

University of Skövde

Schools of Humanities and Informatics

## To Forget and Surrender in Order to Live

A Reinterpretation of Nietzsche's Views on History and Life

Bachelor's Thesis in Philosophy, 15 Credits

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# Abstract

In this essay the dangers of an overconsumption of history are investigated, and concerns are raised over the nature of philosophy and its role as a central part of man. Using material from Friedrich Nietzsche an argument is built, showing how we today suffer from a disease caused by a lack of attention to the present moment, and an overemphasis on truth rather than health. Through Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hindu myth, and Chinese thinkers a defense of surrendering to fate and being content with what happens is put forth, and with the help of Joseph Campbell, and his studies of mythology and anthropology, the value of religious unity and grand narratives receives a new interpretation. The overall style of argumentation is more artistic than analytical, and the intention of the essay is not to prove that the ideas within are true, but merely to show that they are available to anyone who are in need of them. Thus it is not to be approached as a polemic essay of continental philosophy, or as an objective presentation of analytical standards, but as a hybrid of both these traditions and the evocative tradition of Chinese philosophy.

# Purpose, Method, and Delineation

This essay is written as the culmination of three years of philosophical studies and as the last exhibition of learning before applying for a bachelor's degree. The purpose of this paper is to bring new attention to the text called *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010) by Friedrich Nietzsche, and to show the differences in the natures of the philosophy of the East, emanating from China and India, and the philosophy of the West, emanating from Greece. There is no intention to prove that the ideas within are true; this is a mere attempt to show that they are available to anyone who are in need of them. And, thus, it is not to be approached as a polemic essay of continental philosophy, or as an objective presentation of analytical standards, but as a hybrid of both these traditions that also is influenced by the evocative tradition of Chinese philosophy.

The basis of the essay has been a literature study, bringing together philosophical texts from over the world that all have connections to the essential idea here promulgated, and reading them to find coherent threads of argumentation and relationships that serves clarification. It was written over a five month period, slightly changing its focus as new evidence arose, finally settling on the design that can be read below.

The outer edges of the content of this essay are quite blurry, resulting from the fact that it is the target of this text to argue against the artificial clarity and strict categorization so loved in analytical philosophy. But for the sake of guiding the reader it is helpful to say that this essay deals mainly with the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, regarding his views that history is a possible danger to the health of human existence. It stretches out to encompass the study of mythology and anthropology through Joseph Campbell, and turns into a study of comparative philosophy when investigating the relations between the views on knowledge, freedom, and life in Western and in Eastern thinkers. The text contains one element of fictional tendencies that serve to elucidate some of the ideas that are hard to grasp unless put into a narrative account, but apart from this story – and a few glances at Schopenhauer and Emerson – the essay should be quite centered on the main topic.

See the bibliography for a better account of all sources and inspirations.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 An Introduction to the Conclusion

Let us begin with the conclusion of this essay and then turn to the arguments and the reasoning behind them:

Philosophy is a game for broken men. It is the belief of this essay – yes essays are just as capable of belief as men are – that as long as human beings are healthy and flourishing, as long as their surroundings are beautiful and prosperous, as long as days come and go without problems, seasons pass without difficulty, they will not engage in philosophy. It has been a common opinion of our age, and of previous ages in Europe, that it is the natural curiosity of mankind that drives them to ask the big questions, that, when they gaze upon the endless night sky, makes them wonder: Where did this all come from? Where is my place in all this? And, in the end: Why should we go on at all? But, as this essay sees it, this is very far from the truth, and as long as we keep feeding this unhealthy, inaccurate belief, we will spend every day making humanity more and more sorrowful.

The healthy man – the non-philosopher that is – will look at the night sky and say, ‘oh, isn’t it lovely out tonight’. He will find a flower and think, ‘this sure is beautiful; I ought to bring my friends here tomorrow’. His thoughts won’t wander away into the distant and the unintelligible; he will be content with what he has, cry when things are bad, and laugh when things are good.

Also, the healthy man is not a stickler for the truth. He will gladly accept a good story that makes him and others happy over one which merely enables him to predict the future more accurately. The stories need not be coherent or consistent, and neither does he, for as Emerson said: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.”

Only not all beings are healthy. No. The creatures on the cusp of the evolutionary wave, those who are progressive, longing for change and constant newness, are always strange, wild, and riddled with disease. Being born in an environment that does not harmonize with their natures they seek something new, something better. They are philosophers, explorers, scientists,

thrill-seekers, and compulsive hedonists. For them the present moment is shunned because of its inhospitable nature, and instead they long for the future and the past. This makes them powerful in many ways, and it is the belief of this essay that these broken men are responsible for the world we live in today, that they have created it in their own image, made it restless and incapable of contentment and simple joy, and that they try to push this mentality down the throats of all persons who are actually born in harmony with their world, whose nature was enough.

To not merely rave on about this in my own words I will first turn to Friedrich Nietzsche, who made a similar observation in his age, and whose essay *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010) is the main inspiration for this essay; then I will turn to Emerson, Buddha, Krishna, Schopenhauer, Zhuangzi, Joseph Campbell, and a few other to find fresh perspectives on the same problem; all in an attempt to diagnose the disease and to find a cure.

## 2. The History Sickness

### 2.1 The Background

In 1874 Friedrich Nietzsche was thirty years old, and he had spent his life partly as a contemporary German and partly as an ancient Greek. The latter he had read extensively about, being a philologist and ancient scholar, admiring their unrivalled capacity to produce great culture, their strength and drive for life, their health, beauty, and their relentless longing for the eternal and grandiose in spite of their knowledge of the tragic nature of the human condition. The former he diagnosed with a disease, a cultural disease, a disease in the minds of all German scholars and supposedly great intellectuals. Nietzsche knew he was suffering from this disease himself, but he was only partly German, after all, and where other scholars still perceived an illusory health in themselves, he knew what was wrong and what kind of cure the condition required. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 1)

In the essay *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (from here on called *Use and Abuse*) Nietzsche shares this knowledge with his contemporaries, revealing the nature of the disease, and outlining a possible cure. His proclamation was unlikely to come from the lips of a philologist, but there he was, saying that the cause of the disease, the lack of health, was an overconsumption of history.

