

Original Paper

A Metaphysical Approach to the Philosophy of History: An Introduction to a Universality

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Abstract

If history is aligned with metaphysics, it can promote universality, and until this alignment occurs, one culture, or one people, or one age has little chance of being successfully compared with another. Individual histories of isolated periods of time, such as ancient Egypt, or Aztec America, or the age of Louis XIV are important individually, but they confer little meaning when compared with others, that is, if they are comparable at all. It is the task of historians to search for humanity among all humans who lived in bygone ages. Certainly, universality indicates that the world is the result of a process of individuals pulling together and pushing apart, of support for underlying proposals and denials of the same. History signifies a process that is the result of the unknown, and a process is simply a series of steps, actions, or procedures producing a result. Whether the result is desirable is irrelevant to the process itself because the latter manifests an indifference to its outcome.

Keywords

philosophy of history, metaphysics, becoming

1. Introduction

Can the philosophy of history be another description for metaphysics? Since all human endeavors can be perceived to be a part of metaphysics because they involve being, it may also be perceived that the philosophy of history is an example of the truth of this assumption. A perusal of the works of Hegel or Herder, for example, might suggest that an attempt to philosophize about humanity, drawn out over many centuries, would not only be historically, but also metaphysically relevant. Needless to say, the question above demands an answer irrespective of any attempt to deny its premise. If the philosophy of history is assumed to be profound, prophetic, or sweeping, it must have a metaphysical underpinning that concerns the composition or expression of human reality, and not so much to interpret it from a

particular point of view, but to perceive and analyze its reality. If there is anything relevant to all of humanity, it must deal with ontology that is applicable as a totality, definable and limited to its essence and distinguishable from everything else. Emphatically, the philosophy of history would be unsuccessful without a metaphysical underpinning because it must be grounded in an analysis of being and in being's applications throughout time. In the absence of metaphysics, the philosophy of history would remain an example of the past that is particularized, but not generalized. Like many other disciplines, philosophy of history is characterized by more than just a recollection of the past.

If the philosophy of history has an objective, it cannot be variable, since the purpose of Vico's Scienza nuova, as one type of a philosophy of history, is unrelated to Augustine's De civitate Dei, as another. Whether scientific or theological in reference to the two authors just mentioned, the philosophy of history must be limited, and yet defined or distinguished in some way. Otherwise, it would be unreasonable to compare different views within the same context. They must be limited and still have something in common. The perception of a philosophical movement or system, such as rationalism or empiricism, is restricted to some criterion, which is why they have distinct descriptions. Since a system is defined by its worldview or teleology, it differs from other systems that offer views of reality with their own independent interpretations. It is presumed that the philosophy of history would reveal much about its own specialized point of view and little about anything else, but it should not be confused with empiricism or phenomenology, to name a few other specialties. And if, perchance, there is a similarity between them, there must be arguments or reasons that verify it. In this light, we can say that there is a similarity between philosophy of history and metaphysics, and the arguments below are offered as proof of this similarity.

The philosophy of history is an idea conceived in the 18th century by Voltaire. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there is a long tradition within history that disputes its philosophy, a tradition that considers the philosophy of history as an impossibility because the universal push for progress or the pursuit of improvement as a worthy goal in human endeavors is questionable. Yet if history has a philosophy, it cannot ignore historical facts because history is factually based. It is based upon facts that are not so much given in themselves, but must be established, uncovered, and identified. Historical facts are essential for history as scientific facts are essential for science, but historical facts may not only serve history, they may also serve philosophy. And this conclusion is cognizant of the deliberate adulteration or falsification of the past by certain individuals or regimes, but even a denial of something may evolve into an affirmation of what is truthful when one thinks critically and when that affirmation is tested over time. Despite repeated attempts at different times, the past has never been determined and fixed, and neither is the future.

Nor does the philosophy of history have to offer an analysis of the grand sweep of all events, since it can offer an analysis of the past without referring to every incident that took place within it. A metaphysical portrayal of the past would still be supportive even when facts cover a wide and diverse course of events. In this sense, the philosophy of history is possible if it is a metaphysics, but not in a

transcendental or purposive sense. It must deal with the metaphysical basis of everyone, regardless of who they were or when they lived, but a metaphysical analysis of history should not undermine the place of intuition or uncertainty within human actions. And it must be universally applicable in so far that it concerns everyone in which events are perceived as parts of a much larger enterprise that is supported by an openness to being and not limited by motives or causes (Note 1).

