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Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A Plea for “Internal Realism”

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Once there was a farmer who got hold of a copy of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. He opened the book and started to read, but he did not get very far. After a short while, he closed the book and sighed: “I wish I had his worries.”¹

This anecdote was used by the German historian Christian Meier twenty years ago to sketch the troublesome relationship between historians and philosophers, comparing the historians to the farmer. I will take Meier’s sketch as a starting point for my analysis of the relationship between history and philosophy of history. I will argue that doing history is a more philosophical activity than most historians realize and that recognition of this fact can improve the scope and quality of historical discussion. Contrary to philosophers of history like Atkinson, I will defend the view that historians can profit from philosophy because “doing history” can be improved by philosophical insights.² At the same time, however, I will argue that this will only be the case as long as philosophers of history take the concerns of professional historians seriously – and this means that debates of historians should always form the raw material of philosophical analysis as philosophers like Dray and Martin have emphasized.³

To state my point, I will analyze a recent discussion among German historians – the famous *Historikerstreit*. In doing so I will elucidate the relationship between history and philosophy of history by defending three theses. First, I will maintain – contrary to the widespread postmodern fashion – that historians always claim knowledge of a real past; and as all claims of knowledge embody truth claims the justification of truth claims must remain equally central to history as to philosophy of history – *pace* Rorty, Ankersmit, and postmodernism.⁴ Second, I will maintain



that this plea for a return to justificationism in philosophy of history presupposes realism with regard to the past among historians as well as among philosophers of history. The unmasking of naive realism – or objectivism, as it is often called – thus does not imply the rejection of realism altogether nor the need to embrace idealism (as some Collingwoodians think) or estheticism – or other brands of relativism.⁵ Third, I will argue that the brand of realism I shall elaborate – so-called “internal realism” – makes it possible to elucidate anew the classical problem of facts and values that has haunted historians as well as philosophers of history for so long. This analysis will lead to the conclusion – already drawn by Jürgen Habermas, Jürgen Kocka, and Jörn Rüsen – that the normative dimension of history cannot be eliminated and therefore is in need of rational justification.⁶

1 The *Historikerstreit*

The *Historikerstreit* reached its apex in 1986 and 1987.⁷ Its central subject was the place of the “Third Reich” in German history – a subject widely debated among German historians since the late 1960s. I have chosen this discussion as an example because of its eruptive quality. The *Historikerstreit* therefore can be analyzed as a kind of collective “Freudian slip” of the historical profession: it uncovered aspects usually left hidden in “normal” debates. I will focus my attention on the main proponents and schematize the debate deliberately as an argument between two groups. One group is centered around Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber. The other group consists of their critics, led by Jürgen Habermas, Hans Mommsen, and Martin Broszat. It will be shown that these historians justified their claims to knowledge by an appeal to “facts,” “reality,” and “truth”; at the same time it appears that they try to undermine competing claims to knowledge by denouncing them as “value-judgments.”

The *Historikerstreit* commenced with an article by the philosopher and sociologist Habermas in *Die Zeit*.⁸ Habermas criticized the apologetic tendencies in recent interpretations of National Socialism by West German historians. Nolte and Hillgruber – both well-known specialists – were his most important targets. In his most recent writings Nolte had proposed to put the history of the Third Reich in a new perspective.⁹ In his view this was necessary because the old picture of the “Third Reich” as the empire of pure evil was outdated. Historians supporting this picture, according to Nolte, used a figure of speech introduced by the Nazis: the ascription of a collective guilt. The only difference involved was the fact that the collective guilt was imputed to the Germans instead of the Jews. In Nolte’s eyes the negative image of the “Third Reich” not only induced thinking in black and white contrasts, but also produced a “negative nationalism.” This was an obstacle to scientific history because



historical understanding depended on the recognition of the various shades of gray.

Nolte gave two examples of his new perspective of the context in which Nazi Germany should be interpreted. National Socialism in general and the Nazis' crimes towards the Jews in particular should not be interpreted within the framework of a German history; instead of a national perspective a comparative European or even global perspective was mandatory. This was the case because the history of the twentieth century had become global history in the most literal sense; a national history of this period therefore would be a pure anachronism. The supranational character of twentieth-century historical reality simply demanded a supranational perspective from the historian. Consequently Hitler could no longer be treated by historians as an unsuccessful imitation of the German Bismarck, but should be seen as the European "Anti-Lenin." Historians who failed to recognize this elementary fact were the pitiful victims of delusion.

On the basis of this argument Nolte insisted that the crimes of the Nazis towards the Jews should be put in the perspective of the other mass murders in the twentieth century, beginning with the Turkish genocide of the Armenians, the Russian mass murders during and after the Russian revolution, and most recently slaughters in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Afghanistan. According to Nolte, these massacres must be understood in the context of social and cultural processes of uprooting and of the ideologies formulated to cope with these processes. This process of uprooting is seen by Nolte as a consequence of the modernization process beginning with the Industrial Revolution.

Central to the ideologies in question is the idea that the physical liquidation of a specific social group constitutes the solution to the problems of "modern times" because this liquidation is a necessary condition for a utopia. The most influential of these "utopian fantasies of annihilation" have been Marxism and National Socialism, says Nolte. This influence was due to the fact that these ideologies have been adopted by successful political movements and were transformed into state ideologies in Russia after 1917, and in Italy and Germany after 1922 and 1933 respectively. In Russia and Germany these "fantasies of annihilation" were later put into practice.

According to Nolte, these developments were connected to each other because the German practice of annihilation had been "caused" by the Russian example. It is evident that this thesis is the most controversial ingredient of Nolte's new perspective on German history. This causal relationship, which he interprets as a necessary and not as a sufficient condition, is localized by Nolte to the mind of Hitler and his companions. It was the threat of the Russian revolution and the fear of being annihilated just as the Russian bourgeoisie had been by Bolshevism that induced Hitler to the practice of Auschwitz, says Nolte. In the National



Socialist mind, Bolshevism was a Jewish invention and the Soviet Union a state dominated by the Jews. Therefore Hitler identified the struggle against Bolshevism with the struggle against the Jews – with fatal consequences for the latter. In Nolte's view, the anti-Semitism of the Nazis should thus be seen as a historically comprehensible transformation of their "legitimate" fear of Bolshevism. Traditional anti-Semitism played no role whatsoever in this process.

Quite independently, Andreas Hillgruber had also developed a new perspective on the history of Nazi Germany.¹⁰ Like Nolte, he proposed to approach this episode from the East, and like Nolte he criticized others for their lack of scope. This "lack" referred to their blindness to the *two* national catastrophes of World War II and their interrelationship – the catastrophe of European Jewry and the German catastrophe. The latter consisted in the expulsion of twelve million Germans from Eastern and Central Europe in 1944–5, the annexation of their former homelands by Russia and Poland and the German partition. According to Hillgruber, historians up till now had not interpreted the relationship between these two catastrophes in the right European perspective. They presupposed a direct relation between the German and the Jewish catastrophe in interpreting the former as an Allied punishment for the latter. This point of view was not correct because the Jewish catastrophe was not yet known at the time the Allies made their plans for Germany after its defeat. Therefore the Allied policy towards postwar Germany cannot be connected with the German crimes towards the Jews and should be related to the so-called "Prussia-stereotype." This stereotype consists of the idea that there was a "German danger" in Europe and that this danger would only disappear together with the militaristic state of Prussia (with its heartlands east of the Elbe). Thus, the Jewish and the German catastrophe were causally unconnected.

Still there was a connection between both catastrophes, according to Hillgruber, because a hidden factor could explain *both*. This hidden cause consisted in the practice of deporting and liquidating total populations emanating from the idea of "ethnic cleansing," developed in the twentieth century. Stalin and Hitler could only be distinguished from other mass murderers by the radicalness with which they put this idea into practice. The Jewish catastrophe has been the most visible result such that the German catastrophe – as a consequence thereof – receded into the background. Yet they belonged to the same historical context.

Like Nolte's, Hillgruber's new perspective suggests a direct connection between the *German* practice of annihilation and general *European* history. This does not imply that Hillgruber totally ignores the argument that without Nazi Germany Auschwitz would have been impossible and therefore Germany's defeat was most desirable. This problem is presented as a tragic dilemma for the German army, a dilemma without any hope



of a solution. By protecting the German population against the advancing Red Army, the Wehrmacht unconsciously and unwillingly enabled the Nazis to continue their murderous practices in the concentration camps behind the front line. The only avenue open to German historians to make this tragedy comprehensible was to transport themselves mentally into this situation. The key to historical understanding, according to Hillgruber, was seeing the situation through the eyes of the German army and describing it through this perspective because this is what the German population did. Therefore only the perspective of the Wehrmacht was “realistic” for the historian of the Eastern front. Like Nolte, Hillgruber thus tries to legitimize his perspective by appealing to historical reality.

The two perspectives just summarized generated the *Historikerstreit*. During this controversy German historians split into two camps. Historians with leftist sympathies of one kind or another tended to support Habermas’s critique. Their contributions were published mainly by the left-wing liberal weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*. Historians with a more conservative frame of mind tended to support Nolte and Hillgruber and tried to protect them against the criticism of Habermas and others. Their contributions appeared mainly in the conservative daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

This controversy is really a postmodern spectacle. Almost all the firm ground historians usually stand on turned into a swamp of relativism and subjectivity. All of the pillars of “normal” historical science – such as sources, facts, and historical method – sank in this swamp without any trace. Even the question whether there has been any genuine discussion between the two camps appears to be debatable: the defenders of Nolte and Hillgruber simply deny the existence of a historical debate and refer to the “so-called *Historikerstreit*” or to an ignoble “political and moral campaign” directed against them, or to “the Habermas controversy.”¹¹ The sentence “your reality is not the same as mine” probably can be labeled as the only *non*-debatable statement in this whole controversy.

