

Nietzsche Exam Review Dialogue
for
On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life

Preface

p. 7, ¶1

Tedrick: Hey Neechee.

Nietzsche: It's NEE-chuh.

Tedrick: Sorry. Hey Neechay.

Nietzsche: *Chuh*. It ends with a "chuh" sound.

Tedrick: NEE-chuh.

Nietzsche: Right. Now, what do you want?

Tedrick: I got your book, right here, the one about history.

Nietzsche: Yeah?

Tedrick: On the first page of the Preface, in the first paragraph, you're all angry about history. What's the big deal?

Nietzsche: Didn't you ever ask in school what the point was in taking history classes? How was know all those facts about old dead people going to be useful to your life?

Tedrick: Well, yeah.

Nietzsche: Well, that's why, then.

Tedrick: So, you wrote this book for high schoolers?

Nietzsche: No, I actually wrote it for my fellow academics. They are the "spoiled idlers" I talk about in the first paragraph.

Tedrick: That's kind of rough, don't you think? Weren't you afraid of making people angry.

Nietzsche: No. Making people angry was a big part of what I always did. And these people needed to be riled up. They were taking history way too seriously.

Tedrick: But you're a philologist! I know because you say so on p. 8, ¶1. And philology is the study of old, dead languages. You were like a historian of language. So why are you criticizing people for being interested in history?

Nietzsche: I'm not. On p. 7, you see how I say that "we require history for life and action"? History can be very useful, and we should study it for its usefulness. But in my day, that's not why people were studying it.

Tedrick: There was some kind of huge history craze going on in German universities in the 1800s, wasn't there?

Nietzsche: There was. Hegel (that's "HAY-gull," btw) had argued that if you just properly understood how ideas develop throughout history, you'll be able to not only to understand all of the past, but also to predict the future. So, philosophers were getting all excited about history, and Bible scholars started trying to do "scientific history" about the Bible. And people got so excited about studying history, that they forgot to actually have any lives in the present.

Tedrick: So, you're trying to help people—to make the world a better place?

Nietzsche: Yes! Just look at the first full paragraph on p. 8. Do you see the revolution through return there? The Greeks knew how to really live. At least the Greeks back in Homer's day, and whatnot. We need to go back to the way they did things, the way they thought about the world. If we do that, the status quo of our present age will be undercut, and the way will be clear for creating a new and healthier age.

Tedrick: I see. But maybe that's already happened. I mean, nobody's obsessed with history these days.

Nietzsche: "History" is just one word I use. There are others. Look back on p. 1, in the first paragraph. You'll see there that I use "history," "knowledge," and "instruction" as synonyms. And if you keep reading through the book, you'll see I use "science" as a synonym for "history, knowledge, and instruction" as well. Now, people in your day are pretty obsessed with knowledge, instruction, and science, aren't you?

Tedrick: Well, knowledge and science, anyway.

Nietzsche: Okay. But look, if you ask me, the word that best fits your day is "information." History, knowledge, instruction, and science are all just different types of information. And you all are *obsessed* with it.

Tedrick: No we aren't!

Nietzsche: What do you do most of the day?

Tedrick: Surf the internet.

Nietzsche: Doing what?

Tedrick: I don't know. Like Facebook and news sites and celebrity gossip and whatnot.

Nietzsche: Do you text your friends a lot?

Tedrick: Yeah. But what's your point?

Nietzsche: My point, dear Tedrick, is that you, and everyone else in your society, is obsessed with information gathering. You all have to be "in the know" about everything, down to what your friends are eating for breakfast, or what some idiot celebrities named their unfortunate spawn, or what natural disaster is occurring in some country on the other side of the planet.

Tedrick: What's so bad about wanting to be well-informed?

Nietzsche: It's not a want, Tedrick. It's an addiction. If the internet crashed and the cellphone networks went down, there'd be mass hysteria. You would all go insane because you wouldn't be "in touch" with "what's going on" in the world anymore. Cut off your supply of information, and you'd all go into shock.

Tedrick: Yeah, but you could say the same thing about air. Suck all the air out of the country and everyone would die of asphyxiation. That doesn't mean that breathing is a bad thing.

Nietzsche: No, you're right. My point is just that you don't *do* anything with all the information you're constantly gathering, any more than the people in my day did. You just soak it all up, and . . . Nothing. It doesn't make any real difference to your real lives. And how could it? How could knowing about Snookies and Kardashians and Putins and ice melting in Antarctica actually be useful to anyone?

Tedrick: Well. . . .

Nietzsche: Well, okay, it could, but you'd have to be pretty creative, inventive, and motivated to make most of the information you absorb in a day actually matter for how you live your life. But we'll talk about that later.

Section 1

p. 8, ¶2

Tedrick: You seem to have a pretty pessimistic view of the situation we humans are in.