He saw the ancient Greeks study history, taking what they needed, using it to become stronger, using it as nourishment for growing, for living in the present and striving towards the future; and he saw the Germans of 1874 stuffing fact after fact down their throats and down the throats of their children, filling them with whatever they could find, not choosing what was healthy and nourishing, but simply picking up every stone off the ground and swallowing it just because it was true, real, never considering that, even so, it might kill them. To this disease he observed that the only cure was to lean further towards the unhistorical state of mind or the super-historical state of mind, and that we needed to separate the different types of motivation for historical research: the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical. For us to understand what he meant by unhealthy history as well as the above mentioned variations of historical research we need to take a closer look at his essay; so let's. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010)

## 2.2 Three Mindsets

From the start Nietzsche shows the reader that he looks upon history and the reality of historical research as if it they were purely psychological phenomena. He breaks apart the normal view of what use history can have for mankind by looking at it more as a tool – a “food” – than an exploration or a mission.

Animals live *unhistorically*, he states, their mind never reaching into the future, never lingering on the past. This makes them happy, content, and extremely able to perform whatever action their nature requires of them. Humans, on the other hand, possess the two-edged sword of a temporal existence, storing the events of the past in our memory, using the hard earned lessons to create a future more to our liking. This makes us powerful, but also allows the possibility of discontentment, our regret that the present and the probable future, or even our past for that matter, did not turn out as well as imagined. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, pp. 1-5)

Humans also possess the quality of the historical mind to differing degrees. Some are nearly animals, living here and now, never planning, some are driven towards the future, using the past to their advantage – Nietzsche calls them *historical* – and some are even *super-historical*, having understood the futility of all actions, having seen the inevitability of failure. They are the ones who have grown tired of life, gained wisdom only to lose vitality. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, pp. 5-7)

To live unhistorically is basically the ability to forget, and it’s a basic requirement for life. It is possible to survive without conscious memory, as the animals show us, but it is not possible to live without forgetting since this turns man into a sleepwalker, who sees fault in every action, who doubts every decision, and in the end probably turns into stone as a monument to what “has been”. However, if the historical tendency in man is more balanced we would probably end up with a scientific man, who sees in history a progress and who wishes to strive towards the future to make it better. This man still lives to a large degree in the unhistorical, even though he would be hard pressed to admit it, and therefore he is capable of living, of using history as a means to create life. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 2)

Nietzsche sees it as a central question of his time – and I see it as an important question of our time – to find the healthiest balance of the historical and the unhistorical for our well-being and our growth.

### 2.3 Three Methods of History

“The fact that life does need the service of history must be as clearly grasped as that an excess of history hurts it; this will be proved later. History is necessary to the living man in three ways: in relation to his action and struggle, his conservatism and reverence, his suffering and his desire for deliverance. These relations answer to the three kinds of history so far as they can be distinguished – the *monumental*, the *antiquarian*, the *critical*.” (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 8)

The creative, artistic man, full of vitality and power, is most likely to find himself drawn to monumental history, the study of great people and great events of the past. In these monuments he will find reassurance that it is possible to do magnificent things, to, as a single individual, change the path of history. Used in this way it is a healthy activity, feeding present life with the stories of the past. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 9)

Monuments, however, aren't the most factual of presentations. They show the events as mere effects; they hide what makes the event unique in history, and throw a shadow over the parts that are less flattering. Nietzsche reacts with revulsion at the thought of an egoist or scoundrel finding inspiration in these mythical stories – as they often become after a certain time – and announces that only the burning of cities and meaningless revolutions could follow such a combination. It is also possible for monumental history to be used by people as a weapon against the present, for less creative people to look at the artists of today and say that their work is nothing compared to the great works of the past and therefore worthless. Thus, this perspective on history clearly needs a counterbalance; enter antiquarian history. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 11)

There are some people who are by nature reverent and conservative, who look at their past, the past of their village and motherland, and see it as part of themselves – as their roots. For men and women alike this antiquarian history is the natural approach to the past, and in their

instinct for preserving facts and keeping alive traditions they do a great service to life. Through this practice they stay connected to the past and get inspired by the feeling of unity with the many things that gave them this present moment. It also allows contentment through bad times since they're still on their own land, doing what they are supposed to do. Expressed a bit more bluntly by Nietzsche:

“How could history serve life better than by anchoring less gifted races and peoples to the homes and customs of their ancestors, and keeping them from ranging far afield in search of better, to find only struggle and competition?”  
(Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 15)

But also this sweet milk can turn sour, and does so when one is in need of weighing things of the past in an objective manner. The antiquarian isn't capable of this since he will always have a certain love for his own past that outshines and unbalances his appreciation of all other things. This can lead some to destructive fundamentalism. It might also be the case that the antiquarian history stops serving life, and starts to mummify it. His interest in the exactness of the past turns into a neglect of the present, and his reverence for the grand histories of ideas makes it impossible for him to change a single thing in this world – such an act being sacrilege in his mind. Thus, Nietzsche finds that also antiquarian history is in need of a compensating force; enter critical history. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 16)

Life desires life, and will crush anything that tries to stop it from subsisting. Critical history is the purest form of a present-loving, past-hating approach to the study of history. It sets out to forget, and even destroy, the past in order to set free all the forces of life – always longing for unrestrained action. It sees the injustices of traditions created in a very different time and tears them down, enabling people to forget and move forward. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 17)

However, no matter how irreverent of the past critical historians might be they are still inevitably a product of its errors and injustices, and no matter how much they try to be something that is purely present and based on knowledge of life in the now they will always find that this is merely “second nature” to them and that the “first nature” will often come forth and act through them, so that they often know what is right but find themselves doing the opposite. But, as Nietzsche says,

“Here and there the victory is won, which gives a strange consolation to the fighters, for those who use critical history for the sake of life. The consolation is the knowledge that this “first nature” was once a second, and that every conquering “second nature” becomes a first.” (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 17)

## **2.4 The Suffocating Imitator**

Having brought these categories to light, Nietzsche turns to his contemporary Germans to see how their attitude to history and life compares to his natural, simple, quite-obvious-when-you-think-about-it view of them. Needless to say, the great polemicist is appalled and instantly works himself into a linguistic rage about the endless consumptions of useless facts, the division of form and substance – which turns all Germans into weak, unhealthy imitators no longer capable of producing any worthy culture – and yet they have the guts to compare themselves to the Greeks! (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 19) However, I won’t take too much time clarifying Nietzsche’s relations to his contemporaries; instead I will focus on what is general in his essay, and what can be applied to the people of today, of the year 2010.