Testimony to this is that factual statements of one party in this debate are not recognized as such by the other and often are denounced as political “value judgments.” An example of this is the way in which the annihilation of the Jews by Nazi Germany is characterized. The critics of Nolte and Hillgruber regard the quasi-industrial character of the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis as a unique historical fact which distinguishes this event from other mass murders in world history. This view is founded on the consideration that the Nazis deliberately used the apparatus of a “civilized” state to reach their murderous goal while other mass murders took place in the chaotic context of war or civil war. Placing Auschwitz in a comparative perspective of European or world history – as Nolte and Hillgruber do – therefore obliterates the most important factual feature of National Socialism: its uniquely



destructive quality. If historians rewrite German history as European history they are not looking for new scientific insights but only misusing the comparative perspective with the political intent to repress this traumatic historical fact.¹²

People who defend Nolte – like Joachim Fest and Klaus Hildebrand – do not regard this unique quality of the destruction wrought by National Socialism as a historical fact at all; instead they attribute it to a belated manifestation of the German “Herrenvolkgesinnung” because it boils down to the statement that German people are superior to others, even when it comes to killing civilians.¹³

Another crucial fact for critical historians like Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat is the observation that Germany was not a monolithic one-man dictatorship; this state could not have functioned without the active cooperation of the conservative commercial and industrial élites, the army, and the bureaucracy. From their perspective, the crucial fact about the Third Reich was not the presence of an ideological muddle-head, but this muddle-head becoming the head of state and gaining the enthusiastic support of the élites and the state apparatuses for a criminal policy over a twelve-year period. They regard the causal reduction of the Nazi crimes to Hitler’s frame of mind and his fear of Bolshevism as a politically motivated effort to obscure the crucial role of this conservative “Funktionseliten” in the Third Reich – and by the same move shifting the responsibility for the Third Reich to Communism.¹⁴

Nolte, as is to be expected, adopts a different perspective. He does not recognize the collaboration of the conservative élites with Hitler as a historical fact because (almost) all Germans cooperated during the war – and this was as true for the former leftist workers as for the traditionally rightist élites. Ascribing a special responsibility to these élites boils down to putting the blame exclusively on these groups and creating a contrast in black and white. In fact, these historians, argues Nolte, are misusing the Third Reich as an instrument for their leftist critique of today’s society.¹⁵

In their turn, the critics of Nolte and Hillgruber deny that their crucial facts are indeed facts. Because facts are states of affairs that can be stated in true statements, factual claims pertain to both the descriptive and the explanatory level of narratives.¹⁶ Nolte’s factual claim that National Socialism can be causally reduced to Bolshevism is dismissed as political humbug. Hillgruber’s factual claim that the Jewish catastrophe is causally related to a “hidden factor” in general European history and not specially to Nazi Germany meets the same harsh fate. Their critics underline the direct connection between Nolte’s and Hillgruber’s urge for “scientific renovation” and the conservative political urge in the Federal Republic of the 1980s “to step out of Hitler’s shadow – at last.”¹⁷ The creation of a self-image as a “normal” nation is seen as the political aim of these “new perspectives” on German history.



Of course, Nolte and Hillgruber are a bit distressed by all these “misunderstandings” of what they see as their noble and purely scientific intentions. To confound these with apologetic intentions in their eyes surely proves their opponents have been blinded by their leftist ideological blinkers. They impede the registration of unpleasant truths, the more so when these truths are revealed by a person with “wrong” – that is, rightist – political persuasions. Science, however, demands an “unpolitical” stance and a recognition of the truth without any consideration of the political color of the person who states it. For it is impossible for a true science to exist if there are “forbidden” questions.¹⁸

In sum the disagreements between the two camps in this discussion could not possibly have been more fundamental since both descriptive statements about facts and explanatory statements about relationships between facts were involved. The distinction between factual statements and value judgments regularly became a topic of debate, a debate which became contentious to an unusual degree.

2 Internal Realism

A philosopher of history may react in different ways to agitated discussions like the *Historikerstreit*. The first way is to react as Nolte and Hillgruber did: in this case one draws the conclusion this debate has not been scientific but political. This conclusion presupposes that science – contrary to politics – is a factual debate about truth claims and this type of debate ends – at least in the long run – because consensus has been reached. This consensus on facts constitutes the foundation of scientific knowledge. One could label this type of reaction and this view of scientific knowledge as objectivistic, because it is based on the classical ideal of objective historical knowledge.¹⁹ In this view, the historical method is regarded as a filter between truth and untruth and therefore as the foundation of consensus within the scientific community. The frequent appeals by Nolte and Hillgruber to “the facts,” “the sources,” “the truth,” and “science” are testimony to their objectivism.²⁰ Within this frame of reference, however, it is impossible to understand the fact that historians frequently *keep* disagreeing on facts and relationships between facts; nor is it possible to understand why rational, scientific discussions about facts often resemble irrational, political discussions about values.

The second way for the philosopher of history to react to discussions like the *Historikerstreit* is to conclude that history is not a scientific discipline at all and does not constitute knowledge. History then can be labeled (wholly or in part) as an individual “form of art,” “act of faith,” or “expression of culture” which cannot be rationally justified in terms of (the truth of) factual arguments. Such a reaction has traditionally been produced by relativists and can be interpreted as the philosophical mirror image of the objectivistic reaction.²¹ Just like objectivists,



relativists presuppose that there is a consensus in real science on facts and their explanatory relationships; because such a consensus is lacking in history, they conclude that history is not scientific (wholly or in part) and classify it as an “expression of culture” without a claim to truth. This conclusion is inevitable since every claim of knowledge is *ipso facto* a truth claim, as Hamlyn has demonstrated.²² Within this frame of reference, however, it is completely incomprehensible why historians cling to the custom of justifying their claims to knowledge by appealing to the facts. If the relativistic view of history is right, they might as well save their energy for other purposes; the truthful reproduction of the facts by the historian would contribute as little to the quality of the product of the historian as would be the case with painters and their products. In both cases,²³ it would be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for quality.

Neither traditional objectivism nor traditional relativism thus seem capable of explaining why historians do engage in discussions like the *Historikerstreit* and appeal to facts if their perspectives are challenged by opponents. If we want to consider history as a scientific enterprise and discount the phenomenon of science *without* consensus, we therefore have to look for a frame of reference in philosophy of history beyond objectivism and relativism. This is possible, in my opinion, by linking philosophy of history with modern epistemology and philosophy of science – *pace* postmodernism and its allergy to the problem of truth. This allergy stems from the traditional but mistaken identification of the search for knowledge and the search for certainty.²⁴ Epistemology is called for because this branch of philosophy elucidates the possibility of knowledge and therefore constitutes a bulwark against all brands of skepticism – old and new. Skeptics, who often regarded history as one of their favorite playgrounds, cast doubt on the possibility of reliable knowledge altogether.²⁵ The struggle against skepticism therefore is the logical point of departure of any philosophy of history worthy of the name. Philosophy of science – including social science – is needed because the characteristics of history as a discipline can only be elucidated in comparison with other sciences. As these, in turn, are elucidated by their philosophers, philosophers of history cannot afford to fall victim to outdated versions, the more so because they traditionally “lend” the *concept* of science to other disciplines. Since the philosophical identity of history is often formulated in contrast with images of other sciences the risk of errors and empty contrasts is a serious one.

As for epistemology and the struggle against skepticism, philosophy of history in the 1990s must come to terms with the postmodern versions of narrativism.²⁶ As for philosophy of science, philosophy of history must incorporate the post-positivistic view of scientific knowledge.²⁷ The terminus of relativism then functions as the point of departure: the



recognition of the fact that historical knowledge does not have a certain and uniform foundation in facts or logic and therefore does not *per se* presuppose a consensus. In modern epistemology – since Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* – and modern philosophy of science – since Popper’s *Logic of Scientific Discovery* – this insight did not lead to the epistemological skepticism of the relativists, but to fallibilism and contextualism.²⁸ Contextualists recognize that all knowledge is relative to specific epistemic contexts. And fallibilists recognize that *all* claims to knowledge are corrigible, and assume a hypothetical character, because there are no firm foundations of knowledge – either in the senses or in human reason. The demise of “foundationalism” thus does *not* lead necessarily to epistemological skepticism – as many postmodernists seem to think – but to quite a different and more constructive philosophical position.²⁹ This position might “save” historians from the skeptical consequences of postmodernism, such as relativism and subjectivism with respect to epistemology and ethics. As long as historians claim to produce *knowledge*, philosophers of history cannot permit themselves an allergy to the problem of truth and to the justification of truth claims because this would amount to philosophical suicide.

The problem of the justification of knowledge therefore does not disappear. The – insoluble – problem of the *foundation* of certain knowledge is merely transformed into the – soluble – problem of *argumentation* of claims to fallible knowledge. The problem of justification in philosophy of history boils down to the question of what kinds of argumentation historians use to argue their claims to knowledge – or to refute competing ones – and which arguments can be reconstructed *ex post facto*. So “anti-foundationalism” does not of necessity force philosophers and historians to say goodbye to epistemology and embark on a “narrativistic” course, as Ankersmit suggested.³⁰ I hope to show that there is an alternative, more fruitful route in philosophy along which the problem of justification is not *eliminated*, but *expanded* so as to include normative discourse. This route is the more attractive since the “factual–normative” dual character of historical discourse has so long troubled historians as well as philosophers of history. This route can be elucidated by an analysis of the communicative role of language.

If philosophers of history take this road they leave behind two fundamental presuppositions with regard to the character of scientific knowledge shared by objectivism and relativism. First, the presupposition that rational consensus constitutes the hallmark of scientificity; and second, the presupposition that the rationality of science can be explicated in a formal method (that is, an algorithm), or in an explicit set of formal rules. Beyond objectivism and relativism one recognizes the presence of rational *disagreement* in science and the existence of a fundamental and



non-reducible plurality of points of view.³¹ This “third way” in philosophy of history beyond objectivism and relativism – a path we could label, following Hilary Putnam, “internal realism”³² – makes it possible to analyze the practice of history eschewing the false dilemmas produced by traditional but outdated ideas about the nature of rationality and science. Along this path philosophy of history can elucidate the fact that historians “still want to call historical knowledge a *reconstruction*, not a construction *simpliciter*.”³³

Like all brands of realism “internal realism” rests on basic presuppositions: first, that reality exists independently of our knowledge thereof; and second, that our scientific statements – including our theories – refer to this independently existing reality.³⁴ This realist interpretation of scientific knowledge, which at least explains the success of natural science,³⁵ must face two problems that are generated by the confrontation of this interpretation with the history of science. First, the correspondence theory of truth becomes a problem because the history of science is characterized by a radical conceptual discontinuity – as Thomas Kuhn and others have argued. Because of this conceptual discontinuity it is no longer possible to suppose direct correspondence between scientific statements and reality. Second, the reference of scientific concepts becomes a problem: the historical fact that scientific concepts do change in time in a discontinuous manner – as exemplified in Kuhn’s famous “paradigm shifts” – generates the problem to what entities in reality scientific concepts refer. Though linguistic entities may change, according to realism – in contrast with idealism – real entities are supposed to be invariant. Ankersmit’s narrative idealism or White’s linguistic idealism, for instance, posit that the object of history is constituted by the historian and lacks a referential relationship to a real object.³⁶ Paradoxically the history of science thus can be used as an extra argument to interpret historical knowledge in an “internal-realist” way because it confronts us with the lack of fixity and lack of “transparency” of scientific concepts *vis-à-vis* the reality they describe. Traditionally this lack of fixity was regarded as a characteristic of *historical* concepts only and therefore was used as an argument by idealists to set history apart from science.³⁷

