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WE PHILOLOGISTS

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We Philologists

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We Philologists / Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Volume 8:*

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Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

We Philologists / Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Volume 8

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The subject of education was one to which Nietzsche, especially during his residence in Basel, paid considerable attention, and his insight into it was very much deeper than that of, say, Herbert Spencer or even Johann Friedrich Herbart, the latter of whom has in late years exercised considerable influence in scholastic circles. Nietzsche clearly saw that the "philologists" (using the word chiefly in reference to the teachers of the classics in German colleges and universities) were absolutely unfitted for their high task, since they were one and all incapable of entering into the spirit of antiquity. Although at the first reading, therefore, this book may seem to be rather fragmentary, there are two main lines of thought running through it: an incisive criticism of German professors, and a number of constructive ideas as to what classical culture really should be.

These scattered aphorisms, indeed, are significant as showing

how far Nietzsche had travelled along the road over which humanity had been travelling from remote ages, and how greatly he was imbued with the pagan spirit which he recognised in Goethe and valued in Burckhardt. Even at this early period of his life Nietzsche was convinced that Christianity was the real danger to culture; and not merely modern Christianity, but also the Alexandrian culture, the last gasp of Greek antiquity, which had helped to bring Christianity about. When, in the later aphorisms of "We Philologists," Nietzsche appears to be throwing over the Greeks, it should be remembered that he does not refer to the Greeks of the era of Homer or Æschylus, or even of Aristotle, but to the much later Greeks of the era of Longinus.

Classical antiquity, however, was conveyed to the public through university professors and their intellectual offspring, and these professors, influenced (quite unconsciously, of course) by religious and "liberal" principles, presented to their scholars a kind of emasculated antiquity. It was only on these conditions that the State allowed the pagan teaching to be propagated in the schools; and if, where classical scholars were concerned, it was more tolerant than the Church had been, it must be borne in mind that the Church had already done all the rough work of emasculating its enemies, and had handed down to the State a body of very innocuous and harmless investigators. A totally erroneous conception of what constituted classical culture was thus brought about. Where any distinction was actually made, for example, later Greek thought was enormously over-rated, and

early Greek thought equally undervalued. Aphorism 44, together with the first half-dozen or so in the book, may be taken as typical specimens of Nietzsche's protest against this state of things.

It must be added, unfortunately, that Nietzsche's observations in this book apply as much to England as to Germany. Classical teachers here may not be rated so high as they are in Germany, but their influence would appear to be equally powerful, and their theories of education and of classical antiquity equally chaotic. In England as in Germany they are "theologians in disguise." The danger of modern "values" to true culture may be readily gathered from a perusal of aphorisms that follow: and, if these aphorisms enable even one scholar in a hundred to enter more thoroughly into the spirit of a great past they will not have been penned in vain.

J. M. KENNEDY.

London, *July 1911.*

1

To what a great extent men are ruled by pure hazard, and how little reason itself enters into the question, is sufficiently shown by observing how few people have any real capacity for their professions and callings, and how many square pegs there are in round holes: happy and well chosen instances are quite exceptional, like happy marriages, and even these latter are not brought about by reason. A man chooses his calling before he is fitted to exercise his faculty of choice. He does not know the number of different callings and professions that exist; he does not know himself; and then he wastes his years of activity in this calling, applies all his mind to it, and becomes experienced and practical. When, afterwards, his understanding has become fully developed, it is generally too late to start something new; for wisdom on earth has almost always had something of the weakness of old age and lack of vigour about it.

For the most part the task is to make good, and to set to rights as well as possible, that which was bungled in the beginning. Many will come to recognise that the latter part of their life shows a purpose or design which has sprung from a primary discord: it is hard to live through it. Towards the end of his life, however, the average man has become accustomed to it – then he may make a mistake in regard to the life he has lived, and praise his own stupidity: *bene navigavi cum naufragium feci*. he may even

compose a song of thanksgiving to "Providence."

2

On inquiring into the origin of the philologist I find:

1. A young man cannot have the slightest conception of what the Greeks and Romans were.

2. He does not know whether he is fitted to investigate into them;

3. And, in particular, he does not know to what extent, in view of the knowledge he may actually possess, he is fitted to be a teacher. What then enables him to decide is not the knowledge of himself or his science; but

(a) Imitation.