In theory, people who lived in prehistory should be included within this philosophy for they gave support to its being. Although not historically related, they are metaphysically related. If philosophy of history is possible, it would be possible within a context that is universally applicable, but there is a difference between history and its philosophy. Although there is only one historical world into which everything is presumed to fit, history is not reducible to a homogeneity that promotes one value, one quality, or one idea, nor to the Stoic idea that the world constitutes a unity, nor to the Christian idea that history is supported by a single universal chronology, nor to the Enlightenment idea of a fixed and unalterable human nature, nor to the Marxist idea of dialectical materialism, nor to the Spenglerian idea of universal values for all civilizations. If history is reducible to one thing, conflicting interpretations would be contradictory. Nor is the philosophy of history the equivalent of the study of human behavior. Although behavior must be included, its formal study need not be. In fact, if it were true that philosophy of history is merely the equivalent of the study and consequences of human behavior, then Dante's Divine Comedy would be a philosophy.

Adding to these arguments we can conclude that it is irrelevant whether or not there is a purpose to history. Although morally questionable in its own right, it should not be an historian's intention to look for one. The challenge of historical thinking is not to find fault or to assess what was acceptable or unacceptable behavior in times gone by, but to understand and explain the mores of previous generations. It is not the historian's obligation to speculate what should have been done for what was done, to propose an approach to events that in hindsight may have been wiser, better, or more efficient. It is as an obligation to the present that the historian describes what took place in the past, even if it was unfortunate, foolish, or immoral. Therefore, historians must avoid holding historical facts to any standard of morality. If this occurs, the result would reject objectivity and undermine historical authenticity.

Similarly, it is irrelevant whether or not there is an underlying cause or motivation that is posited upon some preconceived premise. Neither the purpose nor the cause is relevant to history or why historians bother to write it. History is a purely human endeavor and concerns humans solely. There might be a so-called history of the dinosaurs, but it does not attract the attention of historians unless they also are paleontologists. The description of history is more accurately applied in the narrower sense and inaccurately applied in the wider sense, but there is nothing mysterious about history. Either it is written, or it is not; either it is factual, or it is not; either it is human, or it is not. Anything that is not written, factual, or human is not truly historical, regardless how frequently the description of natural history is used.

Since history is a serious and definitive pursuit, its study should be followed as scientifically as possible, that is, clear-headed, balanced, and investigative. Although in the view of some thinkers, history may be a science, this view is unimportant when considering its metaphysics, since the latter can be applied to any discipline whether or not scientifically directed. In this sense, the views of J.B. Bury or Marc Bloch are still relevant when considering history's scientific basis, that is, in so far that evidence is collected, analyzed, and described for future evaluation.

2. Historicity

The subject matter of history is not only individuals, but also the behaviors and policies supported by institutions, organizations, and traditions. History's historicity is the primary concern of historians when they are concerned with humanity's collective experience. Nevertheless, historicity must not be confused with Husserl's lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) that presupposes an inclusivity of far-reaching importance (Note 2). The lifeworld is the world that is directly experienced by everyone, the world of everyday life. Because it objectifies the world, it allows individuals to understand and communicate with each other, but it lacks the dimensions that posit humans within history, which is a far more inclusive endeavor. The lifeworld lacks the ability to do something by producing an effect that is efficacious in some way and is divorced from the plenitude of conditions of overwhelming importance that impacts humanity as a totality.

If anything, philosophy of history is similar to uncovering the layers of an onion, since when one layer is uncovered and analyzed, another appears either through the introduction of new questions, or by the application of new analytical techniques, or the introduction of new evidence. Even if posed as a failure, the philosophy of history is an attempt to elucidate a most difficult topic, a topic that indicates the desire to understand our own reality. Therefore, the philosophy of history is really the philosophy of humanity, and to state something so obvious must mean that it describes a plenitude of our most basic characteristics encompassing good and bad behaviors of all of us. Otherwise, it remains an illusion, and ultimately a delusion. When history becomes an erroneous interpretation, it becomes a falsity.

