



On the Concept of History

Walter Benjamin

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Manuel Monroy Correa says

Oct., 2017, Mty, NL. Leyéndolo mientras esperaba a un amigo a que la mañana le hiciera efecto de conciencia..., y a propósito de mi tema de investigación, esta perspectiva mesiánica de Benjamin remite de inmediato a la esperanza de incidencia metahistórica del Mesías. Como si se emparejara el autor alemán con sus congéneres talmudistas y no se tuviera ahora otra opción más que realizar de forma secular este *tikkun olam* de manera política. Y así, el final de toda la reflexión benjaminiana está trasladada hoy por filósofos como Rancière y la "repartición de lo sensible" porque Benjamin, al final, habla del arte... El arte es lo único que puede salvarnos ahora si no es que ya lo hizo y en su conciencia irónica, se entiende antimesiánica, en esa tendencia que la crítica marxista da cuenta, desarticula los mecanismos de la representación para mostrar, finalmente, que no hay más que teatro, enunciación, locura descarnada.

Pablo says

10/10

Abraham Lewik says

Simple to read, written in, what I believe to be, a dialectic mode each paragraph stands as a hypothesis tangentially related by historical materialism. Written when Mr. Benjamin was in grave danger from real Nazi police, the pseudo-emergency of 'The War on Terror' is NOT Thesis VIII. Little pockets of trivia & poetry are squeezed in, what do you know about the Mechanical Turk? Ultimately, an excellent statement of relation between history's logic, making history in the eternal present and the broader social mood. Much better than what I had expected.

Read online and in English. I expect to have missed subtleties that matter.

Stan says

About historical materialism vs. historicism. Benjamin says that for revolutionaries historical materialist approach must interpret and reclaim history in light of current events. It's short, give it a read.

Matthew Raketti says

Read this essay this morning after hearing that many rank it among the the top 100 essays of the 20th century... In my view the essay falls far short of such rank. Benjamin is overbroad in his treatment on the competing views of history: too unequivocal in his critique of historicism, arguing at several points that it is nothing more than an instrument of the powerful (failing to acknowledge its virtuous potential); and somewhat confused in his account of historical materialism (but I may not have read the piece carefully enough). One would be well served by reading Wilhelm von Humboldt's "Task of the Historian" alongside

this piece; at least insofar as one wants to consider what good, if any, there is to be found in the writing of history and what is involved in producing the same. Benjamin is just too cynical in his critique of the progressive impulse and too Nietzschean in his description thereof: Focusing too much on what is wrong with history as it is actually used in his instant circumstance whilst being too wedded to his own ideology; leading, in my view, to a misdiagnosis of the historical concept. That said, the task of "remembrance" briefly pointed to by Benjamin in the addendum could perhaps be read as in dating something analogous to Humboldt's concept of history. I think both writers would likely agree on the danger that inheres in history written to serve a narrow or special interest.

In terms of essays by Walter Benjamin; this piece ranks far below "Unpackng My Library" or "The Translator's Task".

Machado Drummond Amado Rosa Coelho says

Just as Marxist as I thought it would be... but his thesis XI is interesting.

Pablo says

Leí las tesis a través de un libro de Löwy, claramente no pude tener un análisis absolutamente propio y objetivo, aunque esto nunca es así. Creo que se pueden decir muchas cosas de este pequeño libro, nunca publicado por Benjamin, pero deben ser más reflexionadas, por lo que esto no es un lugar apropiado.

La visión de una revolución como la llegada de un mesías en realidad parece un poco tirada de las mechas. No se sabe si su libro es una secularización de los escritos bíblicos, o solo los usa como alegorías y metáforas. Creo que todas estas ambigüedades le dan mucho más valor. Entre muchas frases que hay para rescatar, me quedo con esta.:

"En la idea de la sociedad sin clases, Marx secularizó la idea del tiempo mesiánico. Y es bueno que haya sido así. La desgracia empieza cuando la socialdemocracia eleva esta idea a "ideal". El ideal fue definido en la doctrina neokantiana como una "tarea infinita". Y esta doctrina fue la filosofía escolar del partido socialdemócrata (...) Una vez definida la sociedad sin clases como tarea infinita, el tiempo vacío y homogéneo, se transformó, por decirlo así, en una antesala, en la cual se podía esperar con más o menos serenidad el advenimiento de la situación revolucionaria. En realidad, no hay un instante que no traiga consigo su oportunidad revolucionaria —sólo que ésta tiene que ser definida en su singularidad específica, esto es, como la oportunidad de una solución completamente nueva ante una tarea completamente nueva. Al pensador revolucionario, la oportunidad revolucionaria peculiar de cada instante histórico se le confirma a partir de una situación política dada. Pero se le confirma también, y no en menor medida, por la clave que dota a

ese instante del poder para abrir un determinado recinto del pasado, completamente clausurado hasta entonces. El ingreso en este recinto coincide estrictamente con la acción política; y es a través de él que ésta, por aniquiladora que sea, se da a conocer como mesiánica."

