

# The Seed of All Thought: Nietzsche's "The Uses and Disadvantages of History For Life"

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**Abstract:** In this essay I trace continuities in Nietzsche's thought, demonstrating that several of the key ideas associated with the mature Nietzsche are found in seed form in the early essay, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," one of the *Untimely Meditations*, written in the winter of 1873. A developmental approach to Nietzsche's work sets limits on postmodern approaches to reading Nietzsche. In his essay, Nietzsche argues that historiography must be evaluated on the basis of whether it serves life. I suggest that this criterion is the early version of what the late Nietzsche will describe as the imperative to "become what one is."

If this book [Genealogy of Morals] is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on his ears, the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and not spared some trouble in doing so: for they are, indeed, not easy to penetrate (GM, Preface, § 8).

*Continuities.* If one takes the above epigraph seriously, plunging at random into Nietzsche's corpus is the wrong move indeed. Nietzsche's aphoristic style and not always clear organization seem to support a reading that dives in and out of his various works. But Nietzsche does claim continuity to his thought and work, suggesting that to understand him we ought to read him as he wished to be read, from beginning to end. My concern here then is with the early Nietzsche, specifically the second of his four *Untimely Meditations*, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (HL). Written almost two years after *The Birth of Tragedy*, HL is a far less

journalistic piece than the first “untimely meditation” on David Strauss, and develops an issue that Nietzsche had been intensely wrestling with at the time, namely, the “question of whether historical knowledge is a good or bad thing.”<sup>1</sup>

My aim is to demonstrate continuities in Nietzsche’s corpus. The central concerns and ideas commonly associated with Nietzsche’s mature thought—the death of God, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, the *übermensch*, the revaluation of values—these are each present in HL in seed form. A demonstration of the continuities between HL and Nietzsche’s later thought aids our understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche’s later works; moreover, a demonstration of these continuities refutes postmodern approaches to reading Nietzsche. A second, related aim is to zero-in on the seemingly simple phrase in the title of Nietzsche’s essay, ‘for Life.’ The evaluative criterion Nietzsche offers for judging historical studies in HL is the degree to which the historian “serves life,” and this evaluative standard becomes a leitmotif running through Nietzsche’s works. It is not, however, at all obvious what Nietzsche means by “for life.” I shall argue that Nietzsche’s demand in HL that history serve life prefigures and is continuous with Nietzsche’s imperative in his later works (such as the *Gay Science* and *Ecce Homo*) that “One Becomes What One Is.”

*History and Identity*. Nietzsche’s meditation on the *Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* is concerned with our relationship to the past. Nietzsche is clearly on the attack in this essay, and his target is historicism, the pride and quintessence of nineteenth-century German intellectual life and thought. Historical studies in Nietzsche’s day were rooted in a zeal for the discovery of truth (equated with what “really” happened), coupled with a strong distaste for subjectivity. A central

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<sup>1</sup> Young, Julian. *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 175.

claim of historicism was that the nature or essence of an individual, a nation, or a culture should be embodied in—or identified with—its history; hence the view that the identity of cultural phenomena can only be revealed through a careful, detailed historical contextualization. In HL, Nietzsche argues against this historicist tradition of locating a sense of individual and cultural identity in the gaze into the mirror of the past. Anchoring ourselves in the past does not provide us with a foundation for a healthy life; on the contrary, Nietzsche wants to argue, the purely historical glance robs us of a life-affirming relationship to the world. “We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life: for it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate—a phenomenon we are forced to acknowledge, painful though it may be, in the face of striking symptoms of our age” (HL, Foreword). For Nietzsche, the search for a life-enhancing identity is not a question of submitting to the enclosing horizon of history, but rather of transcending this historical horizon by creating horizons of one’s own. Nietzsche thus distinguishes three attitudes (or “senses”) toward the past—the *historical*, the *unhistorical*, and the *suprahistorical*—along with three modes of conducting historical study—the *monumental*, the *antiquarian*, and the *critical*. A judicious balance between these attitudes and modes will set one in the proper relation to history, and history will thereby serve life, rather than strangulate it.