The two problems of correspondence and referentiality must be addressed because realists suppose that the possibility of knowledge is founded in the capacity of – true – statements to correspond to reality and in the capacity of – adequate – concepts to refer to real entities. Following Putnam we can elucidate these two problems by interpreting correspondence and reference as notions that *derive their meaning from and therefore are relative to specific conceptual frameworks*. Therefore the question “what is factual?” alias “what is true or real?” is always dependent on and *internal* to the specific linguistic framework in which reality is described. Putnam argues for “internal realism” as follows:



The perspective I shall defend has no unambiguous name. It is a late arrival in the history of philosophy. . . . I shall refer to it as the *internalist* perspective, because it is characteristic of this view to hold that *what objects does the world consist of?* is a question that only makes sense to ask *within* a theory of description. Many “internalist” philosophers, though not all, hold further that there is more than one “true” theory or description of the world. “Truth,” in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability – some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are represented in our belief system* and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent “states of affairs.” There is no God’s Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve.³⁸

The acknowledgment that the relationship between language and reality is not “transparent” therefore does not lead to the favorite conclusion of postmodernists that language is “opaque” and not capable of corresponding to and referring to reality, but to the much more “realistic” conclusion that reference and correspondence must be interpreted as relative and internal to specific conceptual frameworks³⁹ – as Carlo Ginzburg hinted in his critique of postmodernism in history.⁴⁰ The fact that reference and correspondence must be interpreted relative to discourses cannot be used as an argument against the applicability of these notions, as often is suggested. Although the critics of the correspondence theory of truth have convincingly established that correspondence cannot be conceived of as a criterion of *verification*, that is for the *control* of truth, correspondence remains the criterion of *meaning* for the truth of statements. This is so because – as Wittgenstein showed – knowledge of the meaning of a concept presupposes the ability to apply the concept; and this in turn presupposes knowledge of the type of things the concept refers to and knowledge of the ways in which this concept is *correctly* used in statements. And one can only be said to understand the meaning of statements *correctly* if one knows under what conditions they can be said to be *true*, that is, when they correspond to fact. If this was not the case, that is, if the meaning of a concept did *not* presuppose knowledge of its *truth-conditions*, a competent language-user would not be able to tell the difference between, for instance, someone who actually suffers pain and someone who fakes pain, that is, the difference between the correct and incorrect application of these concepts. Since competent language users normally *do* know the difference between concepts they normally do know their truth-conditions. The mistakes that are sometimes made in this respect do not contradict this fact; to the contrary, the notion of mistake only makes sense in a context of rules and one can only speak of rules if they are *normally*



followed in a *correct* manner. So the fact that the relationship of correspondence between a true statement and the world it refers to is a conventional relationship within a conceptual framework does *not* invalidate the notions of reference and of truth as correspondence. Without these notions it is, as a matter of fact, impossible to understand *what we are talking about* when we talk.⁴¹

From the viewpoint of “internal realism” we can understand where the strong pull towards idealism in the philosophy of history – from Dilthey and Collingwood to H. White and Ankersmit – comes from and why it is misguided. The “idealistic temptation” has always been based on the argument that history as a discipline – in contrast with the natural sciences – does not deal with a material object and therefore this object must first be constituted in a mental (Collingwood) or a linguistic (White, Ankersmit) manner and universe. Because history lacks a material object historians – in contrast with natural scientists – miss a *direct* sensorial entry to their objects;⁴² therefore historical knowledge – in contrast with scientific knowledge – cannot be founded on empirical statements and cannot be interpreted as knowledge of “the real” and thus is “imaginary,” “mythical,” and so on. According to this traditional idealistic argument, history cannot be (come) a science, but is a form of art, a form of ideology, a branch of literature, and so on.

From the viewpoint of “internal realism” this argument is based on two, internally related, confluences: first, the conflation of materialism and realism;⁴³ and second, the conflation of empiricism (that is, the empiricist brand of foundationalism) with scientific knowledge per se. The first conflation manifests itself in the tendency to deny non-material objects reality in some sense and the resulting tendency to grant this class of objects a purely mental or linguistic status.⁴⁴ Because of this “unreality” it is supposedly impossible for statements to refer to or correspond to these objects and therefore they cannot be true or false. As the objects of historical narratives – such as feudalism, absolutism, the Renaissance, and so on – are categorized as members of this (non-material) class, historical narratives (that consist of conjunctions of singular existential statements) cannot be true or false.⁴⁵ Historical narratives that present “interpretations” contrast with the individual singular existential statements that present “factual” information; only the latter can be true or false. At the level of interpretation, therefore, the problem of truth is supposedly of no importance in philosophy of history and consequently (post)modern philosophers dedicate their energy to an ideological, political, linguistic, or aesthetic analysis of historical narratives.⁴⁶

The second conflation is another legacy of crude empiricism. As the first conflation sprang from the idea that “what cannot be confronted directly cannot be real,” the second conflation springs from the idea that “what cannot be observed directly cannot be known” and therefore



cannot be counted as knowledge. Though this argument has long been discredited in epistemology and philosophy of science it has been surprisingly tenacious in philosophy of history – from the German idealists via the relativism of Becker and Beard to the narrativism of H. White and Ankersmit.⁴⁷ If one realizes that this whole train of thought is based on a mistaken identification of realism and materialism and on an outdated epistemology, the whole idealistic line of argument begins to crumble. It is not necessary for (conjunctions of) singular existential statements to refer to material objects in order to be true or false, nor is it necessary for these (conjunctions of) factual statements to refer to concrete objects in order to be true or false.⁴⁸ And neither are (conjunctions of) these statements necessarily “imaginary,” “mythical,” or arbitrary because they cannot be “founded” in sensory experience.⁴⁹ If that were the case theoretical physics should as well be labeled “mythical” given the fact that entities like quarks and quasars have as little “foundation” in sensory experience as renaissances and revolutions. Because historians often borrow ideas from philosophers when they reflect on their discipline, philosophical mistakes are not as innocent relative to the practice of history as is usually taken for granted.

3 Internal Realism and the Interpretation of Historical Debates

To show the fruitfulness of “internal realism” for philosophy of history I will now clarify some aspects of the *Historikerstreit* from this perspective that could not be clarified by either objectivism or relativism. The point of departure of “internal realism” is the insight that all our knowledge of reality is mediated through language; this means reality for us is always reality within the framework of a certain description. The “Third Reich,” for instance, is not known in a direct, unmediated way but only through descriptions of historians that are based on specific central concepts. Some historians of the “Third Reich” use the conceptual framework of the *Führerdiktatur* – the German state is then described as a unique one-man dictatorship; others use the conceptual framework of theories of fascism or totalitarianism – the Nazi state is then described as one form of fascism or as one brand of totalitarian dictatorship.⁵⁰ *Mutatis mutandis* the same goes for nature since our knowledge thereof is mediated through descriptions of physical scientists. The descriptions embody *points of view* or *perspectives* from which reality is observed. As such, the perspectives belong to the frame of description and not to reality itself. This observation is not contradicted by the fact that in socio-historical reality we *also* confront perspectives at the object-level, as is illustrated so explicitly by Hillgruber’s contributions to the *Historikerstreit*. So in quite a literal sense historians construct a perspective on perspectives,



so to speak. This fact does, however, explain why the choice of perspective in sociohistorical sciences generates the problem of “partisanship,” as is also illustrated by Hillgruber (see below).

When we talk about facts and reality, we therefore *always* refer to reality *within a specific frame of description* (this is why we refer to this view as *internal realism*). This explains how it is possible that with regard to an individual subject – National Socialism, for instance – different historians *keep* referring to different states of affairs as facts and *keep* referring to different statements as true, and thus how it is possible that there is no guarantee of consensus in history. This fact is explained by the circumstance that factual statements and their truth vary with their frames of description. The possibility of plural and even incompatible true statements about the “same” subject is thus elucidated; historians who are baffled by this state of affairs can now be saved from epistemological confusion and despair.⁵¹ An example can be borrowed from Nelson Goodman: he pointed to the fact that both the statement “the sun always moves” and the statement “the sun never moves” are both true depending on the frame of reference.⁵² In the same vein, the statement “Auschwitz was a unique historical phenomenon” and the statement “Auschwitz was not a unique historical phenomenon” may both be true depending on the (aspects of the) phenomena under comparison. So the mere fact that truth in science is not uniform and undivided does not have to worry historians or force them towards skeptical and relativistic conclusions about the scientific status of history. Of course, this does not imply any statement about *particular* truth claims because only the *possibility* of different statements about the same object is elucidated. The merits of every particular truth claim in history are not to be judged by philosophers of history but by the historians themselves.⁵³

Because all statements of fact are dependent on frames of description, the claim that such and such is a fact can only mean that the description under consideration is adequate. So, considered more closely, a factual statement is just a *claim to truth*. This is so because the notion of truth and fact are conceptually interdependent;⁵⁴ therefore, as long as historians are referring to facts, they are referring to truth. And as long as they back their claims with regard to the adequacy of “interpretations” with an appeal to facts – as they *in fact* do, as is demonstrated even by a quasi-postmodern debate like the *Historikerstreit* – the problem of truth cannot be deleted from the agenda by any philosopher of history.⁵⁵ Factual claims, however, can never be “proved” or “founded” in reality but only argued for. What “reality” looks like, or what “the facts” are, always remains debatable for exactly this reason. On a closer view, the uttering of factual statements always means presenting a specific frame of description and a specific perspective on reality. I will now go back to the *Historikerstreit* and see what further insights can be gained from this philosophical angle.



Both Nolte and Hillgruber claimed that their perspectives on the Third Reich – that is, their frames of description – were in accordance with the “true nature” of National Socialism. Nolte argued for his perspective with an appeal to the European if not global nature of twentieth-century history while Hillgruber argued for his “Wehrmacht-perspective” with an appeal to the Eastern front itself (or at least to the German side thereof). Considered from the viewpoint of “internal realism,” it is easy to see why Nolte and Hillgruber did not convince their critics. If one realizes what “reality” looks like always depends on a frame of description – and therefore a perspective – it comes as no surprise that reality cannot be used as an argument in favor of, or even for the “necessity” of, a particular perspective. This presupposes a direct fit between reality and a specific linguistic framework – a presupposition linked up with naïve realism and discarded with empiricism in epistemology. It is rather the other way around: it is the historian who tries to determine what the past “really” looked like by arguing for his or her perspective. Thus it is the historian, not the past, who does the “dictating” in history.