(b) The convenience of carrying on the kind of work which he had begun at school.

(c) His intention of earning a living.

In short, ninety-nine philologists out of a hundred *should* not be philologists at all.

3

The more strict religions require that men shall look upon their activity simply as one means of carrying out a metaphysical scheme: an unfortunate choice of calling may then be explained as a test of the individual. Religions keep their eyes fixed only upon the salvation of the individual. whether he is a slave or a free man, a merchant or a scholar, his aim in life has nothing to do with his calling, so that a wrong choice is not such a very great piece of unhappiness. Let this serve as a crumb of comfort for philologists in general; but true philologists stand in need of a better understanding: what will result from a science which is "gone in for" by ninety-nine such people? The thoroughly unfitted majority draw up the rules of the science in accordance with their own capacities and inclinations; and in this way they tyrannise over the hundredth, the only capable one among them. If they have the training of others in their hands they will train them consciously or unconsciously after their own image. what then becomes of the classicism of the Greeks and Romans?

The points to be proved are —

- (a) The disparity between philologists and the ancients.
- (b) The inability of the philologist to train his pupils, even with the help of the ancients.
- (c) The falsifying of the science by the (incapacity of the) majority, the wrong requirements held in view; the

renunciation of the real aim of this science.

4

All this affects the sources of our present philology: a sceptical and melancholy attitude. But how otherwise are philologists to be produced?

The imitation of antiquity: is not this a principle which has been refuted by this time?

The flight from actuality to the ancients: does not this tend to falsify our conception of antiquity?

5

We are still behindhand in one type of contemplation: to understand how the greatest productions of the intellect have a dreadful and evil background. the sceptical type of contemplation. Greek antiquity is now investigated as the most beautiful example of life.

As man assumes a sceptical and melancholy attitude towards his life's calling, so we must sceptically examine the highest life's calling of a nation: in order that we may understand what life is.

6

My words of consolation apply particularly to the single tyrannised individual out of a hundred: such exceptional ones should simply treat all the unenlightened majorities as their subordinates; and they should in the same way take advantage of the prejudice, which is still widespread, in favour of classical instruction – they need many helpers. But they must have a clear perception of what their actual goal is.

Philology as the science of antiquity does not, of course, endure for ever; its elements are not inexhaustible. What cannot be exhausted, however, is the ever-new adaptation of one's age to antiquity; the comparison of the two. If we make it our task to understand our own age better by means of antiquity, then our task will be an everlasting one. – This is the antinomy of philology: people have always endeavoured to understand antiquity by means of the present – and shall the present now be understood by means of antiquity? Better: people have explained antiquity to themselves out of their own experiences; and from the amount of antiquity thus acquired they have assessed the value of their experiences. Experience, therefore, is certainly an essential prerequisite for a philologist – that is, the philologist must first of all be a man; for then only can he be productive as a philologist. It follows from this that old men are well suited to be philologists if they were not such during that portion of their life which was richest in experiences.

It must be insisted, however, that it is only through a knowledge of the present that one can acquire an inclination for the study of classical antiquity. Where indeed should the impulse come from if not from this inclination? When we observe how few philologists there actually are, except those that have taken up philology as a means of livelihood, we can easily decide for

ourselves what is the matter with this impulse for antiquity: it hardly exists at all, for there are no disinterested philologists.

Our task then is to secure for philology the universally educative results which it should bring about. The means: the limitation of the number of those engaged in the philological profession (doubtful whether young men should be made acquainted with philology at all). Criticism of the philologist. The value of antiquity: it sinks with you: how deeply you must have sunk, since its value is now so little!

8

It is a great advantage for the true philologist that a great deal of preliminary work has been done in his science, so that he may take possession of this inheritance if he is strong enough for it – I refer to the valuation of the entire Hellenic mode of thinking. So long as philologists worked simply at details, a misunderstanding of the Greeks was the consequence. The stages of this undervaluation are · the sophists of the second century, the philologist-poets of the Renaissance, and the philologist as the teacher of the higher classes of society (Goethe, Schiller).