Nietzsche: It's true. Animals, I think, are much better off than we are. They're happier, anyway.

Tedrick: I believe it. Like Kant said, the more you use Reason, the more miserable you're likely to become.

Nietzsche: True, but I don't think the ultimate difference between animals and humans is that we have Reason and they don't.

Tedrick: But that's always been the way philosophers have defined the difference between humans and animals! Aristotle, for example, said humans are animals—"zoon" (that is, "ZOE-on"). It's just we are the *zoon logikon*: *logical* or *rational* animals.

Nietzsche: Ah, but the Greek word "*logikon*" can mean "linguistic" or "speaking" too. It comes from the word "*logos*," which is the word that Bible translators translate as "Word" in the first verse of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Tedrick: Well, I guess the reason we can reason and be rational and whatnot is that we can use language.

Nietzsche: Right. And what is it that allows us to use language?

Tedrick: Our mouths?

Nietzsche: No, silly. *Memory*. That's what we humans have that animals don't.

Tedrick: What? You think animals don't remember stuff?

Nietzsche: They don't! At least, they don't remember much.

Tedrick: You have never seen a face more skeptical than my face is right now. Look, dogs remember their owners, rats remember how to get through mazes, birds remember how to fly south for the winter

Nietzsche: Perhaps. But here's how I'd say it: dogs don't *remember* their owners. They *recognize* their owners. They don't think, "Oh yeah. Here's that guy that gave me food last Friday night at 6 pm, and who bought me from the store five years ago." Seeing his owner just triggers ingrained habits in the dog, that lead to the dog acting in one way rather than another. Dogs are too busy living in the moment to be bothered to think about, contemplate, or remember the past. It's like when Pavlov did his famous experiments on dogs. He, evidently, would ring a bell, and then give them their food. They eventually came to associate the bell so closely with food, that their mouths would start watering whenever they heard the bell.

Tedrick: Well, what about rats remembering mazes then?

Nietzsche: That's just more habit formation. It's like "remembering" how to ride a bike. You're not actually thinking in a detached way about some time in the past when you rode a bike. You're just reactivating an old habit that's stored in your nerves and brain and muscles.

Tedrick: And what about birds remembering how to fly south in the winter?

Nietzsche: Again, they don't. It's not like they have to think back to how they did it last time, and remember that first they did this, and then they did that, and whatnot. There are just certain environmental triggers that get them flying in a certain direction at a certain time of year.

Tedrick: We've been talking about this so long I don't even remember why.

Nietzsche: I'm trying to explain what the difference between humans and animals really is. Humans have memories. Animals don't. Animals live in the present, while humans spend a lot of their lives living in the past.

Tedrick: But in Section 1, you also talk about "horizons" or something.

Nietzsche: Yeah. Your "horizon" is the extent of things you take into account or are aware of. Right now I'm in your horizon, because you're aware of me, and maybe animals are in your horizon too, because you're thinking about them. And your horizon extends into the past, since you're also aware of what you ate for breakfast, or where you agreed to meet Jenny and Joe for dinner tonight, or whatever. And your horizon extends into the future, since you're aware of the exam you'll be taking on Friday, the fact that Jenny and Joe will be waiting for you at the restaurant, and whatnot.

Tedrick: Animals, then, don't have much of a horizon, according to you.

Nietzsche: Right. Animals are limited pretty much to thinking about what is going on in their immediate environment in the present moment. Things that aren't in their immediate environment fall outside their horizon, and so they don't think about them. Likewise, things in the future and past fall outside their horizons.

Tedrick: So, animals' horizons are like points. They live completely in the present.

Nietzsche: In general, yes.

Tedrick: But humans have an extended horizon, since they are aware of the past and the future, and of stuff that is outside their immediate physical environment.

Nietzsche: Exactly. Normal humans have an extended, but still limited horizon. They don't take into account everything in the world, back to the dawn of time, and all the way to the end of time. So, their horizons are limited. But their horizons include a lot more things than animals' horizons. So, their horizons are also extended.

Tedrick: Shouldn't we want to be like the animals, though? They, after all, are the happy ones, since they aren't tortured by their pasts and worried about their futures.

Nietzsche: Well, that's true. But if we were like the animals, then we wouldn't be human anymore. And it's not true that all humans are miserable. The people who are miserable are the ones who have expanded their horizons too far. They take into

account things that they can't actually handle. They think about things that worry them, rather than things that help them live.

Tedrick: So, we humans should learn to limit our horizons to the things we can handle?

Nietzsche: Yes. But the more things you can handle, the stronger you must be. And I'm a big fan of personal strength—strength of mind, strength of character, strength of personality. The stronger you are, the wider your horizon can be, and you'll still be able to actually use everything inside your horizon as motivation for living (p. 10, ¶1).