sofia says

Il correttivo di questi ragionamenti sta nella riflessione che la storia non è solo una scienza, ma anche, e non meno, una forma della rammemorazione. Ciò che la scienza ha «stabilito», può essere modificato dalla rammemorazione. La rammemorazione può fare dell'incompiuto (la felicità) un compiuto e del compiuto (il dolore) un incompiuto.

Griffin Wilson says

Some excellent criticisms of Marx's historical materialism, many of which I have thought something similar to in recent months; Mr. Benjamin, however, was able to formulate these thoughts much more eloquently than I.

I regards to history I am skeptical than any attempt -- no matter how vast or erudite -- to make sense of it can escape the sentiment of Pascal when he said: "Le nez de Cléopâtre, s'il eût été plus court, toute la face de la terre aurait changé."

K.D. Absolutely says

I bought my copy of this book during last year's BLTX. The original texts (English or German) are on the left pages of the book while the translation in Tagalog is on the right pages. For consistency, I just read the right pages.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was a German literary critic, philosopher, social critic, translator, radio broadcaster and essayist. As a literary critic, he wrote essays on the works of Goethe, Franz Kafka, Karl Kraus, Nicolai Leskov, Marcel Proust and Charles Baudelaire. He became a communist in the 30's due to the influence of Bertolt Brecht. He committed suicide while trying to evade the Nazis in 1940 in France while on his route to the US via the neutral Portugal.

Composed of twenty numbered paragraphs (called "theses"), *On the Concept of History* was in Benjamin's suitcase when he committed suicide. One interpretation of Benjamin in Thesis I, for example, is that Benjamin is suggesting that despite Karl Marx's claims to scientific objectivity, historical materialism is actually a quasi-religious fraud. Benjamin uses The Turk, a famous chess-playing device of the 18th century, as an analogy for historical materialism. Presented as an automaton that could defeat skilled chess players, The Turk actually concealed a human (allegedly a dwarf) who controlled the machine. Thesis I goes like

this:

"Sinasabing may automaton na nakakasagot sa bawat kilos ng manlalaro ng chess upang ito ang tiyak na mananalo sa laro. May papet na nakasuot ng damit Turko at mga *shisha* sa bibig na nakaupo sa harapan ng board na nakapatong sa isang malaking mesa. Lumilikha ang isang sistema ng mga salamin ng ilusyon na walang nakaharang sa ilalim ng mesa mula sa lahat ng panig. Sa katunaya'y may maestro ng chess na kubang pandak sa loob na ginagalaw ang kamay ng papet sa pamamagitan ng tali. May maiisip ng katumbas sa pilosopiya ang aparatong ito. Lagi raw mananalo ang papet na binansagang "materyalismong istoriko." Mula rito'y madali na lamang talunin ang kahit sinumang basta kinuhang tagasilbi ng teolohiya na sa kasalukuya'y maliit at pangit at talaga namang hindi dapat ipakita."

There are nineteen others like this and they deal with history, philosophy, sociology, religion, etc. They seem to be very interesting and if I only have time, I would google each term and people mentioned in the book plus the ones in Wiki. However, suffice it to say that this book is worth reading and pondering if you are into history and philosophy.

Because most of the time, I am not sure what to make of those theses that I read in the book. They seem to be for scholars to discuss and argue about.

mahatmanto says

kembali membuka-buka lagi... ini memang tulisan yang monumental.
banyak kutipan yang beredar berasal dari sini.
termasuk epitaph benjamin sendiri mengutip dari risalah pendek yang dibukukan juga hanya beberapa lembar ini:
"there has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism"

Spicy T AKA Mr. Tea says

I've read other Benjamin and have enjoyed it. This was a bit esoteric for me. I certainly understood some of it and enjoyed a few of the sections--but as a whole I feel clueless. In a sentence, can you tell me what this is about? I'm interested in theories of history. It reminded me of Bruce Popper's works on the open society. I need to read more Marxist philosophy. Must.... Comp.... rehend.....

Kevin says

"A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