Contrary to popular literature, history has no sides. It has no right side, no left side, nor any other side. To speak as if it has a side is misguided. When removing the notion of sides, we can also remove the notion that history can be made. Although it can be revealed, it cannot be constructed, erected, or formed. It does not walk, skip, or jump, and certainly, it does not march. Nor is history definable by ages, no matter how many are offered, neither by Spencer's or Durkheim's two ages, Bruni's, Vico's, or Comte's three, or Marx's five. It cannot be fabricated because it begins and ends with the void of being that is consumed by latent possibilities that may develop into actualities, that is, by those possibilities that are waiting as well as those that are spent. Everything comes to be within time as everything passes away within it. Whatever is historical must be part of a much larger event just as a piece that fits into a puzzle is significant because it is part of it. Whatever is historical presupposes the ability to distinguish

between the past and the present, as well as any impact they are thought to have that is projected upon the future.

And regardless of its abilities, history concerns what is possible, and if it is filled with unspeakable atrocities, then the latter are part of human possibilities no matter how terrible they appear. The unspeakable as Nietzsche described is human, all too human. Consequently, it is false to characterize history as the fulfillment of impossibilities because if impossibilities do occur, they are hardly impossible.

3. Truth and the Past

It has been proposed that if what is true is real, that is, if what is true is in the present, then there is no truth in the past (Note 3). If only the real is in the present, then it is the obligation of the present to define what is true. We must respond that this thought is categorically false because if the past has no truth, there would be no truth in history, and no purpose in pursuing it. We can affirm that reality resides in what is, but this understanding extends to the past because the latter concerns what was real at one time. Truth resides in what is even as the present slips into the past because the latter is a form of the former. All variants of time are real, but not all are equally known, since the future that remains unknown is nevertheless real in so far that it is, which is a way of saying that it must be drawn into the present in order to be both real and known.

Past reality is still true in and of itself, and its truth is intensified by being verified and heightened in the present. Otherwise, all of the past would be meaningless and so would all the crimes of humanity. If the latter is correct, there would be no fear of retribution for the so-called untruthful unreality of the past and no reason to act honestly. The absence of truth from the past would also undermine legal systems, but such an assumption is an absurdity and a contradiction. Past and present realities reveal themselves simply and directly by the nature of their being, affirming that truth is uncovered in all variants of time that confer the presence of knowledge and promote the pursuits that disclose it.

Furthermore, it is unfounded to assume that the metaphysical cannot descend into the historical because the historical is the metaphysical. And by being metaphysical, history does not need anything. It does not need an underlying ideology such as Marxism that interprets historical events in terms of dialectics, or Christian eschatology that presupposes the end of the world. History is founded upon being, derived from its openness, and conditioned by its applications. It is a vibrant phenomenon that does not stand still. It does not settle comfortably into the past, nor can the past be equated with it. Essentially, it is not really the study of the past as a student might easily respond. If anything, it is the study of the past preserved and molded by the present. It may be described as the past shaped by a sculptor who chisels the stone of yesteryear revealing an unending rhapsody between what was and what is. Indeed, what good would the past serve if it does not serve the present and remains unknown by it? If the past serves only itself, there would be no need for historical investigation, and without investigation, the past

would remain quiet, empty, and still. It is historians who make it speak, rendering it full-bodied, and moving.

Historical reality is past reality because its being is spent, but it remains to non-being for history's continuation because non-being is projected by the future through its manifestation in the present. It is by this projection that history acquires a metaphysics manifested by the conjunction of what was and what is, and the conjunction of what is and what might be. History may be expressed metaphysically as metaphysics may be expressed historically. Philosophy of history is more than a possibility; it is a certainty that is derived from past experiences projected beyond themselves. It is characterized by our openness to being that is based upon a tension with non-being, and upon being's own openness that itself is based upon the same metaphysical tension, but in reverse. What is noted within us is being that struggles with what is not, at least with being that is not yet. And what is noted within being itself is its own struggle with non-being, represented by a bifurcation of the real and the unreal. Within this flux of being and non-being lies historical reality that displays the dynamic force of knowledge and ignorance.