The historical sense is an awareness of the past as a formative influence on identity and culture. The historical is necessary for life; if we failed to remember the past we would be paralyzed and would have to constantly relearn the simplest of tasks and endlessly revisit painful mistakes. But Nietzsche sees “an excess of history” as problematic; preoccupation with historical research limits creative potential and the ability to make decisions. What is needed is the “ability to forget,” which is what Nietzsche means by the “unhistorical.” If we could not forget the past,

we would be forever incapacitated to deal with present circumstances. We need to learn “to forget at the right time” and to “remember at the right time.” Nietzsche emphasizes that both “the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people, and of a culture” (§1). The suprahistorical, as I argue below, is an early version of the will to power, an attempt to mediate the historical and unhistorical senses.

The three kinds (or modes) of historical study that Nietzsche delineates are the *monumental*, the *antiquarian* and the *critical*. Monumental history is basically concerned with the heroes of the past, the great figures who stand out and above their contemporaries and thus provide us with inspiration and the comfort and exhilaration of looking at greatness incarnate. The danger here is that the demand for truth is often sacrificed, and monumental history risks becoming “free poetic invention.” Antiquarian history “preserves and reveres” the past (§2). The past, owing to its age and grandeur, is worthy of our respect, even veneration. But antiquarian history, which tends toward the unhistorical, loses objectivity. Critical history approaches objective study, but with an eye to critiquing and condemning the stupidities, injustices, and errors of the past. Insofar as critical history tend to identify with the historical sense, an over valuation of its importance blocks the creative use of the past for the purpose of life in the present. Nietzsche speaks of the “genuine historian,” whose task is to judiciously balance the historical with the unhistorical and the three modes of doing history.

Nietzsche, contrary to some opinion, does not argue that the past is unimportant. Indeed, Nietzsche wants to impress upon us that the past is of the utmost importance. In *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche argues that, “Direct self-observation is not sufficient for us to know ourselves: we require history, for the past continues to float in us in a hundred waves” (HH II, §223). But this is not proof for Gianni Vattimo’s claim that Nietzsche “rediscovered” the value of

historicism in his later writings. Vattimo argues that in *Human All Too Human* (and other sections in Nietzsche's mature writings) Nietzsche inverses his use of the image of Heraclitus' ever flowing river as found in HL. In HL "Nietzsche uses the image of the river... to show the paralyzing effect of the excess of historical knowledge upon man's creativity." In *Human All To Human*, continues Vattimo, Nietzsche "says that, because of the essentially historical constitution of our being, if we want to plunge into its most peculiar and personal essence, we have to accept that we can never plunge into the same river twice. To know ourselves... [means] to become conscious of the potentially infinite past which constitutes our individuality."<sup>2</sup> But Vattimo fails to realize that with Nietzsche, it is not a question of one or the other but rather of *both-and*.

The dialectical style of Nietzsche's thought necessitates taking a variety of (at times) potentially contradictory perspectives. Thus we can read in *Gay Science* (written after *Human All Too Human*) that, "Whatever in nature and in history is of my own kind, speaks to me, spurs me on, and comforts me, the rest I do not hear or forget right away. We are always only in our own company" (GS §166). Similarly, in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes, "All historians speak of things which have never existed except in imagination" (D §307). Such statements can hardly be confused with the assumptions of classical historicism; nor do they fit with the idea of a "rediscovery" of historicism, unless we assume that after "rediscovering" history, in HH Nietzsche then (again) promptly forgets it. We would do better to emphasize a dialectical imperative at work, by which I do not mean a three-step thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but

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<sup>2</sup> Vattimo, Gianni. "Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics." In *Nietzsche As Affirmative Thinker*, 60-69, edited by Yirmiahu Yovel. Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 1986, p. 64.

rather Nietzsche's relentless questioning of all assumptions, along with his refusal to side with one pole of a set of contraries; tension is what gives Nietzsche's thought its torque.<sup>3</sup>

When condemning the historical sense from the vantage point of the unhistorical or the suprahistorical, Nietzsche does so in the belief that only the past can liberate us from the past. Why? Because an undomesticated history can show us how past individuals transcended their own horizons. Thus in any good history there is always an element of construction that does not oppose truth, but is its condition.