Tedrick: Are the really strong people the ones you call "superhistorical" on p. 12?

Nietzsche: No no no! And a thousand times, no! Superhistorical people are people who think that they know everything there is to know about history because they've figured out that nothing ever really changes in history. Superhistorical people think that while it looks like things are changing as time goes on, really, at the heart of things, things are really always the same.

Tedrick: They think they can stand above history, then, and see the permanent things in the world that never change.

Nietzsche: Right. They think they don't have any horizons at all, because they think they know everything, since ultimately everything is always the same.

Tedrick: But normal humans aren't like that?

Nietzsche: No. Normal humans have extended, but still limited, horizons, rather than thinking that they are above horizons. They think things are changing, at least gradually, even if there are some things that are relatively permanent. They hope, for example, that the world is getting better (that is, it is changing), and that you can tell what is better and what is worse based on objective standards (that is, there are some things that are permanent). Normal people are still able to act.

Tedrick: What? And superhistorical people can't?

Nietzsche: Not really. I mean, what's the point in doing anything if you think nothing ever really changes?

Tedrick: So, superhistorical people think they're above horizons, because they think they know everything about history, because they think the fundamental truths about reality never change. And so, they can't act.

Nietzsche: Yep. Normal people, on the other hand, have limited (though extended) horizons, and they can act. They can even be happy if they learn to forget the things they can't handle.

Tedrick: To act, you have to learn to forget?

Nietzsche: That's what I think, anyway. To be happy and to act, you have to learn to forget. That is, you have to be able to ignore certain things if you're ever going to get anything done, or if you're ever going to be free to be happy. If you tried to think about everything all the time, you'd never get around to acting, and you'd be miserable.

Tedrick: So, does that mean remembering is bad? Are we back to your "history is a bad thing," thing?

Nietzsche: No. Remember that I said the stronger a person is, the more she or he will be able to take into account and use as motivation for acting. And, in fact, I can show you three ways in which doing history can actually be useful—can actually help you live your life.

Section 2

p. 14, ¶4

Tedrick: There are three good, useful, helpful ways of doing history?

Nietzsche: There are. But each of the ways of doing history has disadvantages as well as advantages.

Tedrick: Hence the title of the book!

Nietzsche: Hence the title of the book. Exactly.

Tedrick: Well, what are the three ways?

Nietzsche: Well, there's monumental history, antiquarian history, and critical history.

Tedrick: That doesn't help me at all.

Nietzsche: Just give me a second. I'll explain.

Tedrick: Sorry.

Nietzsche: You're forgiven.

Tedrick: Thanks.

Nietzsche: No prob. Now be quiet for a minute. Monumental history is the first and most important. It's the kind of history that "active and striving" people do. That is, it's the type of history that natural leaders naturally do.

Tedrick: Leaders have their own way of doing history?

Nietzsche: They do. They focus on the great individuals of the past, looking for inspiration. The advantage of monumental history, then, is that it helps great individuals in the present to do what great individuals did in the past, but to do it even better.

Tedrick: So, monumental history is for great individuals, and looks at the past as a series of great individuals who can inspire present leaders and creators to do as others have done, and do it better.

Nietzsche: Exactly.

Tedrick: But what are the disadvantages.

Nietzsche: Well, first, the monumental approach to history forces you to ignore a lot of things. For example, it forces you to ignore the differences between you and the great individuals in the past who are supposed to inspire you. You can only be inspired by them if you think you are like them, but you can only think you are like them if you ignore all the ways in which they are different from you.

Tedrick: Okay. I guess that makes sense. Why is that a disadvantage?

Nietzsche: It's a disadvantage because it means that doing monumental history requires you to not be entirely truthful with yourself about the past. And nobody wants to admit that they're kind of mythologizing the past.

Tedrick: I can see that. What else?

Nietzsche: Well, monumental history requires you to ignore all the average and everyday people and things in the past. After all, it focuses only on the great leaders and creators, and ignores everyone and everything else.

Tedrick: So, it requires you to falsify the past again. But this time you're pretending not that all the great people in the past were like you, but you're pretending that the past consisted of only great people doing great things.

Nietzsche: Indeed. And then there's another kind of disadvantage.

Tedrick: Yes?

Nietzsche: Well, in the hands of the weak and normal, monumental history can become a weapon against the strong and great.

Tedrick: How?

Nietzsche: The normal weak people can point to all the great leaders and creators in the past, and say to today's "up-and-coming" leaders and creators: "You'll never be as good as the

real greats were. In fact, we've already got all the great leaders and creators we'll ever need. So we don't need you."

Tedrick: And that is a weapon? How? Are the weak using the greats of the past to discourage the greats of the present, and to keep them from achieving greatness themselves?

Nietzsche: That's exactly it.