Let us therefore take a closer look at two of the five symptoms that Nietzsche claims will arise when a society is indulging in an excess of historical thinking, and later see if we can recognize any of them in contemporary man. The first symptom he talks about is the separation of inner and outer, which leads to a weakening of personality and a tendency for imitation. The second is the disruption of people’s fecund illusions and the disrupting effect it has on their maturation. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 24)

In his time Nietzsche saw how the people kept eating and eating history, being fed huge amounts of it without actually being hungry. It was – and is still much in this way today – required of all to learn the great events of history, to learn the causes and effects, and know all the grand theories of science; and while the mind kept increasing in size, being filled with stories and facts, the body was ignored – perhaps then more than now – as it was deemed barbarous. This created disharmony between body and mind; so many things existing in the latter that had no correspondence in the former. And Nietzsche observed how this made their personalities shrivel and become mere imitations; how they no longer trusted themselves in deciding what was right and wrong, what felt good and bad. Instead they were constantly looking to history to find out how they were supposed to be. Where once there were

individuals, educated in life and living, there were now wandering encyclopedias – all incapable of being anything else than machines, fulfilling one role, playing one part, and being extremely impoverished spiritually by this deficiency. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 25)

To explain the necessity of illusion Nietzsche tells us that a man who is caught in the grips of passion will find himself with eyes fixed on the recipient of his feelings; he will experience the world as more luminous and clear than ever, and yet his value judgments will be twisted, allowing him to sacrifice anything for his cause. This state of mind,

“... is the cradle not only of unjust action, but of every just and justifiable action in the world. No artist will paint his picture, no general win his victory, without having striven and yearned for it under those very ‘unhistorical’ conditions.”  
(Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 4)

The historical sense cannot but help trying to destroy all these illusions. From a very young age children are taught the facts of the world, having the veil ripped from their eyes and the air sucked out of their lungs. To Nietzsche this is an abusive action, disrupting the maturation of the children, turning them into critics and specialized scholars instead of artists and creators. For something to grow from a seed into a tree it needs a healthy atmosphere, enough nutrients and water. An excess of history will not allow the earth to keep its thin layer of breathable gas where life can thrive, hidden away from the cold vacuum of space; the historical mind claims that this atmosphere isn't truth, space is truth, it's a cold world, get used to it; and so they disperse the air, and all life suffocates, the earth left barren, only fossils remaining, forever frozen on the surface – an objective history no doubt. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 38)

## **2.5 Nietzsche's Cure**

It was Nietzsche's belief that in diagnosing the deficiency caused by an overly historical education one will suffer from its negative forces, and unless one is young at heart and strong enough one will not be able to resist the aging forces; and even though one resists one must be eloquent enough to put it into words so that one can move the youth with a clear message, and with them bring the revolution. Because it is not those who first discover the problems of the old age that will reap the benefits of the new age. They will suffer the pains of two conflicting

natures within them, the old still a force that cannot be immediately subdued. The first generation of youthful, healthy thinking will merely be a ladder to those who will come; so – Nietzsche warns – egoists, be aware. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 60)

The revolution will be done by destroying education, by seeing that the young need to learn life from living, not from an infinite load of facts and rotten fruits from the ancient past, and by showing people that we are damaged, that we are blind and deaf to anything but thinking, that there is a whole world to experience to feed on, but that we keep eating thoughts and symbols instead. Now then, Nietzsche asks rhetorically, with what should the old ways be replaced? (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 63)

There are only two cures needed: the unhistorical state of mind, forgetting history, bringing your horizons closer, living in the present; and the superhistorical state of mind, transcending history, finding the eternal and unchanging, living through art and religion. Both these are poisons when viewed from a scientific perspective, often ignorant, not interested in the gathering of facts, the looking behind every rock. But essentially we have a choice: let science rule life, or let life rule science; and who could not choose life, even the scientist, when without life there can be no science? (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 64)

Only when time has passed and healthy living once again has turned men into humans, only then can we return to the study of history, now threefold: monumental, antiquarian, and critical. Much of our knowledge might then have been lost, and in comparison with the “educated” men of old – the intelligentsia of our age – the people might seem barbaric and incoherent, but it will be worth it since we’ll have regained our humanity, and since we from that point on will be able to create a culture that is more than mere decoration, a culture that is a new nature, that can bring us together and make us strong, so that one day people of the future can look back at us and wonder like we now look back at the ancients. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 67)

## 3. The Contemporary Diagnosis

### 3.1 Readjusting Our Course

Let us take a little breather after that and summarize what we've learnt. First, I would to reiterate that the separation of the unhistorical, the historical, and the super-historical will remain important in the following sections; second, that the separation of the human being from herself, by rejecting body and tradition, and the loss of our natural instinct, by not trusting ourselves, is still relevant today; third, that Nietzsche's idea of culture as a new nature and the need for unity in arts and religion through a common myth is a concept that might help us in our contemporary disillusion and confusions.

But I have not brought Nietzsche's essay to light so as to only revel in its glories – even though I do like it very much and have read it many times – no, it has entered into this text as a means to an end, to use its old but well preserved body as food for the arguments of the present moment. The conclusion of this essay is not the conclusion that we just heard Nietzsche draw; we still have a few miles to walk before the end is within reach.

### 3.2 Not Just 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany

It is known that Emerson was a great influence on Nietzsche, that when writing his *The Gay Science* Nietzsche had read Emerson assiduously, but it is hard to know how early this influence began and how deep it went. (Poirier, 1992) However, upon reading Emerson's *The American Scholar* (Emerson, 2000) and Nietzsche's *Use and Abuse* one cannot help but seeing the similarities.