*Will to Power.* The phrase "will to power" is first used by Nietzsche in notes of the late 1870s,<sup>4</sup> but the notion is lurking in Nietzsche's discussion of the "suprahistorical" in HL. The suprahistorical sense is for Nietzsche something close to the recognition of a universal truth, namely, that history is nothing but the flux and flow of meaningless, random, and valueless events. As Nietzsche mercilessly puts it, the "suprahistorical man" is one "who does not envisage salvation in the process but for whom the world is finished in every single moment and its end attained. What could ten new years teach that the past could not teach?" (HL §1). History may seemingly teach us that there exists incredible variety across cultures and across time; but this variety belies a truth—that existence is everywhere the same, in so far as the variety of styles and approaches to life demonstrates there is no intrinsic meaning or significance.

Nietzsche's will to power has often been conceived as a basic psychological drive, part of the attempt to locate tensions and dualities in a single, fundamental psychological factor. Perhaps

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<sup>3</sup> This is a point made by Walter Kaufmann. "Nietzsche is, like Plato, not a system-thinkers but a problem thinker... the most striking character of 'dialectical' thinking from Socrates to Hegel and Nietzsche... is a search for hidden presuppositions rather than a quest for solution... typically, the problem is not solved but 'outgrown'" (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, p.82). Similarly, Peter Berkowitz writes of the "conflict or contest of extremes in the very foundation of Nietzsche's thought" (*The Ethics of an Immoralist*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, p.262).

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 179.

the notion has been given more attention that it deserves, given its place in Nietzsche's corpus as a whole, coupled with Nietzsche's abandonment of *The Will to Power*, once he recognized the idea as being rooted in the "will to a system," an impulse that Nietzsche ultimately rejects. It is possible, however, to conceive the notion of a "will to power" as a response to the nauseating wisdom that accompanies the suprahistorical sense. George Grant notes that in "his twenties Nietzsche saw the crisis with which the conception of time as history presented men. The great writings of his maturity were his attempt to overcome it." The nature of Nietzsche's crisis concludes Grant, is that "we cannot live in a horizon when we know it to be one."<sup>5</sup> But neither can we live without horizons: "a living thing can become healthy, strong, and fertile only when bounded by a horizon" (HL §1). This tension is the burden that Nietzsche bore throughout his adult life, and it goes some way to helping us understand the seeming contradictions that fill Nietzsche's work. Perhaps what we value most in Nietzsche is not his resolution of tensions and contradictions but his uncompromising and unrelenting struggle with them. Faced with the knowledge that all is flux, that there is no pattern or meaning in history, and that the horizons of each historical period are not part of an evolutionary development but the products of human will and creation, the genuine historian will creatively use the past for the needs of the present. The historical sense, writes Nietzsche, "lives in a profound antagonism towards the eternalizing powers of art and religion, for it hates forgetting." From the vantage point of the suprahistorical we see the nauseating meaninglessness in the flux of history; this vision reveals to us the necessity of eternalizing powers. The suprahistorical ultimately "lead[s] the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, toward art and religion" (HL §10). Nietzsche would later define "will to power" in precisely such

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<sup>5</sup> George Grant. *Time as History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995, pp.40-41.

terms: “To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power” (WP §617). Nietzsche’s genuine historian is a type who practices the supreme will to power.

*Death of God.* In the parable of the madman in the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche speaks of the death of God as the loss of horizons:

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried; “I will tell you. We have killed him--you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?” (GS §125).

In HL, Nietzsche associates the loss of horizons with the historical sense and the practice of critical history. The historical sense and critical history, given that they shine the light of objectivity on the shady doings of monumental and antiquarian history, are partners in the death of God.