Section 3

p. 19, ¶1

Tedrick: Okay, that's monumental history, with its advantages and disadvantages. What about the other two?

Nietzsche: The second is antiquarian history. It's for people who "preserve and admire." That is, it's for normal people, rather than for great leaders and creators.

Tedrick: And how does it see history? Not as a series of great individuals, I assume.

Nietzsche: Indeed. Antiquarian history sees history as a collection of good things to be preserved and passed on to future generations.

Tedrick: That's nice.

Nietzsche: I know, right?

Tedrick: Okay, what's the advantage of doing history this way?

Nietzsche: Well, the advantage is that antiquarian history knows how to preserve life, and the things that are really good in life.

Tedrick: And its disadvantages?

Nietzsche: First, it doesn't know how to create. All it knows how to do is preserve. (This is why we need Monumental history too, because *it* knows how to create.) And, furthermore, antiquarian history has a tendency to start valuing things simply because they're old, not because they're actually good.

Tedrick: I can see that. So, what about the third kind of history?

Nietzsche: Critical history is the third, and it's for people who "suffer and are in need of liberation." That is, it's neither for the great leaders and creators, nor for the average people who think they have pretty good lives. It's for people who are oppressed.

Tedrick: They need history too, I guess.

Nietzsche: They do.

Tedrick: So, how does critical history see history?

Nietzsche: It sees history as the unjust cause of the unjust present circumstances. It traces all the evils in the present back to evil things in the past.

Tedrick: And this has an advantage?

Nietzsche: It does. The advantage of critical history is that it knows how to free life from the things that are restricting it in the present.

Tedrick: But it has disadvantages too, I bet.

Nietzsche: Indeed. First, critical history doesn't know how to create life. It only knows how to destroy. And second, once critical history gets started destroying things, it doesn't know where to stop.

Tedrick: Why not?

Nietzsche: Because everything has skeletons in its closet, after all. No matter how good a thing is, you can find bad things in its history that can make it look illegitimate.

Tedrick: That's depressing.

Nietzsche: Only if you're not strong enough to use even the bad things in history as motivation for doing good things in the present and future.

Tedrick: Hmmm. Interesting.

Nietzsche: But enough of all this for now. We just discussed the three natural ways of doing history. These are the three ways in which people always did history in the past. They would automatically do whichever type of history they needed at the moment, without even having to think about it. But nowadays, we don't do the right kinds of history when we need them. Something has gone horribly wrong. But we'll talk about that in Section 4.

Nietzsche Exam Review Dialogue 2
for
On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life

Section 4

p. 22

Tedrick: Sometimes your paragraphs are entirely too long.

Nietzsche: Sometimes the things I had to say were so awesome that I couldn't fit their awesomeness into a short paragraph.

Tedrick: You know how Tillman feels about long paragraphs.

Nietzsche: Yes. He said reading through along paragraph is like driving through Illinois or Kansas. You feel like you're making no progress, because everything is flat and monotonous in all directions and so nothing seems to be moving. It's depressing, and the last thing you should be doing is depressing your readers.

Tedrick: Like *you* never depressed your readers.

Nietzsche: If I ever did, it was for a good cause.

Tedrick: What about that one time you said, "God is dead"?

Nietzsche: Well, I *am* an atheist.

Tedrick: I know that. But why did you have to put it like that?

Nietzsche: Look, what I meant was that God is dead to us in Western society because nobody can honestly believe in God anymore—at least, they can't believe in God in any way that actually makes a difference. Science has convinced everybody that there is no God, and so the idea of God can have no practical effect for us anymore.

Tedrick: Well, if you're an atheist, isn't that a good thing?

Nietzsche: No. Not all falsehoods are equally bad. Some falsehoods can actually be healthy. Remember what I was saying last time about how we have to learn to limit our horizons in order to act and be happy?

Tedrick: Yeah. But that's not a falsehood. That's just forgetting.

Nietzsche: When you forget something, you act as if it doesn't exist. You ignore it. You treat the world as if it wasn't included. That's a falsehood. To limit your horizon is to falsify the world. It is to be unjust.

Tedrick: Wow. You *are* depressing. You think everyone is unjust, then, since all normal humans, anyway, have extended, but limited, horizons. And that means that all normal humans are forgetting or ignoring the things that fall outside their horizons. That that means all normal humans are being false with themselves about what the world is really like.

Nietzsche: You see? That's *exactly* my point. If realizing that is so depressing for you, you should just forget it. Ignore it. A fact is only worth paying attention to if you can use it to motivate yourself to act, to live life in a fuller and healthier way. If you can't, that means you're too weak to handle the fact, and should just let it go for the moment. Until you get stronger. Which you should. At least I hope.

Tedrick: Um. Okay. I think I followed that. But I'm kind of confused, so, if it's okay with you, I'd like to shove that out of my horizon for a second and think about something else.