Emerson argues that man needs to constantly convert life into wisdom. He says that if one relies on the words of bygone times, if one does not criticize the masters of the past and find one's own path and truth, one will shrivel, become lifeless, and be unable to create. He thinks that man has been corrupted, turned into a thinker or a farmer instead of Man, a spirit, a soul with immense power; he is merely a part, a worker, and unless Man realizes that she has a deep connection to God, that nature is her just as she is nature, she will never reach the heights and the intuitive genius of the great humans of the past. (Emerson, 2000, pp. 43-59)

I got a small shock when reading this sentence from *The American Scholar*: “Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst.” (Emerson, 2000, p. 47) If we would switch the word “books” for the word “history” we could excavate the title of Nietzsche’s essay from this sentence. And it is not mere single words that suggest Nietzsche’s close study of this text. There are passages that seem to blend in all too well with *Use and Abuse*, such as: “[Regarding books] They are for nothing but to inspire” (Emerson, 2000, p. 47) to suggest the value of monumental history and “Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the view which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books.” (Emerson, 2000, p. 47) , suggesting the value of critical history. These three quotes are from a single page, and predict – or perhaps inspire – much of Nietzsche’s main thesis.

However, to Emerson, God is still very important and he concludes his address by wishing that there could be a new teacher that was as inspired as those who wrote the Greek and Hebrew religious texts of ancient times. (Emerson, 2000, p. 59) This approach in a way harmonizes better with the subsequent tone of this essay, where I will focus less on the value of critical history, whose idea is to bring good by breaking the idols of old – something I believe we are quite good at today – and instead investigate the value of antiquarian history and its close corollaries religion and myth.

Furthermore, Nietzsche thinks entering the unhistorical will make us youthful and wild. In this essay I will claim that the art of forgetting will partially have this effect, of breeding spontaneity and impulsive, thoughtless action; but instead of this being actions of war and conflict I believe they will reduce violence and enmity, since it was the historical thinking that actually caused the egoism and the limited world-view that separated one man from another so that they could wage war. In accordance with Emerson I believe there to be a creative and cooperative being beneath the surface of egoism, and that as soon as we let go of artificial attempts at “being as history teaches us to be” it will break forth and change us in a profound way.

But today we are still egoists stuffed with history, just as most intellectual contemporaries of Nietzsche and Emerson, so let’s look a bit closer at what the exact problem is.

### 3.3 The Hidden Intellectual

We have two prolific thinkers whose influence on our current age is incalculable, who warn us of the danger of taking knowledge too seriously, of letting books be too influential, and yet no matter how hard I look I can't find much of these sentiments resonating in intellectual circles today. Nietzsche is studied in bits and pieces, like bible verses, for the true meaning – the intention. How few are they who let themselves be inspired, who forget the words but feel, and act on, the energy that gave them life. As the Chinese thinker Zhuangzi – a man we will take a closer look at shortly – wrote:

“The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?”  
(Watson, 2003, p. 141)

The historical problems we have today are the following: First, our monumental history, the history devoted to inspire us, is filled with stories of exploration and expansion, stories that belong to an age when the world was still large and areas still uncharted. The values of freedom and constant hunger that were fitting in a world of a little man in a large land is leading us into a metaphorical cannibalism now that we live in a world of billion men on a small planet. Second, our antiquarian history, the history responsible for keeping us rooted in the past and giving us an atmosphere in which we can grow safely, has been damaged by the need for historical research, for truth and facts and nothing else. But equally, and thirdly, I think the sense of critical history has been misdirected and overemphasized lately, ripping apart all sense of antiquarian history with its critical claws. Thus, the critical history instead of serving life has become the servant of truth, and in that way, we are destroying ourselves.

Today we are no longer 19<sup>th</sup> century German intellectuals – not most of us, at least. We call ourselves materialist, and deem the pleasures of the flesh and the gratification of our senses to be the highest good. However, we shouldn't mistake this for having returned from a mental, isolated existence, as the one Nietzsche diagnosed his contemporaries with, into a more living, healthy life, as the one he saw that the Greeks had. For the intellect hasn't gone away, it is merely hiding inside of us as a new nature. We try to seem like we enjoy the beauty of

nature and the liveliness of grand events, but often – the author of this text observes – we don't actually see anything, and experience very little; instead we take pictures, write down mental stories, and inform our social circle that we have been here and done that, so that we can increase our social standing. We tick another box next to a name in our minds – been there, done that – and feel like we've grown. In the words of Daniel Kahneman, psychologist, we put priority on our remembering self rather than our experiencing self. (Kahneman, 2010) Thus, even though we might think ourselves materialists and pleasure seekers, our tastes are for social confirmation and status upgrades, not for immediate beauty and peaceful contemplation. We are not 19<sup>th</sup> century German intellectuals, but we are their descendants, and the disease that Nietzsche diagnosed them with is still very much with us today.

We are soon about to end the description of the disease and move on to the cure, but first I would like to present a little unorthodox clarification of the psycho-historical situation I believe we find ourselves in.

### **3.4 The Genealogy of Our Longing**

Let me tell you a story that probably isn't true and perhaps not even coherent, but that I believe will serve the purposes of this essay and present a perspective on the psychological history of man better than a demonstration of facts and relations would. It will be based on scientific evidence from a book called *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (Campbell, 1991) by Joseph Campbell, a study of the emergence of mythology in hunter-gatherers, the first farmers, and the first city-dwellers. Note that I have allowed much room for imagination and creative interpretation and my account should thus not be seen as an attempt to define actual events.