4. Becoming of Being

Historical facts attest that history, like many other human endeavors, is the story of the becoming of being. It is the revelation of the coming into being from the void of non-being, the weaving together of what is and what is not by the force of uncertainties. In this sense, history means uncertainty as expressed through choice, but it is more than just choice of individual things made from changing circumstances. It means a change in being, and when historians are engaged in this manner, they are engaged metaphysically; but the change described here is not to be confused with change in nature because the latter is governed by natural laws that humans seem to have circumvented, except for mortality and the effects of physiology.

Only a lasting history is capable of changing. When history changes, it can persist, and if it does not persist, it cannot change. This relationship is not contradictory because it is a dependency. The reality of the passing of time and the reality of the fundamentals of change will continue indefinitely into the future made notable by history. Since change is to be expected, this idea also includes those changes that are artificially sought as a pursuit of the deliberately contrived. The end of change is not different if its preparations are either accidental or deliberate, but its means are all-revealing, especially if its preparations were forced. Therein resides the danger of change that itself has no ethical characteristics. It is humans who motivate change and determine its ethics and consequences. Change should always bring inquiries as to its origin and purpose, and the more removed change becomes, the more it is questionable.

One notable example of the effect of change was the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915 during World War I that was followed by the response of President Wilson and Congress to this sinking, the rallying of the German navy for unrestricted submarine warfare, and the death of Captain Schwieger in September 1917 as the former commander of U-boat 20 that sank the Lusitania. These individuals and

events were important because they altered the course of the war. Historians have revealed that change is part of history's constitution, a feature of its descriptive innateness. The assumption that individuals or events can change history presupposes that it is not already known or foreordained. Therefore, individuals and events that changed history are transformative, and transformation signifies a process of some sort, but a process as a sequence of events is not compelled to take place in only one way.

All of these ideas concern the nature of becoming that itself represents a change from non-presence into presence where the word "non-presence" is more descriptive than "absence" because the latter presupposes something that should be, but did not appear, or had appeared at one time in the past. A non-presence fits the description more accurately because it is the opposite of a presence emerging into being from non-being. But is it an oversimplification to say that all things human are the result of becoming? Would this idea naturally be included in what humans pursue? Since all human endeavors are impacted by the acts of becoming, humanity cannot act otherwise, assuring that each time and each event is different. Sociological facts are repeatable, but historical facts are not. Hence, it is metaphysically impossible for history to repeat itself because every event is tied to a specific time and place making the repetition of history a contradiction. It is the importance of this relationship that helps to access the metaphysical basis for a philosophy of history.

Despite being influenced by other disciplines, such as anthropology or sociology, history is self-contained which is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because history is not threatened by other disciplines and remains assured within the quality of its facticity. But it is a weakness because other disciplines are also historically based. In fact, any historian who ventures into any discipline other than history should bring along everything else he knows in parallel and unrelated specialties.

5. Historical Evidence

History would have no influence if it was not recorded, if there were no clay tablets, stone stelae, medieval manuscripts, paper documents, photographs, or computer data, although the past can still exist indefinitely in collective memory. But memory is not history, nor is history based upon so-called authorities as historical sources. Metaphysically, we should question if recorded sources confer the sole advantage of the past upon the present. In what sense is philosophy of history restricted to historical times? If the answer to this question is an affirmation, then prehistorical people would be obscured in more ways than just historically. Likewise, it would be no stretch of the imagination to conclude that history is nowhere to be found in historical records. Rather, it is to be found in the minds of the historically informed, that is, in living and conscious minds. And yet without historical evidence, we would not even get this far. History is not the equivalent of the past as past, but where historical evidence has survived and is analyzed. It is the result of an effort of monumental proportions that discloses serious attempts at understanding human consciousness. And yet historical facts are not the equivalent of historical interpretations, and if only one interpretation is accepted as true and others are oppressed, then orthodoxy prevails.