Nietzsche: Yes. That's what I was say . . . Oh, never mind. Do please continue.

Tedrick: Well, last time, we were talking about the three natural ways of doing history.

Nietzsche: That's right. There are three basic types of normal human beings, and each type needs its own approach to history in order to help it live a fuller, healthier life.

Tedrick: And those three types of people were (1) the leaders and creators—who are “active and striving”—(2) the average and everyday—who “preserve and admire”—and (3) the weak and oppressed—who “suffer and are in need of liberation.”

Nietzsche: So, those things are still in your horizon. Good. And do you remember what my fancy names for each category were?

Tedrick: Monumental, Antiquarian, and Critical.

Nietzsche: 10 points to Gryffindor.

Tedrick: Thanks. And these are the natural ways of doing history?

Nietzsche: Yes. They're the ways that people always automatically did history. Whenever they were Monumental, they automatically did Monumental history. Whenever they were Antiquarian, they automatically did Antiquarian history. And whenever they were Critical, they did Critical history.

Tedrick: And were they always one of the three? Or did they switch?

Nietzsche: Well, you're usually one of the three, but you can occasionally slip into a different category, depending on “where you are in life,” or however it is you Americans say it. And while different people groups tend to be one of the three, there will always be people within each group that belong to the other two categories.

Tedrick: So, they're all natural, and they're all necessary.

Nietzsche: Yes. Remember, each has an advantages and a couple disadvantages. So they all need to work together. And back in the day, they did. And nobody even had to do it on purpose. Everyone just naturally did the type of history they needed, when they needed it.

Tedrick: But not today? There's something wrong with today?

Nietzsche: Yes!

Tedrick: What's wrong with today?

Nietzsche: People *don't* naturally do the kinds of history that they need when they need them! Their relationship to history—and to information in general—is all wrong. Instead of history (knowledge, instruction, science, information) serving life, life is serving history (knowledge, instruction, science, information).

Tedrick: But why? What happened?

Nietzsche: “Science!”

Tedrick: What?

Nietzsche: “The demand that history be a science!” (p. 23)

Tedrick: Why should that be a problem.

Nietzsche: Look, you people like science. Science is like the greatest thing, according to you. You ask someone, “Why are you doing that?” and he says, “Science!” and you say, “Awesome.”

Tedrick: I still don't see what's wrong.

Nietzsche: You can become *famous* by doing science. Think about Einstein. And Newton. And Carl Sagan. And Bill Nye the Science Guy. And Stephen Hawking. You want a legit major in college? You want a major your parents will be proud of? You want a major where people won't always be asking you, “What in the world are you going to do with *that*?”?

Tedrick: Yes. Yes, I do.

Nietzsche: Well then, major in something that sounds science-y.

Tedrick: I will. But you're still not explaining what the problem is.

Nietzsche: The problem is that people value science so much nowadays, that they think anything scientific must be valuable. And since science is the ultimate source of knowledge, then knowledge must be valuable to. Science, and anything associated with science, has a prestige that makes us think it is something “good without qualification” (to borrow from Kant).

Tedrick: And knowledge isn't good without qualification? It's not valuable in itself?

Nietzsche: No! We've been over this! History should serve life. If it doesn't, then it's no good and we should ignore it.

Tedrick: I thought we were talking about knowledge, not history.

Nietzsche: No! We've been over *that* too! "History" is just the most popular form of knowledge in Germany in my day. It's the most popular "science." What I care about is this new obsession we all have with getting information, whether it be in the form of "history" or whatever.

Tedrick: So, what you're saying is that our unquestioning respect for science has led us to treat anything we think is scientific as being good, even when it's actually harmful.

Nietzsche: Yes.

Tedrick: And knowledge or history or science or information or instruction or whatever is good when it serves life.

Nietzsche: Yes.

Tedrick: And it serves life when it actually helps to motivate us to live in a fuller, healthier, more vigorous way?

Nietzsche: Yes.

Tedrick: And not all knowledge or history or information or whatever actually does this.

Nietzsche: No.

Tedrick: That's the stuff we should leave outside our horizons. That's the stuff we should "forget."

Nietzsche: Yes. Until you're strong enough to actually use it as motivation for living and acting.

Tedrick: But most of us aren't strong enough to handle all the information we're trying to absorb, nowadays?

Nietzsche: That's right. How could anyone swallow the flood of information that we're bombarding ourselves with all the time?

Tedrick: What flood? I pay no attention to science sites. I'm not being overwhelmed by science.

Nietzsche: But aren't you? You are being overwhelmed by information, by knowledge, and what is it that gives you access to that knowledge?

Tedrick: Computers.

Nietzsche: Mostly, yes. And where do computers come from?

Tedrick: Technology?