This does not imply that the past does not “really” exist or that individual historians are free to “dictate” any picture of the past they like – as some postmodern thinkers seem to suggest. Narrativists like White and Ankersmit inspired by literary theory take this suggestion very far in emphasizing the autonomy of the historical text in relation to the past. Their view, however, cannot explicate how it is possible that historians often reject texts as historically inadequate. This *fact* of historical practice can only be made comprehensible if one presupposes a referential relationship between the texts of historians and the real past – because without this relationship the notion of adequacy makes no sense – and thus if one resists the temptation to grant historical texts a status independent of the past they are supposed to describe. Anyone who applies Derrida’s “*il n’y a pas de hors texte*” to the writing of history ceases to be of interest to the historian *qua* historian.

The separation of the referential relationship between the historian’s narrative and the past itself is argued for by removing the link between the historical narrative and its factual foundation. White, for instance, recently argued that events like the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the explosion of the Challenger, or the Holocaust (*bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble*) should be regarded as the paradigm cases of the (modern) historical event.⁵⁶ What distinguishes this type of event according to White is that factual statements relating to them cannot be founded and that further research does not *reduce* but *enhances* the puzzlement about “what really happened.” White calls this the “evaporation of reality” or the “derealization” of the event itself, which means, among other things, either the impossibility of telling any single authoritative story about these events or the possibility of telling any number of different stories about each of them.⁵⁷ So White concludes – according



to the familiar either-or scheme – that when the God of the “single authoritative story” of history is dead the historian is engulfed by chaos and arbitrariness: “any number of different stories” about the past can be told, apparently without any constraint of the evidence. So the “underdetermination” of the historical narrative by the evidence receives with White a very radical interpretation. The “evaporation” of the borderline between fact and fiction and between history and literature is the logical consequence of this remarkable line of reasoning.⁵⁸

In Ankersmit’s recent writings we confront a similar line of argument. Like White he tries to undermine the relationship between historical narratives and their factual grounding. In his view this separation of the historical narrative from the evidence is best exemplified by so-called “postmodern” or “new” historiography: “For the modernist, the evidence is a tile which he picks up to see what is underneath it; for the postmodernist, on the other hand, it is a tile which he steps on in order to move on to other tiles: horizontality instead of verticality.”⁵⁹ “For the new historiography the text must be central – it is no longer a layer which one looks *through* (either at a past reality or at the historian’s authorial intention) but something which the historiographer must look *at*.”⁶⁰

Like White, Ankersmit does not seem to be disturbed by the fact that most historians keep subscribing to the “vertical view” on historical evidence and do not embrace their “postulate of the *non*-transparency of the historical text” in their radical manner. And historians do so with good reason because if they did take these philosophical views seriously, it would be completely incomprehensible why they would actually leave their armchairs to do *research*. The “underdetermination” of historical narratives by the evidence by no means justifies their separation. The “lack of transparency” merely implies that historians cannot appeal directly to reality to back up their narratives and therefore have to *argue* in favor of a reconstruction of past reality – just as is the case with the paleontologist or the geologist. In this process of argumentation the factual evidence plays a crucial role.

Still there is an important difference between history on the one hand and paleontology and geology on the other, because the object of history consists of the *human* past.⁶¹ Because humans tend to be interested in the way in which their past is presented in histories (as this is the way individual and collective identities are constructed) they tend to value the perspectives involved. As a consequence histories may be *true* but not *acceptable* because they conflict with the conception of identity of the audience addressed. This practical “interest” of history, which has been analyzed by Jürgen Habermas, Emil Angehrn, Jörn Rüsen, and Herta Nagl-Docekal, is lacking in the sciences that deal with a nonhuman object.⁶² Because Putnam develops his “internal realism” only in relationship to natural science we have to link this idea of practical interest



to “internal realism” when we become “realistic” in philosophy of history. Combined with linguistic analysis this version of “internal realism” is capable of pushing the analysis of the problem of values beyond objectivism and relativism, as I hope to show now.

4 “Internal Realism,” the Problem of Values, and the *Historikerstreit*

Before proposing a frame of analysis I will first comment on the problem. The problem of values is traditionally interpreted in the spirit of Max Weber and his “postulate of ethical neutrality” (*Wertfreiheit*), although many historians prefer to cite Ranke’s famous lines on the task of the historian in this context.⁶³ By this postulate Weber meant a methodological rule for scientists (as scientists) not to pronounce any judgment of value related to an object under investigation and to restrict oneself in science to statements of fact. With objectivism and relativism Weber was convinced of the “absolute heterogeneity” of statements of fact and statements of value; therefore science, as the realm of facts, should be strictly separated from the realm of values, that is ethics, esthetics, and politics.⁶⁴ The problem of values thus was localized by Weber on the level of singular existential statements and singular value-judgments and not on the level of frames of description or conceptual frameworks, that is, the level of the historical narrative *in toto*. As a consequence the most important value-problem in historiography, related to the choice of perspective, falls outside the traditional frame of analysis, as I shall demonstrate in the case of the *Historikerstreit*.

The normative aspects related to the choice of perspective are most important in historiography because they are most debated by historians.⁶⁵ This does not, of course, mean that there is no “problem of values” at the level of individual statements – there surely is – only that this level is *relatively* unimportant. As in the domain of epistemology a “holistic” and a “linguistic turn” is needed in the domain of normative analysis and for exactly the same reason: like descriptive statements in historical narratives, normative statements do not parade individually and present themselves one by one, because they are interconnected at the conceptual level.⁶⁶ As descriptive statements presuppose theories of observation, normative statements always presuppose theories of morality (that function as unproblematic background knowledge).⁶⁷

When we analyze the *Historikerstreit* from this point of view the first fact to be noted is the persistent attempt of Nolte and Hillgruber to keep the problem of values out of the discussion by appealing to Weber’s “postulate of ethical neutrality.” They deny any relationship



between their perspectives, as embodied by their explanatory schemes, and the ascription of moral responsibility to one party; they thereby emphasize the fundamental gap between scientific history and politics or ethics. This line of argumentation is rather awkward when one brings the main issue to mind: after all, the *Historikerstreit* revolves around the place of the Federal Republic in German history – that is the historical identity of the *Bundesrepublik* – and this is as much a political as a scientific problem. In spite of this fundamental fact Nolte and Hillgruber keep appealing to the unbridgeable gap dividing their pure scientific inquiries from politics. In their objectivistic frame it appears to be impossible to incorporate the idea of practical interest.

Hillgruber thereby flatly denies that his choice in favor of the perspective of the “*Wehrmacht*” conceals a normative choice. He presents this choice as one dictated by historical reality itself. The historian of the Eastern front, according to him, is confronted with the following alternatives: to choose to write history from the perspective of Hitler, or from the perspective of the Russians, or from the perspective of the inmates of the concentration camps, or from the perspective of the German civilian population and the German army protecting it. The first three perspectives do not match reality, according to Hillgruber, because the German population did not identify itself with one of these parties. Therefore the perspective of the German army remains as the only “realistic” point of view for the historian.⁶⁸

To uncover the normative choices hidden behind Hillgruber’s quasi-factual argumentation is not a very difficult task since his attempts to clear the German army and civilian population from responsibility for the Nazi crimes are rather clumsy. *His* formulation of the *factual* historical problem evidently hinges on the separation in his frame of description between (1) Hitler on the one side and the German army and civilian population on the other, and (2) the German army and population on the one side and the inmates of the concentration camps on the other. Apparently the latter – mainly Jews, gypsies, Communists, and socialists – are not “real” Germans in Hillgruber’s view, because they are not identified as such by either the majority of the German population then – this is an undisputed historical fact – or the (present-day) German historian in the 1980s – this is his normative choice. The factual description of the Third Reich by the historian then simply boils down to the uncritical reproduction of the *Wehrmacht*-perspective on reality, including its *normative* definition of the “real” Germans and the “real” Germany.⁶⁹ This remarkable point of view stems from Hillgruber’s apparent identification of the (German) past with what was supposedly directly “observable,” the (German) sources – a well-known empiricist fallacy, that has not gone unnoticed in the debate.

The descriptive separation of Hitler and the German army makes it possible for Hillgruber to typify the struggle on the Eastern front



as a “tragedy.” This typification carries a hidden normative load since tragedies presuppose that *both* parties to a conflict are able to justify their actions by an appeal to an ethical principle; moreover, the conflict between these principles is as comprehensible as it is inevitable. In this way the role of the *Wehrmacht* in continuing “Hitler’s war” even after it became apparent during the winter of 1942–3 that it had already been lost is legitimized by Hillgruber forty-five years after the fact. He is consistent in describing the few members of the German military who actually rose against Hitler in July 1944 as “irresponsible” and “unrealistic.”⁷⁰ Surprisingly for Hillgruber the historical reality of July 1944 thus is exactly what the Hitler-supporting majority of the *Wehrmacht* took it for (and made of it) with the exclusion of all other perspectives – such as the perspective of the military resistance, of the camp-inmates, or of the Russians.

Nolte’s normative choices are better hidden than Hillgruber’s in a quasi-factual guise in his frame of description. Most important in this respect is his “factual” statement that the historiography of the “Third Reich” up till now has been based on “ascriptions of collective guilt”; therefore this historiography is labeled as “moralistic” and “factually inadequate” and is in dire need of “scientific revision.” Nolte repudiates any “ascription of collective guilt” because this figure of argumentation sprang from the Nazis. In spite of its intentionally “innovative” and “scientific” character Nolte’s own argumentation at this point suffers from a serious inconsistency that leaps to the eye: he repeatedly criticizes his opponents for denouncing his arguments because of their (rightist) political origins instead of judging their factual adequacy. According to Nolte, in *his* case this constituted a serious breach of the ethics of science. This at least was his argument for using radical rightist pamphlets as historical sources (neglected by other historians) in order to document the Nazis’ “fear of Bolshevism.”⁷¹ The question of the historical German guilt and responsibility for Auschwitz – *the* central problem defined by the perspectives of his critics – was in this way eschewed as a factual problem for history and dismissed as “moralistic.”⁷²

The distinction between science as the realm of facts and politics as the domain of values thus may cause serious trouble and controversy in historical debates, as is clearly demonstrated in the *Historikerstreit*. This direct link between factual and normative judgments is rooted in the practical interest of history, even when this is explicitly denied – as is the case with Nolte and Hillgruber. Both historians were attempting to restore an *acceptable* past for the Germans through the construction of a less painful historical identity by relativizing the German responsibility for the catastrophes brought about by the Germans between 1939 and 1945. This direct linkage between history and identity can explain why it is no use trying to expel ethical discussion from the territory of historians and why “the problem of ethical neutrality” of the historian



is as old as historiography itself.⁷³ As long and as far as collectivities derive their identity from history, the writing of history preserves this practical and normative character.⁷⁴ Therefore the normative points of view of historians are better argued out in the open, as the *Historikerstreit* clearly shows, the more so since in many historical controversies the explicit, conflicting factual judgments appear to be rooted in implicit, conflicting normative judgments. The rationality of historical discussions could be enhanced in this way. In the Jewish contributions to this debate – for instance those of Saul Friedländer and Dan Diner – this argument is explicitly stated. They, for instance, argue that the history of the Third Reich should not be written from the perspective of the German contemporaries – as Hillgruber proposed – because this would imply a duplication in historiography of their moral indifference towards its victims. The violence that the Nazis used to silence their victims would thus be reproduced by the historian.⁷⁵ The same explicit appeal to the normative principles involved is found in Habermas's contributions; according to him the Nolte–Hillgruber group accepts the German nation as the ultimate value while their critics give primacy to democracy. This normative primacy of democracy is the foundation of their critical attitude towards the undemocratic traditions in the German national past.⁷⁶

Within the framework of “internal realism” – in its amended form – this source of trouble can be faced in the open and be made comprehensible in three steps. The first step demonstrates the relativity of the “gap” between the domain of facts and values. The second step is revealing the multiplicity of the functions of language on the basis of general linguistics. The third and last step is introducing the notion of a “horizon of expectation” as a link between factual and normative discourse.