For Nietzsche, the hypertrophy of the historical sense in his day was a contributing factor to the rise of decadence and nihilism. In one of the more prophetic passages of HL, Nietzsche claims that

If the doctrine of sovereign Becoming, of the fluidity of all... species, of the lack of cardinal distinction between man and animal... are hurled into the people for another generation... then nobody should be surprised when... brotherhoods with the aim of robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers... will appear on the arena of the future (HL §9).

This is a view Nietzsche never relinquishes; in *Daybreak* he makes the bold claim that “the great wars of the present age are the effects of the study of history” (D §180). The “historically cultivated man,” says Nietzsche, “... [is] swimming and drowning in a sea of becoming” (HL



§9). To the historical sense, all is becoming, there is no being, and hence there is no God, for whatever God is, he is surely Being.

Implicit in Nietzsche's notion of the death of God is that there is no longer a standard for life's governance. Such a conclusion does not, however, lead Nietzsche to a radical relativism. Nietzsche's controversial move in HL is to claim that historians need to balance the historical with the unhistorical, the latter defined as "the art and power of forgetting and of enclosing oneself within a bounded horizon" (HL §10). One is tempted to say that genuine historian's task is something akin to resurrecting God. But not any horizon will do; not any God will do. Nietzsche's evaluative standard is that this new horizon must serve life, and this end demands certain goods and values as effective means.

*Eternal Recurrence.* Whatever else Nietzsche's idea of the eternal recurrence entails, it can surely be understood as a kind of thought experiment, to be judged by its effects.

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you known it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence" (GS §341).

Nietzsche then asks how we would respond to such a demon. Would we gnash our teeth, or would we let the thought take possession of us, and in doing so, let it change us? Do the whispers of this demon promote life? Does it free us from resentment and a suffocating, nihilistic pessimism? Nietzsche's answer is a resounding 'Yes.'

The notion of eternal recurrence is found in HL in the context of Nietzsche's discussion of "monumental" history and the "suprahistorical" sense. The value of "the monumentalistic conception of the past [is that one] learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and thus may be possible again." But "that which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellations of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on earth" (HL §2). This is, of course, a different use of eternal recurrence than that found in Nietzsche's parable of the demon. Imagining oneself actually as Caesar or Napoleon demands a precise recurrence of conditions and events, something that will never happen. Thus, argues Nietzsche, monumental history works by "making what is dissimilar look similar; it will always have to diminish the differences of motives and instigations so as to exhibit the effects monumentally, that is to say as something exemplary and worthy of imitation" (HL §2). Still, this passage shows that Nietzsche was playing with the idea of the eternal recurrence of events early in his career, and he would define his own version of it over against the Pythagorean understanding.

Turning to Nietzsche's comments on the suprahistorical, we detect a much closer parallel to his later usage of eternal recurrence:

We may use the word "suprahistorical" because the viewer from this vantage point could no longer feel any temptation to go on living or to take part in history... If you ask your acquaintances if they would like to relive the past ten or twenty years, you will easily discover which of them is prepared for this suprahistorical standpoint... What could ten more years teach that the past ten were unable to teach? (HL §1).

The suprahistorical standpoint, in which all is flux, and the demon's suggestion of eternal recurrence, in which everything is played over again in meticulous detail, are similar insofar as they are tests of one's power. Both notions could be viewed as generative of nihilism. But Nietzsche sees the suprahistorical vantage point and the notion of eternal recurrence as conditions that must be overcome through the exertion of one's will.

Beyond similarity of function, the eternal recurrence is clearly a later version of the suprahistorical. In HL, Nietzsche firmly rejects the notion that history involves the unfolding of a teleological process, and he looks forward to the day when "one will prudently refrain from all constructions of the world-process." The idea of eternal recurrence also undercuts the notion that humanity is heading somewhere. Indeed, Nietzsche wants us to turn our eyes away from the mass of humanity toward the great individual. Such individuals "do not carry forward any kind of process... [rather] one giant calls to another across the desert intervals of time" (HL §10). A life of eternal recurrence is nothing less than a desert of time.