Nietzsche: And where does technology come from?

Tedrick: Science?

Nietzsche: From science.

Tedrick: So, it's science's fault that I'm addicted to wasting hours of my time watching TV and surfing the web?

Nietzsche: No, silly. That's *your* fault. But science is certainly an enabler.

Tedrick: Okay. It's just you were making it sound like we were all always looking for more history facts, or science news. And while I'm sure there are people like that, they're not anywhere near the majority.

Nietzsche: That's true. But look at it this way. What makes the modern age different from the Middle Ages and the Dark Ages and all that?

Tedrick: We actually have real knowledge and science and whatnot, while they were a bunch of ignorant, superstitious idiots?

Nietzsche: Right. If you want to be part of the new, modern, scientific world, you have to be enlightened, knowledgeable, in-the-know, "with it," as everyone else. The more information you have access to, the "broader your world is," the less "close-minded" you are, the less ignorant and backward you look.

Tedrick: And this whole idea that gaining knowledge, simply for the sake of having more information, is a good thing, can be traced back to the rise of modern science?

Nietzsche: Yep. It's when people realized that you could get knowledge through science, and that you could do science about just about anything, and that science makes the world a better place . . . that's when Westerners start all becoming *consumers* of information.

Tedrick: But once again, I ask you: why is this bad? What's wrong with seeking out and accessing and trying to absorb all this information?

Nietzsche: The problem is that you can't actually process the flood of information, so most of what you absorb ends up rattling around inside of you, never finding its way back out again.

Tedrick: What?

Nietzsche: Think about when you see a news story about Katy Perry or factories in China. What happens to your knew knowledge?

Tedrick: Nothing. It just sits in my brain, I guess.

Nietzsche: Exactly. You never use it as motivation for actually *doing* anything. It has no effect on your actions at all. You've got this inner life where you have all these factoids sloshing around, and an outer life that has no connection to those factoids.

Tedrick: So, the flood of information essentially splits us in two. It divides our insides from our outsides, because it gives us far too much knowledge (on the inside) than we could ever actually use to motivate actions (on the outside).

Nietzsche: Yep. We're two beings inhabiting the same body, or something. We all suffer from a bizarre split personality, where you can't tell from our outer lives what we've got going on, on the inside, and you can't tell from what we've got going on, on the inside, what our outer lives are like.

Tedrick: Alright, I'll grant you that that sounds unsettling. But what, really, is the problem with it?

Nietzsche: It makes you weak.

Section 5

p. 28

Tedrick: So, that's it? That's the one bad thing about the modern flood of information that has been caused, directly or indirectly, by the rise of modern science?

Nietzsche: Well, that's one of them. There are actually five, altogether.

Tedrick: I see. I figured only having one would be to simple and easy for a philosopher like you.

Nietzsche: I'm a *philologist*.

Tedrick: Whatever. Just tell me what the five problems with “too much history/knowledge/information/whatever” are.

Nietzsche: Okay, here they are (p. 28, ¶1). The first is that our personalities are weakened by the split between our insides and outsides.

Tedrick: Got it.

Nietzsche: The second is that it leads us to mistakenly assume we are more just and objective than any previous age.

Tedrick: Okay. I mean, we *are* more just and objective. But whatever.

Nietzsche: *Are* we, Tedrick? *Are* we?

Tedrick: Um. I see you disagree. Ignore me, and continue with your list.

Nietzsche: The third is that we lose our instincts and are kept from maturing.

Tedrick: That's rough. Stupid flood of information.

Nietzsche: I know, right? But there's more. The fourth is that we are “latecomers” who can do nothing new, and thus can only imitate what has been done before.

Tedrick: Depressing. And the fifth?

Nietzsche: The fifth is that we become ironic and cynical about ourselves.

Tedrick: The world is an awful, terrible place. I'm really depressed now.

Nietzsche: Weakling! You must learn to limit your horizon till you have grown strong enough to handle such difficult truths!

Tedrick: Sorry.

Nietzsche: Well, look, in your condition, maybe you'd better just skip to the end of my book.

Tedrick: Why?

Nietzsche: I use sections 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, to talk about the five ways in which too much history/knowledge/information is harmful. One way per section. Then, in section 10, I tell you my solution to the whole problem.

Tedrick: Okay, I'll skip ahead to section 10. But first, explain to me why the flood of information that splits our insides from our outsides, makes us weak.

Nietzsche: Fine, but promise not to cry.

Tedrick: I promise.

Nietzsche: Okay. Let's start with clothing. Do you know how people dress in China?

Tedrick: Vaguely.

Nietzsche: Do they dress the way we do here?

Tedrick: Some of them do. Some of them don't. And back in the day, none of them dressed like us.

Nietzsche: Okay, what about people in India. Do you know how they dress?