With regard to the first step all the arguments have already been brought forward. For the idea of an “absolute heterogeneity” of facts and values and the plea for a “value-free” science of history are ultimately founded on the presupposition that factual judgments can be founded in reality in contrast to value judgments and the related presupposition that language in science exclusively fulfills a representative function. Therefore facts and values were supposed to be separated by an unbridgeable abyss, with factual discussions decidable by rational means while debates regarding judgments are inherently irrational. All this is derived from “foundational” imagery. The same applies for the representation of factual discussions as leading to a consensus and the debates about values as the opposite of their factual counterparts. The possibility of a foundation of statements therefore was regarded as the ultimate basis of rationality. These presuppositions were shared by both objectivists and relativists.⁷⁷

From the point of view of “internal realism,” all the “foundational” ground for these dichotomies has disappeared. As one recognizes that



factual claims too cannot be founded in reality but can only be argued for, one loses all *a priori* “philosophical guarantees” – so desired even in the recent past – that argumentation will compel any rational audience so addressed to come to a rational consensus. After this presupposition is dropped the “unbridgeable gap” between factual and normative discourse changes from a solution into a problem that can be discussed in the open.⁷⁸ At the same time, the apparent fact that in historical discourse it may be very difficult to separate the factual from the normative controversies – as was so obvious in the *Historikerstreit* and in contemporary German history in general⁷⁹ – is rendered comprehensible.

Beyond objectivism and relativism, thus, there is no longer a self-evident “foundational” gap between facts and values; therefore this gap cannot be used as an argument to keep the normative dimensions of historiography out of discussion. If historians would take notice of “internal realism” in philosophy of history the temptation to disguise normative judgments as factual statements – as exemplified by Nolte’s and Hillgruber’s essays – might even disappear. This is to say that the supposedly “stronger” (foundational) character of the latter turns out to be illusory because *both* types of statements are in need of justification through argumentation. Nolte’s and Hillgruber’s critics seem to be aware of this fact since they overtly use normative arguments against their opponents. For instance, they argue that a German national perspective is undesirable given the disastrous historical record of the consequences of German nationalism for the other nations of Europe. Hillgruber’s proposal to rewrite the history of the Eastern front is rejected on this score. Another example is their rejection of “scientific” attempts like Nolte’s and Hillgruber’s to deny Germany’s responsibility for Auschwitz through a quasi-factual “Europeanization” of the German mass murders in contemporary history. Philosophy of history thus is capable of elucidating the connections between implicit philosophical presuppositions of historians – as the distinction of facts and values in this debate – and their delimitation of the scope of legitimate scientific discussion. In doing this it can contribute to the widening of this scope and thus to the heightening of the level of rationality.⁸⁰

The second argument for pushing the analysis of the problem of values beyond objectivism and relativism can be derived from modern linguistics. Connected with “internal realism” – as I proposed earlier – it may shed new light on the normative aspects of historiography.

Essential for this line of argument is the acknowledgment that language functions not only as a medium of representation of reality but also as a pragmatic medium of communication.⁸¹ All linguistic utterances can also be analyzed as “speech acts,” as Austin and Searle have shown: all use of language is a form of social interaction. Therefore, the use of language is not only the subject of syntactic and semantic analysis,



but also of linguistic pragmatics. All social interaction takes place in a context that presupposes a speaker – who performs the “speech act” – and a hearer. In history, the historians are the speakers, their texts a collection of speech acts, and their audiences the hearers. The main functions of speech acts are the bringing about of contacts and relationships, giving information, expressing emotions, evaluating, entering an engagement, and playing an esthetic role. Traditionally, philosophers of history have almost completely been preoccupied with the information function of historical language, because the agenda of critical philosophy of history was dictated by analytical philosophy of science with its focus on the formal structure of scientific explanations. Though since the demise of analytical philosophy of science in the 1960s philosophy of history has also rediscovered the evaluating and esthetic dimensions of historical discourse, the analysis of the normative functions of the language of the historian has remained somewhat rudimentary.⁸² This neglect is rooted in objectivism and relativism, since both presuppose that the normative function of language excludes the representative function as a consequence of the supposedly “unbridgeable gap” between judgments of fact and judgments of value. The normative dimension in historical discourse therefore was usually identified in historical discourse as “the problem of ethical neutrality.” The solution of this problem was essentially conceived along empiricist lines, that is the “emptying of the mind” of all factors disturbing the acquirement of true knowledge. This boils down to eliminating all Baconian *idola*, that is all ideological – evaluational – influences. Although most historians have their doubts as to whether this process can be completed, this is conceived as a practical and not as a fundamental problem. The normative functions of the language of the historian thus are conceptualized as a threat to the representative function.

This “repression” of the normative function of language has roots in empiricism with its strict separation of facts and values and its foundational paradigm of scientific knowledge. Paradoxically empiricism even still bedevils philosophies of history that explicitly aim to “overcome” empiricism – like Hayden White’s brand of narrativism – because the labeling of all forms of historiography as “ideological” is a simple inversion of empiricism on this score. The version of “internal realism” I advocate is capable of avoiding the sterile dilemma of “science versus ideology” because it recognizes that the language of the historian is capable of fulfilling both representative and normative functions *at the same time* (and that is exactly what is happening when one constructs an identity).⁸³ Because of its “holistic” character “internal realism” has no problems in acknowledging that the *same* statement can fulfill *different* functions at the *same time*.⁸⁴ Presumably descriptive statements, for instance, “Von Staufenberg was a real German officer,” “Adolf Hitler was an Austrian bastard,” or “The struggle at the Eastern Front was a



tragedy” can also be interpreted as normative statements.⁸⁵ Therefore the “fundamental difference” between judgments of fact and judgments of value can no longer be taken for granted and can no longer be used as an argument to narrow the scope of historical discussion. The “value-ladenness” and the “essentially contested character” of sociohistorical concepts⁸⁶ – aspects of historiography that have more often been observed than analyzed – can be elucidated in this way, avoiding the Scylla of “value-free” objectivism and the Charybdis of “ideological” relativism.

The third and last step in order to push the analysis of the problem of values in historiography beyond objectivism and relativism can be set by introducing the notion of “horizon of expectation” (*Erwartungshorizont*) in the analysis of historical debate.⁸⁷ This concept helps to clarify how different normative conceptions relate to different descriptions of historical reality because it can function as a bridge between the “domain assumptions”⁸⁸ of the historians and their audiences. These domain assumptions, that have their origins in social ontologies,⁸⁹ are shared with political ideologies; therefore it makes sense to talk about “liberal,” “conservative,” and “Marxist” traditions in historiography and to link historiographical controversies to the politico-ideological competition of “world views.”

To elucidate the “horizon of expectation” we first have to take a closer look at the ways in which historians argue their claims to knowledge in order to locate its effects. The argumentative process of historians is traditionally divided into the phase of factual research and the phase of interpretation and explanation. Facts are normally judged on the basis of inferential arguments relating to the relative measure of backing by the sources; interpretive and explanatory claims are normally judged on the basis of comparative arguments on the interpretive and explanatory capacity of central concepts.⁹⁰ Elimination of rival arguments is a basic strategy in this phase.⁹¹

As can be observed in a paradigmatic manner in debates like the *Historikerstreit* the arguments in both phases are not automatically “rationally compelling” and do not automatically lead to a consensus.⁹² No appeal to “the historical method” can hide this fact.⁹³ The notion of “horizon of expectation” helps to elucidate one aspect of this absence of consensus – and thus of pluralism – in historiography because it makes us aware that historians do not reconstruct the past *in vacuo*, but with particular audiences in mind; therefore the multiplicity of perspectives in historiography can also be elucidated from the consumer side of historiography – professional and lay. Thus, although all “scientific” historians are bound by the “reality rule,” they are *at the same time* bound by what can be labeled as the “audience rule.” The latter rule can help us to explain the ways in which the “narrative space” is used by historians: it helps to elucidate which of all possible true histories are also *accepted*



as such. This is no triviality since historians, just like natural scientists, are not after truth *per se* nor after the *whole* truth but only after the *relevant* truth.⁹⁴ Because the primary sources do not directly “dictate” the mode of reconstructing the past, they always offer a narrative space for several explanatory accounts (this remains the rational kernel of White’s *Metahistory*). Which of these accounts possess *a priori* plausibility varies not only with the cognitive expectations but also with the normative expectations of the audiences addressed. The latter characteristic is well documented in the history of historiography, especially in the “hot” controversies such the *Historikerstreit* or the “Fischer-controversy.”⁹⁵

The cognitive expectations pose a limit to the *kind* of factors which can be presented as causal agents – as, for instance, individual states of mind (cf. Nolte) versus supra-individual, collective factors (cf. Mommsen).⁹⁶ The normative expectations limit the *particular choice* of factors – for example individuals and collectivities – which can be selected as causal agents. This normative choice is, as Dray has shown, directly linked to the attribution of responsibility and blame.⁹⁷ In national histories, the nationality of the “heroes and villains” offers a concrete example (even when these national histories are dressed up as comparative, international histories). So it is by no means accidental that according to the conservative Nolte–Hillgruber group the Soviet dictator Stalin was ultimately responsible for the crimes of his German “twin brother” in politics, Adolf Hitler. This train of thought – including the idea that in 1941 Hitler launched the war in the East only to prevent the war Stalin planned for 1942 – was already well entrenched in conservative circles in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁹⁸ Nor is it accidental that their critics vehemently rejected this historiographical “export” of German historical responsibility since in the liberal and leftist circles of the Federal Republic the conviction was widely held that it was necessary for the Germans to “rework” *their* Nazi past (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*). Historians take these “horizons of expectation” into account because they vary widely and to an extent determine the reception of historical studies. That the two camps in the *Historikerstreit* published their contributions in publications of widely differing political complexions, and so addressed very different audiences, illustrates this fact. The main peculiarity of the *Historikerstreit*, in comparison with other historical debates, was only that these horizons of expectation were far more visible than usual.