As the first man arose one sunny day in good old Africa, he smiled, and lifting the thighbone of a gazelle into the air he struck the head of another humanoid ape and consumed its flesh. Cooking this food gave him energy to prosper and populate, and then to wage war. Some were good at fighting and held their ground, staying where they had always been, but some lost and still survived and had to leave. When their children later asked them why they had left the old home, the parents looked to the horizon and proudly told the history of how they one day decided to leave the stupid brutes back home and instead go out and explore the world. The youngsters bought this story and turned it into the essence of their identity. Instead of being

people who danced and ate and laughed, they were explorers, doing most of the things that the ignorant grunts back in the motherland did, but devaluing these activities since the grand virtue was to look beyond the horizon and always search for the slightly better land that surely lay at the end of the rainbow. (Campbell, 1991)

One day a child was born who wasn't very fast or strong, and so he couldn't go as far and see as much as the other children. What he had was his dreams and his solitude. He thought that those weird images of gazelles and oxen that appeared to him during the nights were actually part of a world yet unexplored, a world that only he knew was real, that the other children would never take time to explore since they were so busy running around looking behind every boulder and every tree. In solitude he spoke to himself about this dream-world and noticed that as he uttered communications images arose in his mind that corresponded to the words. He was thinking. He was thinking first that a buffalo was a buffalo, and then he thought that the strongest man in the tribe was a buffalo, and then he thought that the tallest man was a mountain. He did this and his children did this, for his strange stories made him very popular. Soon they thought that the sky was the ground, that those bright spots in the night skies were lands far away, that the sky was man and that the ground was woman – thinking even that the world was man and that man was the world. (Campbell, 1991, p. 148)

Sometime after this there were people all over the world who starved themselves until dreams came and played with their minds so that they could see how the world truly was. (Campbell, 1991, p. 253) The people who had the dreams were happy and strong because they had faith and didn't doubt, and they saw many possibilities that others did not. But the people around them, who only knew how to listen to the stories and to remember them across generations, were very confused because the stories were often conflicting in their meaning, and often the stories of ancient times did not seem to represent the world as it was now very well. (Suzuki, 1949, p. 52) The people, however, saw the strength of the dreamers and knew that there was a world beyond the world, and that it was the grandest virtue to explore what was unknown, so they held unto the stories, even as the tales grew ancient and did not resemble much of what the dreamers once saw. They explored the stories with ever increasing anxiety. They looked at the world and compared the facts they saw with the stories in their minds, all to allow themselves to be the explorers they wanted to be.

So many stories had been told, however, and the reliance on them were so intense, that if a dreamer starved himself to see the true relation between man and world his words were shunned and his body burned, for they did not correspond to the stories. Thus, there was a planet filled with people longing to find the truth, but no one who knew how to do it. The anxiety and unhappiness was ever increasing, and the futile attempts at reaching it through facts were becoming infinitely more extravagant. A thing like no other thing had been created by the longing of a lost animal. Civilization had been born out of an excuse for weakness, out of a pale copy of dream, and out of a search for something that everyone possessed in their heart of hearts.

# 4. The Cure

## 4.1 Critical History

When Nietzsche tried to find the cure for his age he focused mainly on critical history and the way it serves life by tearing apart the idols of old in favor of life in the present. However, I think – as mentioned earlier – that we are today quite good at this activity, and that we now ought to focus on the other two aspects, antiquarian and monumental history, together with the fascinating mental states of the unhistorical and the super-historical. The only area where I feel Nietzsche's views are close to pitch perfect is in education, where we are still in the habit forcing knowledge on children without telling them what it's for, often without us knowing what it's for. Here we could use a dose of critical history to rid our children of the dull, numbing, and damaging facts, and ready them for a school where they can learn from life, as Emerson promoted, and where they can grow at their own pace, as Nietzsche wanted.

But this is mostly a negative activity, a cutting away. In the following sections I would like to focus on what it is we can put in place of the old, what can become the new mindset. We will go through the ideas of surrendering and forgetting, the ideas of settling and enduring, and finally the grand idea of living through myth. So let's get started.

## 4.2 Surrender and Forget

From India and the Lankavatara Sutra, the Buddha speaking:

“When one tries to understand the significance of things by means of words and discriminations there follows immeasurably deep-seated attachments to existence. For instance: there are the deep-seated attachments to signs of individuality, to causation, to the notion of being and non-being, to the discrimination of birth and death, of doing and no-doing, to the habit of discrimination itself upon which the philosophers are so dependent.” (Goddard, 1932, p. 63)

Yes, the Buddha seems to be quite spot on even if we were to transplant his words to apply to the philosophers of the twenty-first century. Philosophy is about telling things apart, about saying what is what, and why they are what they are. The son of philosophy, science, does

this admirably well, and from its hard work we have harvested the fruits of modern technology. However, we are still not happy, and we still don't feel like we have any answers. It seems that about fifty percent of Westerners will experience bouts of depression during their life. (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas, & Walters, 2005) And yet we keep on trying. We keep philosophizing, attempting to answer those eternal questions, keep on researching, hoping to find cures to an ever increasing number of diseases, extending our historical capabilities to the maximum, willing ourselves into the past to understand where we came from, forcing ourselves into the future to see where we might escape to. How about giving up?

The thought of surrender is attractive to many. The thought of returning to the state of the unhistorical mind, gracing peacefully, not thinking about the horrors of the past, not sweating over the problems of tomorrow. I don't think I have to cite psychological studies to claim that we make attempts of reducing thought and relieving stress all the time. By watching TV we leave our issues behind for a while and things don't feel as bad, until we wake up. By drinking we sedate our compulsive self-examining, feel relaxed and open for a while, but, inevitably, the next day comes and we are left with a hang-over. Not trying to sound too much like TV-shop, I am here stating that there is a way to get all the benefits of alcohol and TV without any of the drawbacks, and this is the art of forgetting.

There are many ways to forget. Nietzsche first tells us that what we have to do is to stop stuffing unhealthy knowledge into children and let them grow in illusions, but that's not really forgetting, that is not learning in the first place. Then he tells us of the super-historical path of seeing through the patterns of history and realizing that we are only reenacting stories told a thousand times. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 64) This is the path expounded in the Hindu text *The Bhagavad-Gita* (Arnold, 1993), where the god Krishna tells the warrior Arjuna that he has to fight in a war even though it is his friends and relatives on the other side. This because it was already written, had already happened before and would happen again, because everyone had already died an infinite amount of times, and that his killings would do no difference. They just were the repetition of a forever recurring play. Seeing the world and history from this high point is allows one to relax, knowing that there is nothing one could do to change anything. According to Nietzsche and the Hindu philosophers this realization leads you on the path to infinite happiness, where you can find beauty in even the most monstrous

events. It simply allows you to forget the past and the future since they are clearly not important anymore.

