I

The Humanities
and the Sciences
Introduction: Objectivity versus Justice

For over a century, the relationships between the humanities and the sciences have been largely defined by opposition: Geistes- versus Naturwissenschaften, ideographic versus nomothetic, interpretative versus explanatory, past- versus future-oriented. These oppositions were hammered out in the Festreden of Dilthey, Windelband, Helmholtz, and other leading lights of bellwether German universities and reflected the rising prestige and power of the natural sciences in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Since then, the history and philosophy of science in most European traditions has been dominated by inquiries into the natural sciences: a comparable history of the humanities is just beginning to be written, and there is as yet no epistemology of the humanities. Yet the histories of the humanities and the sciences have been intertwined since at least the sixteenth century, at multiple levels: methods, institutions, ideas, and also epistemic virtues. Objectivity is one of those shared epistemic virtues. It emerged in both the humanities and the sciences in the nineteenth century. But in at least some of the humanities, it was preceded by a more ancient epistemic virtue: impartiality.

I shall begin with Nietzsche, who put the point of this paper into one lapidary sentence: ‘Objektivität und Gerechtigkeit haben nichts miteinander zu tun.’ Impartiality is an ancient, judicial value; objectivity is a quite modern scientific value. Nietzsche admired the severity of the just man, who must elevate himself above those who would be judged, but he sneered at the pretensions of the objective historian, ‘der, den ein Moment der Vergangenheit gar nichts angehe [...] das nennt man wohl auch “Objektivität!”’ I call Nietzsche as my star witness because he was at once a sterling product and bitter critic of the new institutions of scholarly teaching and research that forged new epistemic virtues like objectivity in the humanities.
In our own time, the words ‘impartial’ and ‘objective’ are used almost as synonyms, especially by historians. My aim here is to show that these virtues so dear to historians themselves have histories, which are distinct and not always harmonious. During the nineteenth century, when history became a self-consciously ‘objective’ science, especially in Germanophone Europe, the tensions between impartiality and objectivity became acute, as Nietzsche realized. In order to throw the differences between the aims of impartiality and objectivity in history into relief, I shall begin with a sketch of how impartiality was preached and practiced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians, especially in the increasingly volatile context of national histories. I then turn to objectivity, arguing that it resided primarily in certain techniques applied to, as well as attitudes toward, the subject matter of history. Both techniques and attitudes come clearly to the fore in the protracted controversy waged among classical philologists and ancient historians over the speeches in Thucydides: did he betray his own methodological principles in reconstructing them so freely? In conclusion, I pose the Nietzschean question as to how the ascetic religion of objectivity took hold of historians in the nineteenth century.

Impartiality

For the literate eighteenth-century public, the chief utility of history consisted in its true narrations of lives and events presented as guides both moral and practical for readers. On this rhetorical, humanist model, history schooled both judgment and character by exempla. The more ambitious forms of philosophical history also sought out universal generalizations, especially in the realms of politics and human nature. The impartiality of this brand of history was often literally meant: not taking the part of any of the parties whose words and deeds were chronicled in the history. Tacitus’s motto was often cited: Sine ira et studio (without anger or zeal). Impartiality by no means implied value neutrality on the part of the historian. On the contrary, the aim of historical impartiality was to reach sound conclusions about moral matters as they were played out in the wars and political conflicts of the past, much as the aim of judicial impartiality was to reach a just verdict in legal matters as presented in criminal and civil cases. Adam Smith went so far as to make impartiality the basis of all morality: ‘We endeavor to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it.’ It is in eighteenth-century writings on history and morals that the metaphor of impartiality as perspectival suppleness becomes entrenched: Adam Smith’s ethics of impartiality demands that we ‘change our position.’
There was nothing necessarily relativist about these perspectival metaphors of impartiality. So, for example, Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788) offered a studiously even-handed portrayal of the mores and character of the German barbarians, and much of the liveliness of his descriptions stems from his attempts to see the world from the perspective of the Goths and the Vandals, going far beyond the observations provided by Tacitus:

> The languid soul, oppressed with its own weight, anxiously required some new and powerful sensation; and war and danger were the only amusements adequate to its fierce temper. The sound that roused the German to arms was grateful to his ear. It roused him from his uncomfortable lethargy, gave him an active pursuit, and, by strong exercise of the body, and violent emotions of the mind, restored him to a more lively sense of his existence.