5 Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that it is the task of philosophy of history to elucidate the practice of history; therefore philosophy of history must



stick to the analysis of the products and the debates of historians – including their presuppositions. It must elucidate the fact that historians present reconstructions of a past reality on the basis of factual research and discuss the adequacy of these reconstructions; at the same time it must elucidate the fact that these discussions seldom lead to a consensus and that therefore pluralism is a basic characteristic of history as a discipline.

An analysis of the *Historikerstreit* shows that traditional objectivism and relativism cannot account for the fact that historians do debate; it also reveals that a fuzzy distinction between judgments of fact and judgments of value plays a crucial role in this debate because judgments of value are supposed to fall outside the scope of rational debate. This distinction can be traced back to outdated presuppositions with regard to the rationality of science shared by objectivism and relativism. Internal realism goes beyond objectivism and relativism in historiography, though in order to transfer “internal realism” from the realm of the philosophy of natural science – where it was formulated by Hilary Putnam – to history, the notion of the practical interest of history was introduced. With the help of this notion and the implied notion of identity, the normative roots of pluralism in historiography can be brought to the surface. Second, an analysis of the fact–value distinction uncovers its roots in objectivism and relativism; it must therefore be re-analyzed within the frame of “internal realism.” This analysis, put to work in the *Historikerstreit*, shows the relativity of this distinction and the unsatisfactory character of the attempts to clarify the normative dimensions of history: the arguments for the expulsion of the normative discussion outside the domain of legitimate scientific debate are unfounded and outdated. Third, the theory of “speech acts” and the notion of “horizon of expectation” can be connected to “internal realism” in order to give a more adequate elucidation of the normative aspects of historiography. Fourth, historians can profit from “internal realism” because the scope of their discussion would be widened to include the traditionally implicit normative issues involved. Thus, although philosophers of history take the products and the debates of historians as points of departure and as the raw material to analyze, philosophy of history does not simply reproduce the convictions of historians about their trade.

This interpretation of the task of philosophy is necessary in my view to keep philosophy of history and history connected and to prevent a degeneration of philosophic analyses into “formalistic tumors which grow incessantly by feeding on their own juices.”⁹⁹ “Internal realism” in its amended form offers both historians and philosophers of history a “realistic” way to get beyond objectivism and relativism while avoiding the mistakes of narrativism, a move from the swamps of positivism to the quicksands of postmodernism. Historians themselves claim to represent the past and thus subscribe to the “reality-rule”; the mere fact that



the past is only known by us through a frame of description therefore does not entail the conclusion that the past *is* a description or can be regarded as such.¹⁰⁰

Notes

- 1 C. Meier, "Narrativität, Geschichte und die Sorgen des Historikers," in *Geschichte: Ereignis und Erzählung*, ed. R. Koselleck and W. Stempel (Munich, 1973), 571–85.
- 2 R. F. Atkinson, "Methodology: History and its Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Method and Point of View: Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. W. J. van der Dussen and L. Rubinoff (Leiden, 1991), 12–22.
- 3 L. Rubinoff, "W. Dray and the Critique of Historical Thinking," in Van der Dussen and Rubinoff, eds, *Objectivity*, 1–11; R. Martin, *The Past Within Us: An Empirical Approach to Philosophy of History* (Princeton, 1989), 3–16.
- 4 R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford, 1980); F. R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," *History and Theory* 28 (1989), 137–53 [ch. 9, this volume]; P. Zagorin, "Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsiderations," *History and Theory* 29 (1990), 263–74 [ch. 10, this volume]; F. R. Ankersmit, "Reply to Professor Zagorin," *History and Theory* 29 (1990), 275–96 [ch. 11, this volume]. For further literature on the relationship of history and postmodernism: "Herausforderungen durch die Postmoderne" in *Grundlagen und Methoden der Historiographieggeschichte*, ed. W. Küttler et al. (Frankfurt, 1993), 17–97; L. Stone, "History and Post-modernism," *Past and Present* 131 (1991), 217–18; P. Joyce and C. Kelly, "History and Post-modernism," *Past and Present* 133 (1991), 204–13; G. Spiegel, "History and Post-modernism," *Past and Present* 135 (1992), 189–208; J. Caplan, "Post-modernism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians," *Central European History* 22 (1989), 260–78.
- 5 For an example of the Collingwoodian train of thought see W. J. van der Dussen, *Filosofie van de geschiedenis: Een inleiding* [Philosophy of History: An Introduction] (Muiderberg, 1986), 144–79; for the problem of relativism see R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Oxford, 1983), 1–16.
- 6 For references see C. Lorenz, *De constructie van het verleden* [The Construction of the Past] (Meppel/Amsterdam, 1990), 255–82. For "internal realism" see H. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, 1981), 49.
- 7 The literature on this debate is immense. For overviews and analyses see R. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London, 1989) and C. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988). The original contributions to the debate are collected in "Historikerstreit." *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987), to be cited henceforth as *Historikerstreit*.
- 8 J. Habermas, "Eine Art Schadensabwicklung: Die apologetische Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung," in *Historikerstreit*, 62–77.



- 9 E. Nolte, "Zwischen Geschichtslegende und Revisionismus? Das Dritte Reich im Blickwinkel des Jahres 1980" and "Vergangenheit die nicht vergehen will," in *Historikerstreit*, 13–36 and 39–48. For his self-defense and commentary on the discussion see E. Nolte, *Das Vergehen der Vergangenheit: Antwort auf meine Kritiker im sogenannten Historikerstreit* (Berlin, 1987).
- 10 A. Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin, 1986).
- 11 Nolte, *Vergehen der Vergangenheit*, 13–68; A Hillgruber, "Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Heinz Janssen und die Aufklärung Anno 1986," in *Historikerstreit*, 331–52; I. Geiss, *Die Habermas-Kontroverse: Ein deutscher Striet* (Berlin, 1988).
- 12 H.-U. Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum Historikerstreit* (Munich, 1988), 16–17; Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 83–4; Evans, *Hitler's Shadow*, 175.
- 13 J. Fest, "Die geschuldete Erinnerung: Zur Kontroverse über die Unvergleichbarkeit der nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen," in *Historikerstreit*, 104–13; K. Hildebrand, "Das Zeitalter der Tyrannen," in *Historikerstreit*, 91.
- 14 H. Mommsen, "Suche nach der 'verlorenen Geschichte'? Bemerkungen zum historischen Selbstverständnis der Bundesrepublik" and "Neues Geschichtsbewusstsein und Relativierung des Nationalsozialismus," in *Historikerstreit*, 156–74 and 174–89; M. Broszat, "Wo sich die Geister scheiden: Die Beschwörung der Geschichte taugt nicht als Religionsersatz," in *Historikerstreit*, 189–96; H.-A. Winkler, "Auf ewig in Hitlers Schatten? Zum Streit über das Geschichtsbild der Deutschen," in *Historikerstreit*, 256–64; W. J. Mommsen, "Weder Leugnen noch Vergessen befreit von der Vergangenheit: Die Harmonisierung des Geschichtsbildes gefährdet die Freiheit," in *Historikerstreit*, 300–32.
- 15 Nolte, *Vergehen der Vergangenheit*, 57, 88–9; Nolte, "Geschichtslegende," 23; Nolte, "Vergangenheit," 41.
- 16 See D. W. Hamlyn, *The Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1970), 136–42 for the relationship between facts and truth, and especially 137: "It is true that a fact is what is stated by a true statement, but it does not follow from this that this is the same as the latter; nor would it be true to say that a fact is *just* what is stated by a true statement. This might suggest that facts do not exist until a statement is made that happens to be true, whereas it would appear that on the contrary there are countless facts that have never been stated and never will be."
- 17 This famous phrase was formulated by the late conservative CSU politician Franz-Joseph Strauss. For the political context of the debate see *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. D. Diner (Frankfurt am Main, 1987) and *Streit ums Geschichtsbild: Die "Historikerdebatte."* *Dokumentation, Darstellung und Kritik*, ed. R. Kühnl (Cologne, 1987), especially 200–92.
- 18 Nolte, "Vergangenheit," 45 and *Vergehen der Vergangenheit*, 91; Hillgruber, "Frageverbot," 232–8.
- 19 For a definition of traditional objectivism in history see P. Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), 1–2. For the philosophical presuppositions of objectivism see Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 8–9, 19.
- 20 Nolte, for instance, presents his thesis that Auschwitz constitutes a "reaction" and a "distorted copy" of the Bolshevistic murder of the Russian bourgeoisie as a pure "fact" ("Tatsache"); Nolte, "Revisionismus," 23 and *Vergehen der Vergangenheit*, 73.