Valuing is the most difficult of all.

In what respect is one most fitted for this valuing?

– Not, at all events, when one is trained for philology as one is now. It should be ascertained to what extent our present means make this last object impossible.

– Thus the philologist himself is not the aim of philology.

9

Most men show clearly enough that they do not regard themselves as individuals: their lives indicate this. The Christian command that everyone shall steadfastly keep his eyes fixed upon his salvation, and his alone, has as its counterpart the general life of mankind, where every man lives merely as a point among other points – living not only as the result of earlier generations, but living also only with an eye to the future. There are only three forms of existence in which a man remains an individual as a philosopher, as a Saviour, and as an artist. But just let us consider how a scientific man bungles his life: what has the teaching of Greek particles to do with the sense of life? – Thus we can also observe how innumerable men merely live, as it were, a preparation for a man, the philologist, for example, as a preparation for the philosopher, who in his turn knows how to utilise his ant-like work to pronounce some opinion upon the value of life. When such ant-like work is not carried out under any special direction the greater part of it is simply nonsense, and quite superfluous.

10

Besides the large number of unqualified philologists there is, on the other hand, a number of what may be called born philologists, who from some reason or other are prevented from becoming such. The greatest obstacle, however, which stands in the way of these born philologists is the bad representation of philology by the unqualified philologists.

Leopardi is the modern ideal of a philologist: The German philologists can do nothing. (As a proof of this Voss should be studied!)

11

Let it be considered how differently a science is propagated from the way in which any special talent in a family is transmitted. The bodily transmission of an individual science is something very rare. Do the sons of philologists easily become philologists? *Dubito*. Thus there is no such accumulation of philological capacity as there was, let us say, in Beethoven's family of musical capacity. Most philologists begin from the beginning, and even then they learn from books, and not through travels, &c. They get some training, of course.

12

Most men are obviously in the world accidentally; no necessity of a higher kind is seen in them. They work at this and that, their talents are average. How strange! The manner in which they live shows that they think very little of themselves: they merely esteem themselves in so far as they waste their energy on trifles (whether these be mean or frivolous desires, or the trashy concerns of their everyday calling). In the so-called life's calling, which everyone must choose, we may perceive a touching modesty on the part of mankind. They practically admit in choosing thus. "We are called upon to serve and to be of advantage to our equals – the same remark applies to our neighbour and to his neighbour, so everyone serves somebody else; no one is carrying out the duties of his calling for his own sake, but always for the sake of others and thus we are like geese which support one another by the one leaning against the other. *When the aim of each one of us is centred in another, then we have all no object in existing; and this 'existing for others' is the most comical of comedies.*"

13

Vanity is the involuntary inclination to set one's self up for an individual while not really being one; that is to say, trying to appear independent when one is dependent. The case of wisdom is the exact contrary: it appears to be dependent while in reality it is independent.

14

The Hades of Homer – From what type of existence is it really copied? I think it is the description of the philologist: it is better to be a day-labourer than to have such an anæmic recollection of the past. —¹

¹ No doubt a reminiscence of the "Odyssey," Bk. ix – Tr.

15

The attitude of the philologist towards antiquity is apologetic, or else dictated by the view that what our own age values can likewise be found in antiquity. The right attitude to take up, however, is the reverse one, viz., to start with an insight into our modern topsyturviness, and to look back from antiquity to it – and many things about antiquity which have hitherto displeased us will then be seen to have been most profound necessities.

We must make it clear to ourselves that we are acting in an absurd manner when we try to defend or to beautify antiquity: *who* are we!

16

We are under a false impression when we say that there is always some caste which governs a nation's culture, and that therefore savants are necessary; for savants only possess knowledge concerning culture (and even this only in exceptional cases). Among learned men themselves there might be a few, certainly not a caste, but even these would indeed be rare.

One very great value of antiquity consists in the fact that its writings are the only ones which modern men still read carefully.

Overstraining of the memory – very common among philologists, together with a poor development of the judgment.