But Gibbon’s empathic ability to imagine the states of soul of a German warrior by no means implied sympathy, nor did it curb the enlightened historian’s judgment on the state of German civilization – or rather, lack thereof:

> The Germans, in the age of Tacitus, were unacquainted with the use of letters; and the use of letters is the principle circumstance that distinguishes a civilized people from a herd of savages, incapable of knowledge or reflection. [...] They passed their lives in a state of ignorance and poverty, which it has pleased some declaimers to dignify with the appellation of virtuous simplicity.

I have chosen a passage on the Germans advisedly. The most fiery nineteenth-century disputes about historical impartiality involved French and German historians who accused one another of fighting today’s battles with ammunition from yesterday’s history, as often as not encounters between Germanic and Roman peoples in ancient and medieval times. Among the most ferocious of these confrontations was that between two eminent ancient historians, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges and Theodor Mommsen, over the nationality of the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. Mommsen, in two letters addressed to a Milanese newspaper in July-August 1870, had argued on the basis of language and race that the Alsatians were of German nationality. In October 1870 Fustel replied indignantly:

> Mais je m’étonne qu’un historien comme vous affecte d’ignorer que ce n’est ni la race ni la langue qui fait la nationalité [...]. La patrie, c’est ce qu’on aime. Il se peut que l’Alsace soit allemande par la race et par le langage; mais par la nationalité et le sentiment de la patrie elle est française.
Fustel accused Mommsen and the Prussian army of imposing nationality by conquest. \(^9\) This was a head-to-head collision over a matter that inflamed nationalist passions on both sides of the Rhine, but hints of the polemic crept into more rarefied historical works on topics apparently quite remote from the Franco-Prussian War. In an 1877 note on whether German law in the fifth century AD permitted a partition of land between Romans and barbarians, Fustel’s philological analysis was meticulous, and his conclusion (that the Burgundians had by no means ceded their territories to the invading Germans) hedged with scientific caution. But a remark fraught with relevance for Europe in 1872, rather than 472, crept into the final paragraph: ‘C’était un système bien commode de dire que les Germains étaient venus en vainqueurs, qu’ils avaient confisqué le sol des vaincus et qu’ils l’avaient partagé au sort. On ne peut plus se contenter de ces généralités vagues et fausses.’\(^10\) And in an 1872 review of a book on the origins of the Germanic empire,\(^11\) after upbraiding German historians for their patriotism and French historians for their slavish Germanophilia, Fustel noted with satisfaction that the book under review showed that ‘la Germanie, en tant que nation civilisée, est l’œuvre de Rome et de Gaule [...] le progrès intellectuel, social, moral, ne s’est pas opéré dans la race germanique par un développement interne, et ne fut jamais le fruit d’un travail indigène.’\(^12\)

Fustel was, of course, aware that such sentiments accorded ill with the vaunted impartiality of history, and yearned for ‘ce charme d’impartialité parfaite qui est la chasteté de l’histoire.’ But in the very next breath he made it clear that impartial history, ‘chaste history’, was in his view ‘cette vraie science française d’autrefois, cette érudition si calme, si simple, si haute de nos bénédictins, de notre Académie des Inscriptions.’ And in any case, whatever one thought of the impartiality of the Benedictine historians, those pure, tranquil times were gone forever. In a bellicose age like his own, even science and learning must don sword and shield. Besides, he could not resist adding, the German historians had begun the mischief by writing in the sign of the Vaterland. For them the science of history (and Fustel was as adamant as his German colleagues in his insistence that it was a science) was not an end in itself but a mean toward promoting national interests.

