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Why the Destruction of History Makes Sense

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Abstract. This article describes a political psychology of the construct of history.

The construct of history has a history worthy of note. History can be a story of what came before. It can be a repository of lessons learned of what to do and not do. It can be a process that points the way to the future and to ethical calculus. It can be onanistically anthropomorphized as an actor playing on its own stage. It can be a force that must be reckoned with in making history or that through which we only can be swept along or away. These and other histories often are constituted, exemplified, or glorified through documents, books, sculptures, paintings, music, and architecture—as well as rituals, lifestyles, and modes of thinking, feeling, wanting, and behaving.

Within the above context, public discourse on the looting and destruction of Iraqi museums and libraries pursuant to the 2003 United States-led military intervention against the Saddam Hussein government becomes puzzling. As but one example quoted in *SECRECY NEWS*, an archaeologist laments “[h]ow can one understand those who destroyed such artifacts and set fire to manuscripts, annihilating a precious part of their own heritage? There is evidently a deeply rooted impulse to attack precisely those institutions that are the repositories of history and the foundations of culture and civilization. It does not make sense; it tends to destroy the very possibility of sense.”

But, perhaps it does make sense and affirms, not destroys, the possibility of sense. Destroying that which represents history can reinforce the sense of one’s own power. It can change history by destroying history’s foundations. It can settle scores with a history deemed to be malignant. It cannot destroy the possibility of sense but can establish other potential senses. It also can help suggest that what history deems to be history may still leave a huge lacuna of the human experience.

Public discourse that attributes sense only to looters who stole antiquities for profit may be unwittingly reinforcing a constrained consciousness of a crude Marxist perspective on economically induced sense—cents leading to sense, if you will. Instead, it may turn out that the destruction of history seen in Iraq is instead a creation of histories. Better yet, an appreciation and apperception that history may be a history of continuous, concurrent, and reciprocal destructions and creations. (See Aftergood, S. Threats to archives there and here. (April 23, 2003). *SECRECY NEWS*, 2003(34); Lombardo, G. P., & Foschi, R. (2003). The concept of personality in 19th-century French and 20th-century American psychology. *History of Psychology*, 6, 123-142; Verene, D.P. (2002). Coincidence, historical repetition, and self-knowledge: Jung, Vico, and Joyce. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 47, 459-478; Wong, W-C. (2002). Revitalizing the metaphoric process in commonsense psychology. *Philosophical Psychology*, 15, 473-488.)

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