18

Busying ourselves with the culture-epochs of the past: is this gratitude? We should look backwards in order to explain to ourselves the present conditions of culture: we do not become too laudatory in regard to our own circumstances, but perhaps we should do so in order that we may not be too severe on ourselves.

19

He who has no sense for the symbolical has none for antiquity:
let pedantic philologists bear this in mind.

20

My aim is to bring about a state of complete enmity between our present "culture" and antiquity. Whoever wishes to serve the former must hate the latter.

Careful meditation upon the past leads to the impression that we are a multiplication of many pasts · so how can we be a final aim? But why not? In most instances, however, we do not wish to be this. We take up our positions again in the ranks, work in our own little corner, and hope that what we do may be of some small profit to our successors. But that is exactly the case of the cask of the Danaë · and this is useless, we must again set about doing everything for ourselves, and only for ourselves – measuring science by ourselves, for example with the question · What is science to us? not. what are we to science? People really make life too easy for themselves when they look upon themselves from such a simple historical point of view, and make humble servants of themselves. "Your own salvation above everything" – that is what you should say; and there are no institutions which you should prize more highly than your own soul. – Now, however, man learns to know himself: he finds himself miserable, despises himself, and is pleased to find something worthy of respect outside himself. Therefore he gets rid of himself, so to speak, makes himself subservient to a cause, does his duty strictly, and atones for his existence. He knows that he does not work for himself alone; he wishes to help those who are daring enough to exist on account of themselves, like Socrates. The majority of men are as it were suspended in the air like toy balloons; every

breath of wind moves them. – As a consequence the savant must be such out of self-knowledge, that is to say, out of contempt for himself – in other words he must recognise himself to be merely the servant of some higher being who comes after him. Otherwise he is simply a sheep.

It is the duty of the free man to live for his own sake, and not for others. It was on this account that the Greeks looked upon handicrafts as unseemly.

As a complete entity Greek antiquity has not yet been fully valued · I am convinced that if it had not been surrounded by its traditional glorification, the men of the present day would shrink from it horror stricken. This glorification, then, is spurious; gold-paper.

The false enthusiasm for antiquity in which many philologists live. When antiquity suddenly comes upon us in our youth, it appears to us to be composed of innumerable trivialities; in particular we believe ourselves to be above its ethics. And Homer and Walter Scott – who carries off the palm? Let us be honest! If this enthusiasm were really felt, people could scarcely seek their life's calling in it. I mean that what we can obtain from the Greeks only begins to dawn upon us in later years: only after we have undergone many experiences, and thought a great deal.

People in general think that philology is at an end – while I believe that it has not yet begun.

The greatest events in philology are the appearance of Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Wagner; standing on their shoulders we look far into the distance. The fifth and sixth centuries have still to be discovered.

Where do we see the effect of antiquity? Not in language, not in the imitation of something or other, and not in perversity and waywardness, to which uses the French have turned it. Our museums are gradually becoming filled up: I always experience a sensation of disgust when I see naked statues in the Greek style in the presence of this thoughtless philistinism which would fain devour everything.

PLANS AND THOUGHTS RELATING TO A WORK ON PHILOLOGY

(1875)

Of all sciences philology at present is the most favoured . its progress having been furthered for centuries by the greatest number of scholars in every nation who have had charge of the noblest pupils. Philology has thus had one of the best of all opportunities to be propagated from generation to generation, and to make itself respected. How has it acquired this power?

Calculations of the different prejudices in its favour.

How then if these were to be frankly recognised as prejudices? Would not philology be superfluous if we reckoned up the interests of a position in life or the earning of a livelihood? What if the truth were told about antiquity, and its qualifications for training people to live in the present?

In order that the questions set forth above may be answered let us consider the training of the philologist, his genesis: he no longer comes into being where these interests are lacking.

If the world in general came to know what an unseasonable thing for us antiquity really is, philologists would no longer be called in as the educators of our youth.

Effect of antiquity on the non-philologist likewise nothing. If they showed themselves to be imperative and contradictory, oh, with what hatred would they be pursued! But they always humble themselves.

Philology now derives its power only from the union between

the philologists who will not, or cannot, understand antiquity and public opinion, which is misled by prejudices in regard to it.