There may be some confusion about the meaning of history and the past because they are associated with each other. The past means the time before the present, the time no longer existent, the time that was earlier because it is bygone, or the condition or action prior to the time when it is expressed. None of these meanings have anything to do with history, which is a more sophisticated and specialized word. History concerns the past, but it is also a description of a narrative that requires more than what has passed away. It means an analysis of that passing which hopefully encourages historians “to show how it actually was” (... zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen....), an expression made notable by Ranke (Note 4), and similar to the reflections on the Peloponnesian war by Thucydides (Note 5). To state what actually was is reminiscent of the correspondence theory of truth. Therefore, history does not and cannot live only in the present variant of time; it must also live in our knowledge of it which makes history an epistemological study.

History is a recollection of the past, but its influence far exceeds its recollection. Its influence is based upon the effects of the past on the present because the past sets in motion conditions that persist long after their initial occurrence. History is a remembering, a recordari. It posits history’s influence upon humanity while demonstrating humanity’s influence upon history. History signifies an intensity of far-reaching possibilities, and this view is supplemented by the understanding that the past lives within the present by affecting an influence on it that is constantly changing and continually being reinterpreted. History is the theme, subject, or topic that evaluates human beings conditioned by time that moves both forward and backward simultaneously, but more prominently it moves forward because it is affected by being’s temporality and by the coming into being from non-being. By itself, history cannot be denied unless we also deny our own self-importance, a self-importance essential in past events pushing upon the present and of present events building upon the past. Since there is nothing unusual or uncommon about the views expressed here, they cannot be disqualified as an explanation for a philosophy of history. Hopefully, along the way we can avoid special concepts and techniques that distort history and its evaluation (Note 6).

6. History’s Forwardness and Backwardness

Contrary to Lotze’s analysis from the late 19th century, we must affirm that time’s forwardness and backwardness, and their influence on history, can only be the result of humanity’s immersion in the world (Note 7). It is in connection with the world, with activities and events, with successes and failures, that time’s forwardness and backwardness and their historical reflection have any meaning. Without the world, all would be lost because the world endures as the medium for action and the plateau for existence. History is not derived from individuals hovering in space, but by being tied to the world that itself is conditioned by its own worldliness. Because history is reinterpreted continuously as the means to self-importance, the result makes the world the object for every intent and every purpose. This is why the world and the historical reflection of it move forward while simultaneously reflecting where it had been. In fact, history would be an impossibility if it did not reflect where it had been. The

lack of the world, if at all possible, would render time static and unchanging. It is the past that affirms the world's existence, and the present continues its affirmation. The movement of time confirms that history represents changeability that in reference to history is a uniquely anthropomorphic characteristic that must be differentiated from nature and natural evolution. It is by being human, by being subject to an openness into which all human possibilities occur that we have created a reflective historical sense of the past upon which the present is grounded. History is the expression that itself is historically defined as a revelation of humanity. It is the subject of the description of past events, and becomes, simply by its presence, the vehicle of all human importance, the vehicle that even if ignored, altered, or forbidden, cannot undermine its influence. The influence of time forwardly and backwardly is the fulcrum upon which the past remains preeminent in humanity's collective existence. There is no fixed and completed past that is not influenced by the present, and yet the past is real in so far that it is variable, but the future is not real at all. Since there is no opportunity for the future to replace the past, the future can project, but not determine what might happen. The future is a hypothetical. It is a longing, not a certainty.

Being and non-being begin and end with the void, with a description of its location in a non-spatial sense of what is and is not. And what distinguishes being from non-being is change, although it is related to both, that is, to the act of emerging into something that did not exist before, and to the act of passing away from what did exist before. What we have just described is a general explanation for change regardless where or when it occurs, and it is also related to historical change because the reality of new occurrences or happenings is connected to the reality of the old. Both realities are correlated in some way that are brought together into a reciprocal relationship. And it is this reciprocity that helps to define the meaning of history and illustrates why it is important to know it.

7. Importance of the Past

Any being that is conditioned by time is exemplary of the past because it is subject to a temporal definition. Without time, the past cannot be aligned with the present. Therefore, the past has a direct bearing upon the present that affects its presence, its actions, and its cause for being. The past is significant because of the metaphysical truth that verifies the present, the truth that affirms that the present exists because of what went before. The present springs forth from the void of being that contains everything that might be. It is the residence, so-to-speak, of all successes and failures, all actions and inactions, everything that we are, do, and desire. Although the present springs forth from the void of being, it also reverts to it. The present is short-lived, but the past lingers indefinitely. More than the past having been present at one time, its greatest impact is its lingering effect. Therein is the importance of history because it attains a preeminence by sustaining the present, and thereby makes history a concern of the utmost importance.