- 21 Cf. Novick, *Noble Dream*, 3 and Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 18 on “the Cartesian anxiety.” William McNeill’s proposal to label all historiography “mythistory” – because nothing is absolutely certain in history – is an example of this procedure of inversion; see his *Mythistory and Other Essays* (Chicago, 1986), 6–7, 19.
- 22 Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 95–103.
- 23 This paradoxical problem is faced by all brands of narrativism – as developed by Hayden White or Frank Ankersmit – that regard the past as it is presented by the historian as a text without a referential relationship to a real past. For an excellent analysis and criticism of H. White’s *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973), and his later developments cf. W. Kansteiner, “Hayden White’s Critique of the Writing of History,” *History and Theory* 32 (1993), 273–96. Kansteiner, 286, also indicates that White’s position is inconsistent with regard to the problem of referentiality.
- 24 Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 10–16.
- 25 Cf. for skepticism in general: Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 23–53; for skepticism in history: *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, ed. D. Kelley (New Haven, 1991), 12–13, 264–7, 502.
- 26 Rex Martin also recently called for a return to epistemology in philosophy of history in “Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Towards a Post-analytic View,” *History and Theory* 32 (1993), 25–50.
- 27 Cf. W. Callebaut, “Post-positivistic Views on Scientific Explanation,” in *L’Explication en sciences sociales: la recherche des causes en démographie*, ed. J. Duchène and G. Wunsch (Brussels, 1989), 141–96; W. Salmon, *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation* (Minneapolis, 1989).
- 28 For the history of this debate see Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*.
- 29 The same holds for philosophy of social science. Cf. Bohman’s analysis of skepticism in postmodern anthropology in J. Bohman, *New Philosophy of Social Science: Problems of Indeterminacy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 103–39.
- 30 F. R. Ankersmit, “The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy or History,” *History and Theory*, Beiheft 25, *Knowing and Telling History: The Anglo-Saxon Debate* (1986), 27. A. Fell, “‘Epistemological’ and ‘Narrativist’ Philosophies of History,” in Van der Dussen and Rubinoff, eds, *Objectivity*, 82–3, criticizes Ankersmit on the same score.
- 31 In modern philosophy of science this position has been stated most radically and eloquently by P. K. Feyerabend in *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1975).
- 32 Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 49–50.
- 33 L. O. Mink, “On the Writing and Rewriting of History,” in Mink, *Historical Understanding*, ed. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann (Ithaca, NY, 1987), 94.
- 34 J. Leplin, “Introduction,” in *Scientific Realism*, ed. J. Leplin (Berkeley, 1984), 2; H. Radder, “Het probleem van het wetenschappelijk realisme,” in *Wetenschapsleer*, ed. M. Korthals (Meppel/Amsterdam, 1989), 72–3.
- 35 Cf. H. Putnam, “What is Realism?,” in Leplin, ed., *Scientific Realism*, 140: “[And] the typical realist argument against idealism is that it makes the success of science a miracle.”
- 36 I criticized Ankersmit’s “narrative idealism” and its idea of the self-referentiality of historical texts – as propounded in his *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian’s Language* (The Hague, 1983) – in “Het masker zonder gazing: F. R. Ankesmits filosofie van de geschiedschrijving,”



Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 97 (1984), 169–95. I deal with his later developments in my “Ankersmit en het postmoderne denken over de maatschappelijke functies van de geschiedenis,” in *Feiten en waarden: De constructie van een onderscheid*, ed. D. Pels et al. (Amsterdam, 1990), 139–48. Although Ankersmit dropped the term “narrative idealism” later in the 1980s, he has not changed his position regarding the issue of referentiality; cf. his *The Reality Effect in the Writing of History: The Dynamics of Historiographical Topology* (Amsterdam, 1989).

Similar criticism has been formulated by W. Walsh, “Fact and Value in History,” in *Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-western Perspectives*, ed. M. C. Doezer et al. (The Hague, 1986), 57: “If an historian writes ‘What followed was a veritable renaissance’ there is no observable state of affairs against which a contemporary could have checked the truth of the claim. By contrast ‘Jane Austen wrote Emma’ and ‘Napoleon died on St. Helena’ might conceivably be accepted on the testimony of eye-witnesses. But though this is an important difference, it does not follow that something like a renaissance exists only in the mind of the person who judges it to have occurred.”

For criticism of White on this score see for instance W. H. Dray’s review of White’s *The Content of the Form in History and Theory* 28 (1988), 284: “Are events rendered ‘imaginary’ (again White’s own term) by being brought under colligatory concepts?”

- 37 This is also the case with White and Ankersmit.
- 38 Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 49–50; cf. N. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, 1978), 17–20.
- 39 Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 72–3: “The trouble . . . is not that correspondences between words or concepts and other entities don’t exist, but that too many correspondences exist. To pick out just one correspondence between words or mental signs and mind-independent things we would already have to have referential access to mind-independent things.” Cf. Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 140: “[Thus] talk of facts and talk of correspondence with fact implies a form of realism, not in the sense that facts are identical with concrete states of affairs, but in the sense that a necessary condition of there being objective truth is that there should be an independently existing world. To say that a statement corresponds to the facts is to say that the statement conforms to whatever standard of objective truth is applicable.”
- 40 C. Ginzburg, “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 79–98. Ginzburg also criticizes the postmodernist position as “inverted positivism.” He proposes to regard historical sources as lenses instead of the false dilemma to regard them as transparent pieces of glass – as is the case in “positivism,” or as a blind wall – as is done in postmodernism.
- 41 Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 53–78, 132–45, especially 67: “the use of language presupposes the idea that linguistic expressions have meaning and that meaning cannot be fully elucidated by or reduced to use.”
- 42 Cf. B. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford, 1980), 13–19, for a recent and effective demolition of the idea of a “direct” observation in natural science.
- 43 According to realism – that is, an epistemological position – objects of human knowledge exist independently of knowing subjects. According to



materialism – that is, a metaphysical position – all reality consists of matter and therefore only material things exist.

- 44 Cf. K.-G. Faber, *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Munich, 1974), 24–5.
- 45 It is not without significance that Johan Huizinga, who is often cited as one of the intellectual fathers of narrativism, held a different opinion. In his essay on the “esthetical character” of historical narratives (1905) he explicitly referred to the danger of projecting images on the past because this would lead to “*pictures, that are untrue*” (my italics). Cf. J. Huizinga, “Het aesthetische bestanddeel van geschiedkundige voorstellingen,” in *Verzamelde Werken VII* (The Hague, 1950), 25.
- 46 Both Ankersmit and White hold that *singular* existential statements by historians do refer to the past and can be true or false while denying that this is the case with *conjunctions* of these statements, that is the level of historical interpretation or narrative. The same position was held by well-known relativists such as Becker and Beard. This distinction sets relativism apart from outright skepticism that denies the possibility of true knowledge in all forms.
- 47 White and Ankersmit both argue that because historical narratives do not represent the past reality *directly*, they do not refer to reality *at all*; therefore they are self-referential and can be analyzed as a purely linguistic universe in which the problem of truth has disappeared. This train of thought is the linguistic variant of the arguments used by Becker and Beard half a century ago. They too argued that because historical narratives – or “interpretations” – cannot be founded in historical reality, they cannot be “objective” and therefore are “imagined,” based on “an act of faith” and strictly “personal.” Then as now arbitrariness and indifference to the problem of truth is presented as the only alternative for a rock-bottom epistemological foundation and a universal cognitive consensus. Cf. C. Becker, “What Are Historical Facts,” in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, ed. H. Meyerhoff (New York, 1959), 132: “Thus into the imagined facts and their meaning enters a personal equation. The history of any event is never the same thing to two different persons,” and C. Beard, “Written History as an Act of Faith,” in Meyerhoff, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, 148–9: “His faith is at the bottom a conviction about the movement of history and his conviction is a subjective decision, not a purely objective discovery.” Both relativistic and narrativistic arguments reflect the Cartesian train of thought that everything that does not exist objectively in an external world must be interpreted as a subjective creation of the human mind. Cf. Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 342. The fundamental distinction between facts (external) and values (internal) also stems from this “Cartesian Anxiety” (Bernstein).
- For a fundamental analysis and criticism of narrativism in philosophy of history and its links to literary criticism see J. Zammito, “Are We Being Theoretical Yet? The New Historicism, the New Philosophy of History and ‘Practicing Historians,’” *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993), 783–814. Also illuminating is A. P. Norman, “Telling It Like It Was: Historical Narratives on Their Own Terms,” *History and Theory* 30 (1991), 119–35 [ch. 8, this volume].
- 48 Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 139: “It is possible to refer to a thing, without that thing being a concrete physical object (e.g. abstract entities, like justice); similarly for facts.”



- 49 Kansteiner, "Hayden White's Critique of the Writing of History," 286, convincingly shows that White is inconsistent on this score: "[Thus] the problem of representational transparency, shown out the front door, returns at the back."
- 50 Cf. I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems of Perspectives and Interpretation* (London, 1989), 1–42.
- 51 The Dutch historian L. de Jong could serve as an example – see his "Zelfkritiek," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen tot de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 105 (1990), 2, 179, 182–3 or the American historian William McNeill – see his *Mythistory* (note 21).
- 52 Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 2–3.
- 53 According to most commentaries Nolte and Hillgruber should be regarded as the losers of the "Historikerstreit": D. Peukert, "Wer gewann den Historikerstreit? Keine Bilanz," in *Vernunft riskieren: Klaus Dohanyi zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. P. Glotz et al. (Hamburg, 1988), 38–50; I. Kershaw, "Neue deutsche Unruhe? Der Ausland und der Streit um die deutsche National- und Zeitgeschichte," in *Streitfall Deutsche Geschichte*, ed. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung NRW (Düsseldorf, 1988), 111–31.
- 54 Hamlyn, *Theory of Knowledge*, 135–42, especially 135: "indeed, if one considers what could be the general necessary and sufficient condition of any statement being true, it will appear that the only thing that could be would be that the statement should correspond to fact."
- 55 Cf. Zammito, "Are We Being Theoretical Yet?," 812: "Veridicality and coherence are indispensable to the practice of history, but the standards of appraisal are disciplinary, not abstract."
- 56 H. White, "The Fact of Modernism: The Fading of the Historical Event" (1993 ms.). For White's development and inconsistencies see Kansteiner, "Hayden White's Critique."
- 57 White, "Fact of Modernism," 8.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 23. This line of reasoning is even more remarkable because it is inconsistent. While denying that there is reliable knowledge about the (recent) past – cf. JFK and the Holocaust – White presents a full-blown characterization of just this (recent) past: while undermining the notion of fact he tries to convince his readers of a fact, his "fact of modernism." One can't have one's cake and eat it too.
- 59 F. R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," *History and Theory* 28 (1989), 137–53 [ch. 9, this volume]. Remarkably enough Ankersmit presents Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York, 1982) as a prime example of postmodern historiography, while Ginzburg himself is clearly hostile to this interpretation. See his "Checking the Evidence."
- 60 F. R. Ankersmit, *The Reality Effect in the Writing of History: The Dynamics of Historiographical Topology* (Amsterdam, 1989), 8. It is paradoxical that Ankersmit recently has left his "textual trail" and has presented an analysis of "the historical experience" – independent of its linguistic expressions. See his *De historische ervaring* [The Historical Experience] (Groningen, 1993). Now that White is philosophizing about *the* historical event and Ankersmit about *the* historical experience one wonders where narrativism will bring us next.
- 61 Although the concept of history is ontologically neutral – since there is, for instance, a history of the earth and a history of extinct animal species

alongside human history – I reserve this concept in this context for the history of humans.