*The Revaluation.* In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche speaks of the model philosopher as "applying the knife vivisectionally to the very virtues of their time" (BGE §212). A similar image is found in *Human All Too Human* when Nietzsche claims that humanity can no longer be spared the gruesome sight of the psychological dissecting table and its knives and forceps (HH §10). Nietzsche is not concerned with rationalizing existing ethics; he wants to investigate the origin and nature of morality as such. Nietzsche's "revaluation of values," argues Kaufmann, "does not mean a table of virtues, nor an attempt to give us such a table... the revaluation means

a war against accepted valuations, not the creations of new ones.”<sup>6</sup> This “war” was well underway in HL. Speaking of the practice of critical history, Nietzsche argues that “every past is worthy to be condemned” (HL §3). Critical history attacks, without mercy, the violence, errors, and accidents of the past. Though Nietzsche champions in HL the genuine historian as one who creatively uses history for the purposes of the present, he or she abandons neither the critical study of history, nor the condemnation of those values that do not serve life.

*Übermensch*. Nietzsche’s writings are filled with a variety of ideal types: the philosopher of the future, the free spirit, the übermensch, Zarathustra. The genuine historian of HL is a forerunner of these later types. I have said that Nietzsche exposes his readers to the tension of not being able to live in a horizon when we are conscious of a horizon, and yet not being able to live without a horizon. Each of Nietzsche’s ideal types struggles with this crisis. In *Zarathustra* this crisis is formulated in images of ropes, bridges, and an abyss: “Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping” (Z §4).

This imagery is further developed in the story of the tight-rope-walker who falls to his death (Z §6). To walk the rope strung over the abyss, there must be tension in the rope. Such tension is thoroughly embedded in the concepts presented in HL. Nietzsche calls for a judicious balance between the three modes of history (monumental, antiquarian, and critical) and between the three historical senses (historical, unhistorical, and suprahistorical). To reject or limit any of these modes and attitudes is to kill the necessary tension required in using history for life. The theme of human excellence is never far from Nietzsche’s pen. In HL Nietzsche urges, “ask yourself why you, the individual exist... try for once to justify your existence... by setting before

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<sup>6</sup> Kaufmann, pp. 110-111.

yourself an aim, a goal, a ‘to this end’, an exalted and noble ‘to this end’. Perish in pursuit of this and only this...” (HL §9). Nietzsche never wavers from urging his readers to a higher state of being, to strive after “exalted” and “noble” ends. Nietzsche, in his third meditation on Schopenhauer, states “your true self does not lie deeply concealed within you but immeasurably high above you (SE §1). In HL, Nietzsche claims the “goal of humanity cannot lie in the end, but only in its highest specimens” (HL §9). Such remarks are important for understanding the development of Nietzsche’s conception of the *übermensch* as a higher form of humanity.<sup>7</sup>

*For Life.* The standard of evaluation introduced in HL is that history serve life:

Is life to dominate knowledge and science, or is knowledge to dominate life?  
Which of these two forces is higher and more decisive? There can be no doubt:  
life is the higher, dominating force, for knowledge which annihilated life would  
have annihilated itself with it (HL §10).

This same standard is found repeatedly in Nietzsche’s work. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche notes that

Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for a certain type of life.”  
The judgments a particular philosophy produces may be false, but “the falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment.... The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating (BGE §3-4).

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<sup>7</sup> Leslie Thiele has argued the “underlying theme of all four [*Untimely Meditations*] is the desirability of creating a heroic culture... [a life] spent creating and maintaining culture, which is defined as the favorable environment for the propagation and maintenance of great men” (*Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 14).

In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes

every healthy morality [is] dominated by an instinct of life; some commandment of life is fulfilled by a determinate canon of 'shalt' and 'shalt not'... *Anti-natural* morality--that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and reached--turns, conversely, against the instincts of life: it is condemnation of these instincts. Life has come to an end where the 'kingdom of God' begins" (TI V, §4).

