

## ***2. What is philosophy of history?***

These are fascinating questions. As historians we study interesting individuals and cultures to understand how they lived, why they lived the way they did, and what impact they had on the course of human events. As philosophers we think more broadly and abstractly. We learn our lessons from the historians and ask: Are there broader explanations we can find in the dramatic rises and falls of cultures, or in the static nature of others?

History, from this perspective, is a huge laboratory of experiments in human living. Some of those experiments have been wildly successful, some have achieved middling results, leading their cultures to eke out an existence across the generations—and some have been outright disasters, causing misery and death on a large scale. Can we identify the fundamental causes at work? Can we learn why some cultures flourish while others stagnate, collapse, or descend into horror? Is there a moral to the story of history?

Let us turn to one major experiment, one that turned out to be one of the darkest eras in human history.