Tedrick: I've seen movies set in India. It's the same as in China. Some people dress like us, while others don't.

Nietzsche: But, traditionally speaking, do they dress differently?

Tedrick: Sure. Traditional dress is different in every area of the globe. Some places people traditionally don't wear hardly anything at all.

Nietzsche: Right. So, now ask yourself this: What should you do with all that knowledge? Are you going to use all this information you have about how people around the world traditionally dress?

Tedrick: No. I'm just going to keep wearing t-shirts and jeans. Or polo shirts with the collars popped. And shorts with flip flops. And sunglasses.

Nietzsche: So, would it be appropriate for you to show up naked to class?

Tedrick: No.

Nietzsche: Why not? That's how they do it in some parts of the world, basically.

Tedrick: Um, well, it would be embarrassing here. And it would cause a commotion.

Nietzsche: So should you dress up like someone from China or India instead?

Tedrick: No. I would just feel weird.

Nietzsche: So, is your way of dressing better than the other people's ways of dressing?

Tedrick: Um.

Nietzsche: Clearly, you must think it is, because you choose to dress like this, rather than imitating them, even though you know full well how they dress and that it's different than your way.

Tedrick: Um. No. No way's better than any other way. I just dress how people usually dress here.

Nietzsche: And if people normally showed up to class in their underwear, you'd do that? That would be okay?

Tedrick: If that's what I grew up with, I guess.

Nietzsche: That's true. And this is something that Descartes noticed, and that we talked about back when we were reading his *Discourse on Method*. If you travel enough, or read enough, you'll discover that people from other places and times do and did things different that people in your time and place do. That goes for clothing, and for politics, and for family structures, and for religions, and for cannibalism and sacrificing babies, and for everything.

Tedrick: What? Are you saying that everything about the way we live is completely arbitrary?

Nietzsche: If by "arbitrary" you mean "chosen," then yes. Everything about how we live is a choice we make, and thanks to modern science and all that we all know there are many, many other choices we could have made.

Tedrick: But aren't some choices better than others?

Nietzsche: Sure. Some lead to more life, fuller life, more lively and vigorous life. And others lead to less life, weaker life, more drab and lethargic life.

Tedrick: But how do I know which is which? How do I know if my people's and time's way of doing things is the right and best?

Nietzsche: Exactly. Knowing what you know, having access to all the information you have access to (and that you can't actually use), how do you know that the way you live your life is the way you should be living it? After all, most people throughout space and time have chosen to live differently, to a greater or lesser degree.

Tedrick: Gah! You're doing this on purpose, Nietzsche. You're trying to get me all stressed out and anxious and depressed.

Nietzsche: But it's for your own good.

Tedrick: How?!? How can making me doubt everything I believe—and even things I never realized I believed—be good for me?

Nietzsche: I'm not the one doing that to you, dear Tedrick. It's your own obsession with consuming information—an obsession you share with everyone else in modern Western society—that is doing that to you. It's making you weak by making you doubt yourself, your people, your tradition, your entire way of life.

Tedrick: How is it making me weak?

Nietzsche: Feeling confident and strong about your way being the right way, are you?

Tedrick: Well, no.

Nietzsche: Ready to stand up with Superman, and fight for “Truth, Justice, and the American Way”?

Tedrick: Not really. Wait, Superman said that?

Nietzsche: Yeah, that was his motto.

Tedrick: I see.

Nietzsche: So, do you see my point?

Tedrick: What point?

Nietzsche: My point that the modern obsession with information-gathering, or “knowledge,” or “history,” or whatever you want to call it, has weakened our personalities. It has revealed to us a plethora of alternative cultures and life choices that make us doubt the validity and rightness of our own. And we, being too weak to handle it, are made even more weak by it. It has turned us from self-confident, lively people willing to celebrate and elaborate on our cultures and traditions, and turned us into self-doubting, quivering husks who can barely bring ourselves to even live our own cultures and traditions.

Tedrick: Well, maybe that's a good thing.

Nietzsche: Maybe it is, if our cultures and traditions are unhealthy and life-negating. But if they aren't, then it's a bad thing.

Tedrick: Okay, well, I've had about as much as I can stand of this. Can we skip ahead to the solution part?

Nietzsche: Yes. Yes we can.

Section 10

p. 58

Tedrick: Okay, so what's the solution?

Nietzsche: Well, since I think we've been poisoned, the solution would be an antidote.

Tedrick: Fine. What's the antidote?

Nietzsche: There are too, actually. As I myself say it, "the historical malady, . . . the excess of the historical" is "the *unhistorical and the superhistorical*" (p. 62).

Tedrick: That's. . . that's real helpful. Thanks for that.

Nietzsche: No, I'm serious. If our problem is that we have an "excess of history" or knowledge or information or science, then we need to balance ourselves out by being a little bit "unhistorical" and a little bit "superhistorical."