“Dance to what tune He will. With all thy soul  
Trust Him, and take Him for thy succour, Prince!  
So – only so, Arjuna! – shalt thou gain  
By grace of Him – the uttermost repose,  
The Eternal Place!” (Arnold, 1993, p. 95)

Another way of forgetting is to let go of the distinction between yourself and others. You can do it by rationally realizing that there are no boundaries between individuals in the way shown by the immensely complex argumentation by Derek Parfit in his *Reasons and Persons* (Parfit, 1984) – an argumentation I won’t even begin to try to explain. Or you might see the unity of all things by walking to the top of a mountain and having a sudden realization – there being evidence of certain neurological changes at high altitudes. (Arzy, Idel, Landis, & Blanke, 2005) However, the main goal is to feel like there is no self and that there is nothing that is needed; thus, allowing us to forget. When Zhuangzi heard that there was a man who could ride on the wind, and that he was very happy, he wasn’t impressed because he realized that the man was still dependent on the wind, saying:

“But suppose there is one who chariots on the normality of the universe, rides on the transformation of the six elements, and makes excursion into the infinite, what has he to depend on? Therefore it is said that the perfect man has no self; the spiritual man no achievement; and the true sage has no name.” (Fung, 1976, p. 110)

Arthur Schopenhauer – one of the philosophers that inspired young Nietzsche – was a pessimist, believing that behind all surfaces was a constantly striving will that could never be satisfied. In art, however, he could find relief. He allowed the notion that for perhaps thirty minutes – but no more – one could release oneself from the incessant wanting and become free and happy. This is something he received from Kant and that has been quite influential in the West. (Wicks, 2007) It is this state of mind – or something closely related to it – the state of the creator of art, and of the observer of art, that Nietzsche, Buddha, Krishna and Zhuangzi thought that we could spend our entire lives if we only are ready to accept the world as it is.

This is why Buddha, although claiming that the world is suffering, that nothing lasts, and that death is a good topic for contemplation, was an optimist. (Suzuki, 1949) The same goes for Nietzsche, who saw the death of God before most, who brought out the most monstrous motives behind human pity, who claimed that we were stuck in the revolutions of an eternal recurrence, doomed to experience every pain and joy of our lives an infinite amount of times, still was an optimist, saying yes, yes, yes to all things that arose in his experience.

“Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and most painful episodes, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustible vitality even as it witnesses the destruction of its greatest heroes – that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet.” (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 1888, 1998)

### **4.3 Settle and Endure**

Language, to me, is not a system of expressing truth but a tool that can be used to bring about a change in the mind of the reader or listener. The sentence “philosophy is a game for broken men” was therefore meant to evoke a certain reaction and will hopefully have done its job by setting the stage of this essay. Now, however, I would like to bring in a new definition of philosophy where I see it as a very good thing, an activity in which all humans ought to partake, and a game well worth the price. This type of philosophy will be found in the East, particularly in China, but really all over Asia (in a few cases it also arises in the West, but it never gains much influence). To explain the main difference between the two philosophies we will listen to Fung Yu-Lan, an eminent historian of Chinese philosophy.

One big difference between Chinese philosophers and their Western colleagues was that they were farmers while the Greeks, for example, were mainly city-dwellers and travelers. (Fung, 1976, p. 18)

“...their fortunes were tied up with agriculture. A good or bad harvest meant their good or bad fortune, and therefore their reaction to the universe and their outlook on life were essentially those of farmers.” (Fung, 1976, p. 18)

According to these thinkers merchants were of the lowest standards for they never stayed with

the land through bad times, they left in search of what was better instead of enduring. At the same time farmers were what they called “the root”, the producers of things, while the merchants were “the branch” that could only exist if the root was healthy. This made them consider the agricultural patterns of life as moral standards of correct behavior. (Fung, 1976, p. 19) They had a belief that “reversal is the movement of the Tao”, that for every action there was an equal reaction, and because of this one ought never to exaggerate wealth or poverty, happiness or sadness. (Fung, 1976, p. 20)

Living in families and villages rather than cities they had a more natural dependency on hierarchies, and therefore there are still more than a hundred words for family relations in the Chinese language – most of which have no equivalent in English. Confucius took these relations, made necessary by a certain type of life, and turned them into ethical statements. Confucianism is therefore a mere theoretical extension of Chinese rural life, and its need for proper behavior. The strict accordance with tradition is a reflection of the farmer’s soul. (Fung, 1976, p. 21)

Talking about the ideal land, the most ancient of Chinese philosophers, Laozi said: “The neighboring state might be so near at hand that one can hear the cocks crowing in it and the dogs barking. The people would grow old and die without having been there.” (Fung, 1976, p. 20)

Thus, we are able to illuminate that a sense of exploration, the longing for freedom, for unrestricted movement, are not the needs of mankind but the need of those who stem from a maritime, city-based culture, and we are therefore able to see that there might be another cure – than forgetting – for our restlessness, and that is to settle down, to relax, to endure, to build relations, and to find our place in family, in hierarchy; to be what Nietzsche called antiquarian, and to tell ourselves stories about the past so that we can feel our roots stretching down into the soil, grounding us, making us feel contented and alive. There have been traditions in the West prescribing this, but they have never gained preponderance, and as of today there is perhaps only laughter directed towards anyone who dares declare that freedom isn’t necessarily good, that a reduction of freedom and an increase in tradition and contentment is what we need.

#### **4.4 Living through Myth**

What I was trying to echo in the story told in part 3.4 – if you're still wondering what it was all about – was a concern expressed by Joseph Campbell himself, and that relates to Nietzsche's interpretation of the value of a unified culture.

"It is possible that the failure of mythology and ritual to function effectively in our civilization may account for the high incidence among us of the malaise that has led to the characterization of our time as 'The Age of Anxiety'."

(Campbell, 1991, p. 92)

From archeological finds and anthropological studies we are today quite certain that mankind has lived with religion and myth for a very long time: 30,000 years, possibly even much longer. (Campbell, 1991, p. 374) And perhaps our minds are now so dependent on a grand narrative, a great story, that few of us can find our way to the calm Zen state of the Chinese farmer or the Buddhist monk.