Either an event occurred in the past and remains there, or it is remembered in the present and is promoted there. If not sustained, the past cannot be alive in the present. The present is all important,

and it alone determines the past. And when the past lives in the present, it does so not in any active sense, but in relationship to our knowledge of it. History is knowledge that makes the past meaningful. It is a knowledge-based subject that requires years of study to know even a small part of it. Metaphysically, we can say that the past cannot determine itself because it is devoid of being. It lies in waiting, like a princess hoping to become the consort of a present or future king. Because the past is devoid of being, the revival of its being takes place in the present when the latter reconstructs the former, although it is not really the revival of its being. Rather, it is the revival of the knowledge of its being. A past and dead language, such as Hebrew, has been revived, and it indicates that old languages, as well as old religions, old laws, and old mythologies, among others, may be restored, remodeled, and reestablished. In this sense, the past is not dead. It becomes a living and dynamic force that brings with it an energetic and compelling potency, but a potency that hypothesizes the uncertainty of the future.

History is a dynamic and vibrant discipline, and not only for what it contains, but also for its influence on human endeavors. It contains an energy that cuts across all peoples, all cultures, and almost all times. Although it can be understood on its own terms, is history historically conditioned? The answer to this question must be affirmative because it is supported by the past, but we should ask if later generations have the right to alter it. The answer is apparent because the past is defenseless against factors or individuals who wish to alter its presence, a presence that is still important, but now seeks a different agenda, which is similar to erecting a statue to some individual or cause that years later is defaced or removed because the world or some participants within it have altered their perception of what is meaningful. Even if later generations cannot influence the outcome of historical events, they can still influence their consequences.

We may conclude that although history deals with the past, the past by its very nature is not historical. Deliberate attempts to alter facts are not done for the benefit of the past, but the present. They are altered for purposes that are thought to be favorable. And when such attempts are extended to politics, particularly when they are radicalized, they offer ideas that seem extreme and are supported by reasoning that is considered to be true. But the desire to alter the past cuts both ways because the introduction of new and historically questionable interpretations or methods may reaffirm what has changed over time. Therefore, deliberate attempts to alter the past in order to strengthen the present may reaffirm the past at the expense of the present. Any attempt to alter the past would succeed if the present is not built upon it, but this desire cannot be supported because humanity already possesses a past. History cannot be detached from the reality it concerns because it is not derived from general principles or assumptions, and not based upon premises when thinking about the past. It contains an innate weakness that like deduction as a process of reasoning is posited on assumptions and not on inferences. It has the potential to be systematic, but a system does not always have to be methodic because systems and methods are not equivalent concepts. A method may or may not be systematic, and a system may or may not be methodic. But in reference to history, if it is falsified, it becomes a denial, that is, a refusal to grant a truth that in itself becomes a contradiction.

Regardless how we view human behavior and human choices, both are characterized by methods, and whatever is methodical is part of a process. It should be apparent that there is process within history. Because it concerns what is directed to an end, its actions are the means, but history is not prearranged or foreknown. Its methods, and by extension its interpretations, are unpredictable and uncertain.

To deny the past assertively is to know it pointedly just as bigotry does not stem from how we look at others, but how we look at ourselves which is another way of saying that the denial of truth is based upon internalizations of what we already know. It is more than the traditional meaning of adaptation of social norms that originate externally and are accepted internally. Adaptation means those ideas that are conditioned by our own limitations are composed largely of contradictions. And yet the affirmation of truth cannot be other than what it is, but the difficulty is determining what it is, and what it is rests upon the evidence that allows us to believe it (Note 8). In a sense, accepting what is true affirms the validity of the past, but truth and validity are not equivalent terms because truth must be valid, but a validity may not be true. Validity means that a conclusion from which it is drawn must be based upon the premises that are given.