Tedrick: You're going to have to explain what you mean by those terms.

Nietzsche: Well, being unhistorical means learning to forget, or limiting your horizon. If our problem is that we're flooding ourselves with information that is expanding our horizons to include information we'll never be able to use, we need to start limiting our horizons. We need to start deliberately ignoring at least some of the information we know we can't use. We need to start being a little bit "unhistorical."

Tedrick: Okay, so we need to be a little more like the animals, then.

Nietzsche: Right. Not completely like them, or we'll cease to be human. But we've gone so far in the "expand your horizons" direction, that aiming to be at least a little bit like the "animals," with their point-like horizons, will help us to get our horizons under control.

Tedrick: But what about the "superhistorical" thing. Did you already talk about that?

Nietzsche: Yes. Superhistorical people are the people who think they've got all of history figured out, because they think that the most fundamental truths about reality never change.

Tedrick: How is that a solution to the excess of history, or the flood of information, or too much science, or whatever?

Nietzsche: Well, if you really were completely scientific, you would expand your horizons to infinity. A scientific person would have infinite horizons. And with infinite horizons—with knowledge about everything that ever has happened, is happening, or will happen—you would see the universe as being in a constant flux. You'd see that

everything is always changing. You'd start to believe that nothing is permanent, and that all changes are eventually wiped out by other changes.

Tedrick: But superhistorical people believe there are certain fundamental truths about reality that never change.

Nietzsche: Exactly. If you are a scientific person, you have an infinite horizon, so you believe that everything is always changing, nothing is permanent, and there's no point in acting because you have no stable reasons for acting and any changes you made would be changed out of existence in the flux of history.

Tedrick: But superhistorical people believe they have no horizons, because they are above horizons, because they think that the fundamental truths about reality never change, and so there's no point in acting because while you have stable truths on which to base your actions, you can't actually make any kind of difference (because things fundamentally never actually change).

Nietzsche: Right. But our problem is that we are scientific people. Some folks might be superhistorical people, but today in the West, we are predominantly scientific people. And that means we think our horizons are infinite (science can tell us everything about everything), that everything is always changing, and that not only do we have no stable truths on the basis of which to act, but even if we did act, any difference we made would be changed out of existence. What we need, then, is to be able to see some stability and permanence in the world. That will help us to believe there are solid, stable truths on the basis of which we can act, and it will help us to believe that we might be able to make some permanent differences in the world with our actions.

Tedrick: But if we believe that everything is stable and permanent—that is, if we become completely superhistorical—we wouldn't be able to act either.

Nietzsche: Right. We need to be a little bit superhistorical, not completely superhistorical, just like we need to be a little bit unhistorical, not completely unhistorical.

Tedrick: Okay, well, that sounds reasonable.

Nietzsche: Good. But I still have one more thing to add, that you might not like.

Tedrick: What's that?

Nietzsche: I think the two best ways of being a little bit superhistorical are art and religion.

Tedrick: What?! I thought you were an atheist! Explain yourself.

Nietzsche: Well, look, both art and religion are really good at teaching us about timeless truths, about what ultimate reality really is. They help us to see certain things as being fundamental and permanent in the world.

Tedrick: But if you're an atheist, then you must believe that the fundamental truths that religion teaches us about are false.

Nietzsche: Maybe. Maybe not. After all, just because I think the religious claim that God exists is false, doesn't mean I think all claims made by all religions are false.

Tedrick: Okay. I guess that's true.

Nietzsche: And furthermore, just because I think something is false doesn't mean I think it's bad, or unhelpful.

Tedrick: Really? You think false things can be good. Lying can be a good thing.

Nietzsche: Sure. I can't believe you didn't see this coming.

Tedrick: How was I supposed to predict that you were going to come out in favor of falsity?

Nietzsche: Remember the whole "limit your horizons" thing?

Tedrick: Yeah. What of it?

Nietzsche: Remember how I said that to forget, or to limit your horizon, was often good and necessary?

Tedrick: Yes.

Nietzsche: And remember how I said that when you forget something, or limit your horizon so as to not include it, you are falsifying reality? You are acting as if that thing didn't exist.

Tedrick: . . . Yeah. I remember.

Nietzsche: Look, Tedrick. What matters to me is what is good. And what is good is *life*. And thus anything that serves life—that makes life more lively and healthy and vigorous and full—is good. Therefore, if a lie serves life, it must be good, just as a truth that undermines life must be bad. In my book, the Good is higher than the True. Our primary duty is to do what is good, even if that means believing or claiming something that isn't actually true.

Tedrick: I don't know how I feel about that, Nietzsche.

Nietzsche: Well, you are not alone on that count. Most people don't really know how they feel about me and the things I say. I may be insane, after all.