When I in the story in 3.4 express the despair of those for whom religion no longer seem to make sense I refer to a book by D.T. Suzuki, a Zen master and a great writer. In one of his essays he talks of how the death of the Buddha made his followers confused and unclear of what their practice really was about. Previously they had seen enlightenment embodied in their master and could therefore safely go on practicing, certain of the truth, of the reward at the end of their journey. But as he died they had two possible roads to take. One was the road of taking the words of the Buddha as truth and following them to the letter, believing that he was the only true prophet; the other was to find in their own bodies the state of consciousness Buddha had encountered, and to believe themselves, through this, to be his equals. (Suzuki, 1949, p. 52) The first road leads to priesthood, the other to shamanism.

In hunter-gatherer societies the shamanistic type of religion was prevalent, since this promoted individual strength and quick adaptability to new circumstances. (Campbell, 1991, p. 240) In farming communities and early cities, however, the priest-centered type of religion grew more powerful, enabling a large group to be synchronized with each other by discouraging individual thinking, and for their annual rituals to be strictly planned so as to correspond to the changes of the season, maximizing crop yield. (Campbell, 1991, p. 147) To make sense of life in cities mythology showed how the very structure of the city (Mesocosm)

was in line with the stars above (Macrocosm) and corresponded to the body of man (Microcosm); the king being the sun and the heart, and all other institutions and groups having their own corollaries. (Campbell, 1991, p. 148)

Today we don't have a widespread culture of shamanism. There is a lot of spiritual exploration and much experimentation with different substances, but most often those seem, to me, mere running away from the world, and are often too shallow to actually make a great impact on a person's life, making him feel safe, enabling him to act naturally while being healthy and happy. Also, today we have used critical history to break down the priesthood, and very few of us have a strong faith in religion. Some may argue strongly for it but they don't seem to gain either happiness or strength from their stories – which isn't strange since they are myths designed as a guide through the world as it was two thousand years ago.

But we do seem to need a myth, a story – a history. Our problem is that we are now so hell-bent on criticizing everything that isn't fact – so eager to tear apart anything that isn't scientific truth – that we don't even allow ourselves the atmosphere to breathe. In many ways we have an overly historic education, feeding us too much information, never letting us forget, never letting us enjoy the silence, and in another way we actually lack history, in the sense that we have don't have the story of our roots that the antiquarian needs, and the story of grand events of the past that the man of great potential needs.

In part these problems of the monumental history of our age, which are quite similar to those of Nietzsche's time, can actually be partly attributed to the later Nietzsche, or at least the interpreters of later Nietzsche, who saw that behind even the most benevolent act lay subconscious egoistic motivations (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 1878, 1996) and, thus – even though this was far from Nietzsche's intention – making every saint and warrior of the past out to be monstrous, egoistic creatures, who could inspire no one, hence, leaving us with no aspiration but unadulterated, unashamed egoism. And at the same time I believe that in the early Nietzsche, in *Use and Abuse*, we can find a cure; that is in his theory of the necessity of an ignorant atmosphere for the healthy growth of man. (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010) This is a theory that gives us good reason to forget that egoism might underlie all action, to ignorantly believe in benevolence and happiness; a theory that allows us to have a perspective that lacks predictive capabilities, but that lets us mature until we are strong enough to hear the truth and still be able to live and be healthy.

The question is: if we need mythology, then what kind of mythology do we need? Should we look for the individualistic type, allowing us all have our own religion, going our own ways, or ought we to find some beliefs that can unite us globally, letting us develop a unified, strong culture, as Nietzsche hoped for? I won't pretend to answer that question here; all I am saying is that it is the belief of this essay that stories will be a necessary part in curing us from our disease, even though it might've been stories – histories – that made us sick in the first place.

However, none of this is easy, and none of this is clear cut. I make no claim to have successfully separated Good from Evil. Therefore, we will now – before the conclusion of this essay – look at some dangers of this approach to life, history and philosophy, and see that the medicine might indeed be quite bitter.

# 5. The Bitter Medicine

## 5.1 The Dangers of

First, we are going to look at the dangers of myth and stories, and we don't have to walk far from Nietzsche to find examples. In 1874, the same year as the essay *Use and Abuse* was published, the opera *The Ring of the Nibelungen* was released by Richard Wagner, the composer. It was a work that had taken twenty five years to complete; it was more complicated, passionate, and sublime than any previous opera; and it was built out of fragments of old German mythology to create a new image of the German people, the German tradition. (Fisher, 2005) For a few years Nietzsche worshipped Wagner and proclaimed his operas the answer to the problems of disillusion and decadence that he had revealed in his studies; he even thought it the equal of Greek tragedy. But, as the racist, anti-Semite, fascist tendencies of Wagner became clearer to him Nietzsche lost faith in his idol and broke with him. The operas, and their stories, however, went on to inspire Hitler – together with many of Nietzsche's own works, interpreted by his Nazi sister – and this use of stories to benefit not life, but a certain people, a certain idea, is the danger of ignorance, of myth overpowering truth, of almost everything that I've presented in this essay. (Wicks, 2010)

In a disillusioned time, such as the present one, the force that resides in a narrative that people could actually believe in and unite around is so immense that it is clearly dangerous in the wrong hands. The reality of a few men, dispersed around the world, wishing harm to Western culture, doing harm with bombs and planes, mere vandals, aggrandized by the technology available, can be turned into a grand myth of the Enemy, a great force, hidden all around the world, and this simple story can make it possible to change policy and law, resounding deeply within the ancient minds of the people. (Altheide, 2006) Therefore, one might argue, against this essay, that myth is better left alone, that when using this deliberate stepping away from the obvious truth, in search of unity and deeper sentiments, one will always slip into evildoing.

Second, we have an argument against the art of forgetting (as interpreted by me, more in accordance with Buddhism than Nietzsche) inspired by a text written by Nietzsche much later in his, *The Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1887, 2003). I interpret him here as criticizing the Buddhist, the meditative, peacefully religious attitude that is connected to the unhistorical

acceptance of what is. Saying that surrendering to the moment and letting go of the ferocious ambitions that the historical sense awakens in us is an act of weakness, and a cowardly attempt to escape. He says in *The Twilight of the Idols* that: “The sedentary life is the very sin against the Holy Spirit. Only thoughts reached by walking have value.” (Nietzsche, 1888, 1998, p. 9) This showing his contempt for that which refuses to fight for its existence, those creatures who are content with what they have, and those who aren't part of pushing evolution forward.