- 62 E. Angehrn, *Geschichte und Identität* (Berlin, 1985); J. Rüsen, *Historische Vernunft: Grundzüge einer Historik I: Die Grundlagen der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1983); H. Nagl-Docekal, *Die Objektivität der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Munich, 1982); J. Habermas, “Geschichtsbewusstsein und post-traditionelle Identität,” in *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung* (Frankfurt, 1987), 159–80. For a summary of Habermas’s theory see Bohman, *New Philosophy of Social Science, passim*; for a summary of Rüsen’s theory cf. A. Megill, “Jörn Rüsen’s Theory of Historiography between Modernism and Rhetoric of Inquiry,” *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 39–61.
- 63 For references cf. R. Vierhaus, “Rankes Begriff der historischen Objektivität,” in *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit*, ed. R. Koselleck et al. (Munich, 1977), 63–77.
- 64 This problem cannot be dealt with here in all its aspects; for a further treatment see W. Schluchter, *Wertfreiheit und Verantwortungsethik* (Tübingen, 1971).
- 65 For recent analyses of this old problem cf. J. Scott, “History in Crisis? The Other Side in History,” *American Historical Review* 94 (1989), 680–92, and A. Megill, “Fragmentation and the Future of Historiography,” in *American Historical Review* 96 (1991), 693–8.
- 66 The “holistic” and “practical” aspects of historiography are also stressed by Allan Megill, “Recounting the Past: Description, Explanation and Narrative in Historiography,” *American Historical Review* 94 (1989), 3, 627–54, especially 647: “Finally, the historian interprets the past – that is, necessarily, views the past from some present perspective. The perspective permeates all that the historian writes.” He also stresses the normative aspect connected with the choice of perspective: “Since the historical account is necessarily written from a present perspective, it is always concerned with the meaning of historical reality for us, now – even if, on an explicit level, it seeks to deny that it has any such concern. To the extent that the concern with present meaning is dominant, the historian becomes not simply a historian but a social or intellectual critic as well” (647).
- The same points are made by T. Ashplant and A. Wilson in “Present-centred History and the Problem of Historical Knowledge,” *Historical Journal* 31 (1988), 2, 253–74.
- 67 Cf. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1984) and B. Rundle, *Facts* (London, 1993), 82–3: “The root of the problem is not a gulf between fact and value; rather, the difficulties divide between the factual and the conceptual: it is often practically impossible to reconcile conflicting interests. . . .” For an apt formulation of the relationship between theory and observation see Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 97: “Facts are small theories and true theories are big facts.”
- 68 Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, 20–5.
- 69 Since the *Wehrmacht* actually defined Nazi-Germany *in practice* by physically eliminating its opponents Hillgruber’s stance implies a total indifference to its victims.
- 70 Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, 20–1.
- 71 Nolte, *Vergehen der Vergangenheit*, 25, 137. Nolte, However, misinterprets his critics. They did not object to the use of right-wing propaganda in order to document the Nazi-state of mind – *in casu* their fear of Bolshevism



- but to the uncritical identification by Nolte of this propaganda with historical reality and the elevation of this presumed historical reality to *the* cause of the Nazi mass murders. For a devastating critique of Nolte's use of these sources see Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit?*, 147–54 and Evans, *Hitler's Shadow*, 84–5.
- 72 Nolte thus ignores the fundamental fact that when a historian *describes* the actions of an individual or collective as *its* or *their* actions, he or she at the same time *ascribes* moral responsibility and constructs an identity. This identity is not only constituted by intentional actions, but also by unintended consequences of action. The way the intentions are reconstructed and the way unintended consequences are ascribed depends both on descriptive and normative considerations; therefore identity is both a factual and a normative notion at the same time. For this important characteristic of historiography cf. Angehrn, *Geschichte und Identität*, especially 60–2.
- 73 Cf. Kelley, *Versions of History*, 5–7.
- 74 This stems from the fact, as Rüsen and Angehrn have showed, that the concept of identity is normative and factual at the same time; see also Lorenz, *De constructie*, 255–62. Ann Rigney has also stressed the interweaving of the “factual” and normative discourses in the representation of history: A. Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990) and her review of Lionel Gossman's *Between History and Literature* in *History and Theory* 31 (1992), 208–22.
- 75 As is stated in Diner's and Friedländer's contributions to *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zur Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. D. Diner (Frankfurt, 1987). Cf. Friedländer's discussion with Martin Broszat: M. Broszat and S. Friedländer, “Um die ‘Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus.’ Eine Briefwechsel,” *Vierteljahrshefte zur Zeitgeschichte* 36 (1988), 339–73.
- 76 Habermas, “Geschichtsbewusstsein und post-traditionelle Identität,” 159–80.
- 77 Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 341–2, 363–4; Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 143; Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 139–40.
- 78 Bundle, “Facts and Values,” in *Facts*, 55–85; D. Pels, “De ‘natuurlijke saamhorigheid’ van feiten en waarden,” in Pels and De Vries, *Feiten en waarden*, 14–44; M. Doeser, “Can the Dichotomy of Facts and Values Be Maintained?,” in Doeser et al., eds, *Facts and Values*, 1–19; J. Mooij, “Feiten en waarden,” in *De wereld der waarden* [The World of Values] (Amsterdam, 1987), 28–45; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1–36; Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 341–2, 363–4; Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 143; Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 139–40.
- 79 I have analyzed this interweaving of political and factual discourse in German historiography recently in “De *Sonderweg* in de Duitse historiografie: Posities, problemen en discussies,” [“The *Sonderweg* in German Historiography: Positions, Problems and Discussions”] in *Geschiedschrijving in de twintigste eeuw*, ed. H. Beliën and G.-J. van Setten (Amsterdam, 1991), 141–81.
- 80 This is also the aim of Rüsen's project; cf. his *Historische Vernunft*.
- 81 S. Dik and J. Kooij, *Algemene Taalwetenschap* [General Linguistics] (Utrecht, 1991), 20–39.
- 82 For an overview of the demise of analytical philosophy of science see Salmon, *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation*. For an overview of the

- demise of analytical philosophy of history see F. R. Ankersmit, *De navel van de geschiedenis: Over interpretatie, representatie en historische realiteit* [The Navel of History: On Interpretation, Representation and Historical Reality] (Groningen, 1990), 23–43.
- 83 Rösen, *Historische Vernunft*, 78: “Identität, die im Erzählen von Geschichten zur Sprache kommt, ist kein fixer Tatbestand. Wer man ist, hängt auch davon ab, was andere einen sein lassen and was man im Verhältnis zu den anderen selber sein will.”
- 84 Mooij, “Feiten en waarden,” 28–44.
- 85 Cf. Bundle, *Facts*, 66–7.
- 86 W. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 1955–1956* (London, 1957), 167–98.
- 87 For further analysis of this notion see M. Thompson, “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” in *History and Theory* 32 (1993), 248–73.
- 88 See A. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (London, 1970), 30–1.
- 89 S. James, *The Content of Social Explanation* (Cambridge, 1984). Involved are, for instance, different concepts of social causation.
- 90 In this phase it is useful to distinguish between a problem-oriented type of history (*histoire problème*), which seeks explanations for specific and explicitly stated hypotheses, and an interpretive type of history, which seeks to present global and descriptive interpretations (*histoire totale*). In the former type the elimination of rival explanations is the basic strategy, in the latter type the demonstration that certain concepts possess the capacity to integrate disparate facts into a meaningful whole. In already densely populated niches of historiography this is usually done by elimination of rivals. On the use of evidence by historians see P. Kosso, “Historical Evidence and Epistemic Justification: Thucydides as a Case Study,” *History and Theory* 32 (1993), 1–14.
- 91 Cf. Martin, *The Past Within Us*, 30–85.
- 92 Although factual arguments are judged by other historians on the basis of the criterion of consistency – consistency with the information adduced from and supported by the sources – this criterion does not in itself guarantee a consensus. This lack of consensus has two roots at the level of the sources: not only is it possible for different historians investigating the “same” object – like the Third Reich or the Holocaust – to use different sources but it is also possible for different historians to interpret the same sources differently – as was the case with Nolte’s right-wing pamphlets.
- 93 For analyses and the history of the conception of “historical method” see *Historische Methode*, ed. C. Meier and J. Rösen (Munich, 1988), especially the contributions of J. Rösen, J. Topolski, and J. Meran.
- 94 Cf. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 18.
- 95 For the “Fischer-controversy” cf. A. Sywottek, “Die Fischer-Kontroverse: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung des politisch-historischen Bewusstseins in der Bundesrepublik,” in *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. I. Geiss and B. J. Wendt (Düsseldorf, 1974), 19–46.
- 96 Of course the descriptive and the explanatory level are conceptually intertwined, but nevertheless it is useful to make an analytical separation because the answer to the “what”-question does not determine the answer to the “why”-question; cf. R. Martin, “On Dray’s ‘Conflicting Interpretations,’”



in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. G. Shapiro et al. (Amherst, 1984), 262: “the characterization of the event to be explained suggests the level, and sets constraints, for what is going to count as the explanation.” For the philosophical arguments cf. James, *Social Explanation, passim*; for the historical arguments see for instance the discussion about Hitler’s role in German history: M. Broszat, *Nach Hitler: Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer geschichte* (Munich, 1988), especially 11–33, 119–31 and 227–34; H. Mommsen, *Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft* (Hamburg, 1991), especially 67–102 and 184–233. For a discussion about the explanatory role of the individual in history see C. Lorenz et al., *Het historisch atelier: Controversen over causaliteit en contingentie in de geschiedenis* [The workshop of the historian: Controversies on causality and contingency in history] (Amsterdam/Meppel, 1990).

- 97 W. H. Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1964), 21–41. Cf. L. Pompa, “Value and History,” in van der Dussen and Rubinoff, eds, *Objectivity*, 112–32 for further references and discussion.
- 98 Cf. Evans, *Hitler’s Shadow*, 138: “How people regard the Third Reich and its crimes provides an important key to how they would use political power in the present and in the future. That is why the neoconservatives’ reinterpretation of the German past is so disturbing. For many if not most of the arguments are derived, consciously or unconsciously, from the propaganda of the Nazis themselves”; Maier, *Unmasterable Past*, 64: “The Nolte-Fest position has given academic credentials to what hitherto was the underground discourse of the *Soldatenzeitung* or SS-reunions.”
For a recent overview see A. Lüdtke, “‘Coming to Terms with the Past’: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993), 542–72.
- 99 Feyerabend used this phrase to characterize the development of philosophy of science; see P. Feyerabend, “Philosophy of Science: A Subject with a Great Past,” in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. R. Stuewer (Minneapolis, 1970), V, 183.
- 100 Compare Zammito’s critique of the “pan-textualism” and the “intra-textual narcissism” of the “new” philosophy of history and its dissolution of all referentiality of historical narratives in “Are We Being Theoretical Yet?”