That history, philosophy, and morality serve life is crucial to Nietzsche's ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics. History, philosophy, and morality are each means to an end. When taken as an end in themselves, as standards for judging ideas and action, there is an inversion of means and ends. Thus Nietzsche offers a means-end distinction on the basis of which we can rank goods, values, and virtues. The idea implicit in HL is that if there is one goal that all other goods serve, then that goal can be taken as an evaluative standard. Nietzsche does not prove this notion, but he does take it as an underlying assumption on which to base his arguments: things become good or bad in relation to whether they serve life.

Of course this formulation begs the question, what does Nietzsche mean by "for life"? At first glance, the attempt to answer this question leads to an answer of simple survival: "Knowledge presupposes life and thus has in the preservation of life the same interest as any creature has in its own continued existence" (HL §10). This statement could lead one to conclude that staying alive is preferable to justice, honesty, integrity and the pursuit of truth. But Nietzsche does not endorse nor try to prove such a conclusion. By taking "life" as an evaluative standard, Nietzsche invokes an endlessly ambiguous notion, setting himself a problem that would be explored and returned to time and again in his later works.

To better understand what Nietzsche has in mind by “for life” we would do well to distinguish between flourishing and excellence on the one hand, and simple existence and survival on the other. Nietzsche holds that there exists a fundamental psychological/spiritual drive to actualize one’s power, though for most individuals this drive is usurped by the drive to conform. This actualizing of one’s power is often spoken of by Nietzsche in terms of ‘becoming who you are.’ “What does your conscience say?—‘You shall become the person you are’” (GS §270).<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche derived this motto from Pindar, and it fills his later works. That which serves life can be taken as that which serves self-becoming. And the drive to actualize one’s potential may conflict with the drive to survive. Self-preservation is only one aspect of the will to power<sup>9</sup> and it may be overridden by higher demands.<sup>10</sup>

Peter Berkowitz notes that Nietzsche’s thought is “constituted by a pervasive and unresolved tension between his fundamental assumption that morality is made or willed by human beings and his unyielding conviction that there is a knowable and binding rank order of desires, souls and forms of life.”<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power is similarly rooted in a foundational tension: if all knowledge and understanding of the world are the product of the will to power, then so too is Nietzsche’s will to power a creation of his will to power, a logical predicament that admits to an assertion being a fiction. Such tensions in Nietzsche’s thought are readily apparent in HL. Nietzsche is clearly aware that all historical study involves subjectivity, yet he grounds his critique of the historical sense in the naturalistic notion that history must serve

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<sup>8</sup> According to Walter Kaufmann, “Perhaps there is no more basic sentence of Nietzsche’s philosophy in all his writings than this sentence” (p.149).

<sup>9</sup> “A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength--life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results” (BGE 13).

<sup>10</sup> “The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, or a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation” (GS 349).

<sup>11</sup> Berkowitz, p. 262.

life. Nature and convention in Nietzsche's thought form a potential difference that generates energy, heat and current. In HL Nietzsche ultimately sides with a naturalistic grounding of his critique of historicism. History "for life" may ultimately be a nebulous and utterly subjective creation of Nietzsche's own will to power; but that is not how Nietzsche understands it—Nietzsche is not content with such a lazy way out of the contradictions inherent in his thought. For Nietzsche knowledge and truth are both made up and discovered. Insofar as they are discovered, we can say that there exists a set of human needs—physiological, psychological, and metaphysical—the absence of which leads to a degeneration and decline of life. Beauty, for example, may not be in the eye of the beholder, differing vastly from one individual to another, but rather a function of human interest. The task Nietzsche sets for himself in HL is that of elaborating and defining the set of human needs and goods that will ultimately serve life; that is, Nietzsche sets for himself the task of living inside of the tensions and contractions between subjective willing and objective knowing. The problem Nietzsche identifies in HL (the tension in historical study between historicism and subjectivism) is also the solution to the problem, since Nietzsche understands the tension as constitutive of human being in the world. The "suprahistorical" position, coupled with the "critical," constitutes Nietzsche's attempt to mediate the contradictions of two seemingly opposed options. *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* renders palpable Nietzsche's struggle to navigate between the notions of an objective historical truth (however short we may come in realizing it) and a subjective play of appearances, rooted in an evaluative standard of serving "life."



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