The real Greeks, and their "watering down" through the philologists.

The future commanding philologist sceptical in regard to our entire culture, and therefore also the destroyer of philology as a profession.

The Preference for Antiquity

If a man approves of the investigation of the past he will also approve and even praise the fact – and will above all easily understand it – that there are scholars who are exclusively occupied with the investigation of Greek and Roman antiquity: but that these scholars are at the same time the teachers of the children of the nobility and gentry is not equally easy of comprehension – here lies a problem.

Why philologists precisely? This is not altogether such a matter of course as the case of a professor of medicine, who is also a practical physician and surgeon. For, if the cases were identical, preoccupation with Greek and Roman antiquity would be identical with the "science of education." In short, the relationship between theory and practice in the philologist cannot be so quickly conceived. Whence comes his pretension to be a teacher in the higher sense, not only of all scientific men, but more especially of all cultured men? This educational power must be taken by the philologist from antiquity; and in such a case people will ask with astonishment: how does it come that we attach such value to a far-off past that we can only become cultured men with the aid of its knowledge?

These questions, however, are not asked as a rule: The sway of philology over our means of instruction remains practically unquestioned; and antiquity *has* the importance assigned to it.

To this extent the position of the philologist is more favourable than that of any other follower of science. True, he has not at his disposal that great mass of men who stand in need of him – the doctor, for example, has far more than the philologist. But he can influence picked men, or youths, to be more accurate, at a time when all their mental faculties are beginning to blossom forth – people who can afford to devote both time and money to their higher development. In all those places where European culture has found its way, people have accepted secondary schools based upon a foundation of Latin and Greek as the first and highest means of instruction. In this way philology has found its best opportunity of transmitting itself, and commanding respect: no other science has been so well favoured. As a general rule all those who have passed through such institutions have afterwards borne testimony to the excellence of their organisation and curriculum, and such people are, of course, unconscious witnesses in favour of philology. If any who have not passed through these institutions should happen to utter a word in disparagement of this education, an unanimous and yet calm repudiation of the statement at once follows, as if classical education were a kind of witchcraft, blessing its followers, and demonstrating itself to them by this blessing. There is no attempt at polemics · "We have been through it all." "We know it has done us good."

Now there are so many things to which men have become so accustomed that they look upon them as quite appropriate and

suitable, for habit intermixes all things with sweetness; and men as a rule judge the value of a thing in accordance with their own desires. The desire for classical antiquity as it is now felt should be tested, and, as it were, taken to pieces and analysed with a view to seeing how much of this desire is due to habit, and how much to mere love of adventure – I refer to that inward and active desire, new and strange, which gives rise to a productive conviction from day to day, the desire for a higher goal, and also the means thereto – as the result of which people advance step by step from one unfamiliar thing to another, like an Alpine climber.

What is the foundation on which the high value attached to antiquity at the present time is based, to such an extent indeed that our whole modern culture is founded on it? Where must we look for the origin of this delight in antiquity, and the preference shown for it?

I think I have recognised in my examination of the question that all our philology – that is, all its present existence and power – is based on the same foundation as that on which our view of antiquity as the most important of all means of training is based. Philology as a means of instruction is the clear expression of a predominating conception regarding the value of antiquity, and the best methods of education. Two propositions are contained in this statement. In the first place all higher education must be a historical one, and secondly, Greek and Roman history differs from all others in that it is classical. Thus the scholar who knows this history becomes a teacher. We are not here going into the

question as to whether higher education ought to be historical or not; but we may examine the second and ask: in how far is it classic?

On this point there are many widespread prejudices. In the first place there is the prejudice expressed in the synonymous concept, "The study of the humanities": antiquity is classic because it is the school of the humane.

Secondly: "Antiquity is classic because it is enlightened – "

It is the task of all education to change certain conscious actions and habits into more or less unconscious ones; and the history of mankind is in this sense its education. The philologist now practises unconsciously a number of such occupations and habits. It is my object to ascertain how his power, that is, his instinctive methods of work, is the result of activities which were formerly conscious, but which he has gradually come to feel as such no longer: *but that consciousness consisted of prejudices*

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