates, and cuts into pieces, and by a constantly heightened sense of life in every good hour. People may dispute the fact that these youth already have culture, but for what young person would this be a reproach? People may speak against their crudeness and immoderation, but they are not yet old and wise enough to make do with less; above all, they do not need to feign and to defend any ready-made culture, and they enjoy all the comforts and rights of youth, especially the privilege of a braver spontaneous honesty and the energizing consolation of hope.

Of these hopeful people I know that they understand all these generalities at close hand and in their own most personal experience will translate them into a personally thought-out teaching for themselves. The others may for the time being perceive nothing but covered over bowls, which could also really be empty, until, surprised one day, they see with their own eyes that the bowls are full and that attacks, demands, living impulses, passions lay mixed in and impressed into these generalities, which could not lie hidden in this way for a long time. I refer these doubters to time, which brings all things to light, and, in conclusion, I turn my attention to that society of those who hope, in order to explain to them in an allegory the progress and outcome of their healing, their salvation from the historical sickness, and thus their own history, up to the point in time where they will be again healthy enough to take up history once more and to make use of the past under the control of life in that threefold sense, that is, monumental, or antiquarian, or critical. At that point of time they will be less knowledgeable than the “educated” of the present, for they will have forgotten a good deal and even have lost all pleasure of still looking for what those educated ones wish above all to know. Their distinguishing marks, from the point of view of those educated ones, are precisely their “lack of culture,” their indifference and reserve with respect to many famous things, even with respect to many good things. But they have become, at that final point of their healing, once again *human beings* and have ceased to be human-like aggregates—that is something! That is still

something to hope for! Are you not laughing at that in your hearts, you hopeful ones!

And, you will ask, "How do we come to that end point?" The Delphic god shouts out to you, at the very start of your trek to that goal, his aphorism: "Know thyself." It is a difficult saying, for that god "hides nothing and announces nothing, but only points the way," as Heraclitus has said. But what direction is he indicating to you?

There were centuries in which the Greeks found themselves in a danger similar to the one in which we find ourselves, that is, the danger of destruction from being swamped by what is foreign and past, from "history." The Greeks never lived in proud isolation; their "culture" was for a long time much more a chaos of foreign, Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian, and Egyptian forms and ideas, and their religion a real divine struggle of the entire Orient, something similar to the way "German culture" and religion are now inherently a struggling chaos of all foreign lands and all previous ages. Nevertheless, Hellenic culture did not become an aggregate, thanks to that Apollonian saying. The Greeks learned gradually to *organize the chaos* because, in accordance with the Delphic teaching, they directed their thoughts back to themselves, that is, to their real needs, and let the apparent needs die off. So they seized possession of themselves again. They did not remain long the over-endowed heirs and epigones of the entire Orient. After an exhausting battle with themselves, through the practical interpretation of that saying, they became the most fortunate enrichers and increasers of the treasure they had inherited and the firstlings and models for all future national cultures.

This is a parable for every individual among us. He must organize the chaos in himself by recalling in himself his own real needs. His honesty, his more courageous and more genuine character, must at some point or other struggle against what will only be constantly repeated, relearned, and imitated. He begins then to grasp that culture can still be something other than a *decoration of life*, that is, basically always only pretence and disguise; for all ornamentation covers over what is decorated. So the Greek idea of culture reveals itself to him, in opposition to the Roman, the idea of culture as a new and improved nature, without inner and outer, without pretence and convention, culture as a unanimous sense of living, thinking, appearing, and desiring. Thus, he learns out of his own experience that it was the higher power of *moral* nature through which the Greeks attained their victory over all other cultures and that each increase of truthfulness must also be a demand preparing for *true* culture, even if this truthfulness may also occasionally seriously harm the idea of culture esteemed at the time, even if it is capable of helping a totally decorative culture to collapse.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is a retired instructor and research associate at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC. His translations and other materials are available at the following web site:

<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/index.htm>.

A number of his translations have been published as paperback books by Richer Resources Publications, including the following:

- Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
- Aristophanes, *Birds*
- Aristophanes, *Clouds*
- Aristophanes, *Frogs*
- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
- Aristophanes, *Peace*
- Cuvier, *Discourse on the Revolutions of the Earth*
- Euripides, *Bacchae*
- Euripides, *Electra*
- Euripides, *Medea*
- Homer, *Iliad* (complete and abridged editions)
- Homer, *Odyssey* (complete and abridged editions)
- Kafka, *Metamorphosis, In the Penal Colony, Hunger Artist, and Other Stories*
- Kant, *Universal Natural History*
- Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*
- Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
- Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
- Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
- Sophocles, *Ajax*
- Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
- Sophocles, *Philoctetes*.

Johnston's translations of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* (both complete and abridged editions), *Nicomachean Ethics* (Abridged), *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Nature of Things* are also available as recordings from Naxos Audiobooks.

Friedrich Nietzsche

On the Use and Abuse of History for Life

Translated by Ian Johnston

"We wish to serve history only insofar as it serves living. But there is a degree of doing history and valuing it through which life atrophies and degenerates. To bring this phenomenon to light as a remarkable symptom of our time is now every bit as necessary as it may be painful." With these words Friedrich Nietzsche, the revolutionary German philosopher, launches a frontal assault on the modern historical scholarship of his age. That scholarship, which prides itself on its objectivity and its ruthless enquiry into the facts, Nietzsche argues, undermines life, because it destroys our confidence in our own culture, our instincts, and our ability to live meaningful lives. We end up knowing all there is to know about our past, but losing contact with the emotionally meaningful value of that past. With so much knowledge we can have no horizon of significance, no moral frame of reference, because everything is dissolved into an infinite sea of becoming, and the most important elements of our lives become subservient to historical scholarship instead of the other way around. The best solution for this acute problem is a new generation of young people who will use history to expose its dangers and who will re-establish the priorities which serve life, by putting human beings in charge of history and no longer allowing a perverse mania for scientific knowledge to corrupt cultures and individuals.

Ian Johnston's new translation of this famous essay captures the clarity, energy, and urgency of Nietzsche's challenge to the culture of his time, a challenge every bit a pertinent today as when it first appeared.



Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and educated in Canada and England. He has a BSc from McGill in Geology and Chemistry, a BA from Bristol in English and Greek, and an MA from Toronto in English. For many years he taught as a college and university-college instructor in British Columbia teaching English, Classics and Liberal Studies. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*. Since 2006, he has had 18 titles published, including his translation of *Homer's Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which were issued in both book and audio form. He is now retired and living in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

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