8. Conclusion

How are all these historically related ideas represented in the present variant of time? Is the present representative of the passage of time as it slips into the past from the nebulous future, or is it something more meaningful, more decisive, and more pertinent? A person, custom, or artifact from the past has meaning because it passes from the time of its creation into the present. And yet there are many things that originated in the past that have little or no meaning in the present. In fact, they constitute the majority of these things, such as Henry VIII's craving for baked lampreys or his fascination with mechanical clocks. Many things from the past have been rendered archaic, obsolete, and outmoded. They are part of the past, although reduced in meaning. They served, acted, and lived before reverting into the void, but their brief existence may have lasting influence indicating that the passage of time is really an example of time's eternity.

And yet the past in its historical sense contains something important because it constitutes the pivotal mechanism not only for history's philosophy, but also for its metaphysics. If this relationship did not exist, the philosophy of history would remain suspect, if not unlikely. We might conclude that the philosophy of history is a worthy pursuit. The discoverers of stone tools, the harnessing of fire, and the wheel are unknown, but their importance extends into history, an importance that far exceeds their prehistorical origins. Are they important in themselves or are they important because they impact the present? Although these ingenuities occurred prehistorically, in what sense are they not historically significant?

Although the metaphysics of history needs individuals as agents, it does not need to know who they were because their impact outlives them. The soldiers of the Allied forces who fought and died on the beaches of Normandy in June 1944 are largely lost to history, but they are just as eventful as the

recorded and remembered names of their commanders, affirming that history is conditioned upon humanity's presence within the nature of its being. If humanity is unimportant, historical analysis would be irrelevant.

The real question to ask is whether history is historically relevant. If it is not metaphysically conditioned, we can conclude that it is a discipline of minor importance. It is metaphysics that renders history important and gives it its historical relevance. As an inquiry that assesses human reality, metaphysics concerns the ideals of a much wider humanity because it concerns the breath of human activity exercised everywhere. And although it is commonly known that historical records describe events within the last six thousand years, what do we do with the previous four million years? Archaeological discoveries help to illuminate the past, and they should not be ignored when we reflect upon it.

The philosophy of history is actually the philosophy of the past to the fullest extent of its meaning, and we should ask how individuals and events of the past are important in the grand scheme of things. Are these events important not just for what they were, but also for what people did in reference to other human beings, to the world, to nature, and to being itself? And with reference to all these things, history tells us what actions were taken in the past. All of these things constitute the metaphysical basis for the philosophy of history that is founded upon the acts of becoming. They touch upon phenomena, tendencies, and proclivities that are universally applicable. When expressed as actions and reactions, every individual is the potential embodiment of those choices that are subject to the whole range of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. These embodiments contain what is common to all humanity, but to call this phenomenon human nature is an inaccuracy because a more suitable description would be ontological freedom that is expressive of our choices and behaviors as we stand before the foremost attribute of openness, namely, the condition of unending possibilities when seen from the precipice of nothingness. Using metaphysics as a way of explaining history means that it is utilized as a measure in order to assess it. It is not that history is deliberately constituted in this way, but that it is the logical result of such a relationship that may be analyzed from numerous points of view.

Notes

Note 1. An interpretation denied, but not refuted, by Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity*, trans. George J. Irwin, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, pp. 250-52.

Note 2. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. with an Introduction by David Carr, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 108-14.

Note 3. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933, p. 146.

Note 4. Leopold van Ranke, *Fürsten und Völker: Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1491-1514; die Osmanen und die spanische Monarchie im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, 4th

enlarged ed., ed. Willy Andreas, Wiesbaden: Emil Vollmer Verlag, 1957, p. 4 (preface of the first edition of 1824).

Note 5. Thucydides, *The History of the Poleponnesian War, Books I and II*, with an English Translation by Charles Forster Smith, rev. ed, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1928, bk. I, ch. 22, sect. 2 (pp. 38-39).

Note 6. Isaiah Berlin, *Historical Inevitability*, London: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 52.

Note 7. Hermann Lotze, *Lotze's System of Philosophy*, Eng. trans., ed. Bernard Bosanquet, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884, vol. II (Metaphysic), sect. 150, p. 255.

Note 8. A view similarly expressed is Henri-Ir é n é Marrou, *The Meaning of History*, trans. Robert J. Olsen, Baltimore: Helicon, 1966, pp. 63-66.