Nietzsche would perhaps say that without struggle we humans wouldn't have come into existence, wouldn't have been forced to evolve our intelligence and our sensibilities. And to now say that we have enough, to deny further progress by complaining of the suffering that it causes, would be arrogant to all future generations who, through this, would be robbed of the fruits of our pains.

Third – and to me perhaps the strongest – is the argument that focuses on the danger of losing modern science, the knowledge of medicine and technology, when letting go of our historical sense. Zhuangzi said after the death of his wife:

“In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery a change took place and she had spirit. Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Now there's been another change and she's dead. It's just like the progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter.” (Watson, 2003, p. 115)

A man with those thoughts wouldn't spend much effort on developing medicine to extend life a few years, or to heal a sickness that afflicted a people. Nor would Krishna's words to Arjuna about the eternal recurrence of all things be a good motivator for the enhancing of technology. Even in Nietzsche's wilder and more progressive notion of the effects of the unhistorical state of mind, he still stated of these forgetful people:

“At first they will be more ignorant than the “educated men” of the present: for they will have unlearned much and have lost any desire even to discover what those educated men especially wish to know: in fact, their chief mark from the

educated point of view will be just their want of science; their indifference and inaccessibility to all the good and famous things.” (Nietzsche, 1874, 2010, p. 65)

And since the very illusion created by our grand myth is dependent on certain facts being hidden from the view of most people, an open, sharing, omnipresent scientific community would probably be discouraged, and science would become a more priest-like esoteric society where innovation would decrease and where earlier truths soon would begin to rot. I believe like Nietzsche that this would only be a temporary thing, soon to be replaced by an era of great activity, now perhaps with a different focus and with a different attitude, but the danger is still, undoubtedly, there.

## **5.2 Living without Fear**

It is not for nothing that the Buddha tells us that to become free we must first accept that the world is suffering, nor is it for nothing that Nietzsche tells us that we must accept even the most monstrous, and see beauty in the most evil; for when we seek eternal happiness, we elevate ourselves from the temporary concerns of things and then and there we cannot have any artificial desire of what ought to be, we can only accept what is. And anyone who chooses the path argued for in this essay will in the end have nothing to guide them but their inner sense of joy and peace, and this will have to be enough for them to grow faith in the fact that we live in the best of all possible worlds. This will require a type of fearlessness unimaginable to most, but that – as they will see – arises naturally in man as she looks at the world through super-historical goggles.

Hence, I am not going to show that these dangers do not exist. For she who lives unhistorically does not know what the world will serve her today, if it will be pain or pleasure; but she is not disturbed by this, for she knows that she will suffer from neither and find beauty in both. Instead, I will devote the conclusion of this essay to reiterating for whom, and for what reason, these words are written.

# 6. Conclusion

## 6.1 In Defense of

First, this essay is written in defense of those who chose to stay when others left, or rather, didn't choose, for they didn't even consider it an option; the antiquarians. These are people who often find their existence "nasty, brutish, and short" (Lloyd & Sreedhar, 2009) as Hobbes would describe their state, but who accept this and are content with it. They are not the "noble savages" of Romanticism, for they do not seek freedom. They accept hierarchies if there are hierarchies and they accept limitations if there are limitations. Nor are they the "blond beasts" (Nietzsche, 1887, 2003) of Nietzsche, for they don't strive to conquer and don't walk around with a constant hunger for power. They are beings that have found their evolutionary niche, who once in the past adapted and found themselves fitting to a certain environment, who no longer need thinking because their instincts will adequately respond to most of the situations that arise. And their lack of thinking means that they do not philosophize, and that they cannot defend themselves in intellectual circles.

Philosophy is a game for broken men because those who engage in it are creatures still in need of adaption, creatures that lack a home, whose instincts are not fit to the time and place in which they find themselves. As times change and nature transforms itself – as it always does sooner or later – people previously content will find themselves once again lost and grasp for philosophy. The problem in current thought that I wish to bring into light here is that just because exploration, a search for improvement, and a need for self-examination is something that is occurring in all philosophers, this doesn't have to mean it is a universal value, or be necessary for the flourishing of a creature. I defend here those who cannot defend themselves, and reprimand those who see a small part of their own nature as an essence of all mankind even though this very part might be the cause of much of human suffering.

Second, this essay is written in defense of the art of forgetting, of the surrender of the historical through the super-historical to reach the unhistorical, and of critical history that accepts no fact that isn't healthy to life in this very moment. This means that I'm defending the act of sacrificing science, the act of letting go of all engagements in life, and having unshakable faith that life will subsist even though we humans stop trying to keep it alive by artificial means. Essentially I am trying to defend the children who deserve an illusion and a healthy atmosphere that we don't give them, who should be allowed to let their natures break

forth without us trying to control them and put them in square, quantifiable boxes, teaching them facts that are designed to turn them into “educated” people. Instead of suppressing the children – instead of suppressing nature – I here claim that we should let them be an inspiration for us all. I say that we ought to learn how to live, not from philosophers and historians, but from nature and life; from animals, plants, rivers, and children.

Third – and last – this essay is written in defense of telling a story, of letting monumental history inspire man. Because just as the hunter-gatherers would tell a story to better know when animals would come and go; just as the first farmers would tell a story to better harmonize with the movements of their crops; just as the first city-dwellers would tell a story to unite themselves and avoid tearing themselves apart; just as all these storytellers, we today have a need for a story to guide ourselves through this time of change. In a world that is shrinking and flattening, that through instant communication distorts time and space, that through innovation is pushing our bodies and minds in directions never imagined – at a rate previously impossible – we need to live within a narrative so that we can feel at home, so that we can become healthy and functional. In this time when minds are bent in pain even though everything outside seems easier than ever, we need to tell ourselves a story to relieve our frustration, to build an understanding that is not based on the inconsiderate facts of science, that doesn’t try to be as much true as it tries to be healthy. We need to, in Nietzsche’s terms, give ourselves a horizon. We need to let ourselves breathe a nutritious atmosphere, so that we can grow, so that we can be all that we can be.

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