Fustel was not so wide of the mark when he indicted German historians like Wilhelm von Giesebrecht for strident patriotism in their works.\(^13\) Once the nation-state became the protagonist of historical narratives, portrayal of the past in the service of present nationalist interests became a constant temptation. The temptation was not irresistible: Leopold von Ranke, for example, had conceived of his Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker (1824) in terms of ‘sechs grosse Nationen,’ the French, Spanish, Italian, German, English, and Scandinavian. But he insisted upon their essential unity (despite the fact that they were constantly at war with one another during the period in question, 1494-
Objectivity and Impartiality

1514), and let each nation in turn command center stage in his narrative so long as, in the famous phrase, ‘zuweilen die Hand Gottes über ihnen.’ However, the next generation of German historians, although they unanimously embraced the new methods with which the names of Niebuhr and Ranke were narrowly associated, included figures such as Heinrich von Sybel and Georg Gervinus, who explicitly rejected Ranke’s doctrine of impartiality. At his public defense of his doctoral dissertation at the Universität Berlin in 1838, Sybel made ‘Cum ira et studio’ his motto, and he later criticized his teacher Ranke’s studied neutrality as cold, colorless, and perhaps even cowardly. Gervinus in his history of German literature also exhorted the science of history to take hold of life with both hands, and saw Machiavelli’s greatness as a historian precisely in his political engagement — a position that Ranke criticized as unscientific; Gervinus for his part contended that Ranke’s much vaunted impartiality was simply a sign of political impotence. Friedrich Nietzsche and Heinrich von Treitschke had still stronger words for what they regarded as the self-imposed eunuchry of the Rankean school in matters of impartiality. Yet with the notable exception of Nietzsche, to whom I shall return, all of them, even the political firebrand Treitschke, believed that historical objectivity was essential, one of the glorious achievements of nineteenth-century historiography. This is a position that has bewildered and exasperated their successors. In the next section I shall try to explain how it was conceivable for these historians to embrace objectivity even as they jettisoned impartiality.

Objectivity

It would be highly misleading to claim that nineteenth-century historians agreed about the meaning of impartiality or objectivity, much less about the relationships between the two. Just because these words as well as the ideals and practices they represented were so central to the historian’s ethos, and therefore so unavoidable in polemics, they admitted of much stretching and shading. I cannot possibly do justice to the spectrum of positions here. Instead, I want to concentrate on core meanings of objectivity that were widely accepted among nineteenth-century historians, however, sharply they may have diverged on more penumbral elements. At the core of this core meaning were the practices of the new-style scientific historian. Although not all — perhaps even none — of these methods was entirely new to Ranke and his students (Fustel thought they’d all been invented by the Benedictines and Mabillon long before), they were nonetheless perceived by most nineteenth-century historians as having finally established their discipline on a firm scientific foundation. On the fringes, as it were, of the core sense of objectivity was the vaguer but nonetheless strongly felt value of scientific restraint, which
judged precisely how far the evidence at hand could be pushed and refrained from pushing it one whit further.

Gustav Droysen’s position as outlined in his influential Grundriss der Historik (1867) is particularly instructive in this context, because he defended historical objectivity while rejecting, on the one hand, historical positivism à la Henry Herbert Buckle (who sought deterministic laws of history based on statistical data) and, on the other hand, historical romance à la Macaulay and Michelet. Droysen dismissed the cult of ‘reine Tatsachen’ as superstition, the pursuit of deterministic laws in history as wrongheaded, and the faith that history can arrive at unmediated truths about the past as criminally naive. It was the great achievement of ‘historische Kritik’ since Niebuhr to have shown that historians can only glimpse the past through a glass darkly, through fragmentary sources, every one of which had been stamped with its own partial and partisan perspective. Decoding these perspectives was the essence of Quellenkritik, as Droysen explained it: first, to determine what the sources were about; second, to ascertain with what general ‘coloring’ they had been impregnated by the reigning conceptions of the time and place; and third, to discern the more individual ‘coloring’ added by the individual who had written the source. Quellenkritik was the systematic practice of identification, contextualization, and criticism. Nothing about a source was self-evident; it must be read warily, from all angles, against the grain. Anyone who expected historical facts to speak for themselves, or regarded sources as transparent windows upon the past was ipso facto branded a rank amateur – and dangerously subjective to boot, since meaning could then only be projected onto the opaque sources. Even with the aid of Quellenkritik the risks of subjectivism were great, and Droysen recommended further rules to rescue historical interpretation from flights of the imagination.18

In the techniques of historical criticism lay the source of historical objectivity. Just as mechanical objectivity in the natural sciences fetishized rigid procedures and protocols, objectivity in history required disciplined respect for methods. The ‘objective’ truth of the past was forever unattainable, but the methods of the historian – and above all the historian’s awareness of the limitations of these methods – qualified scientific history as nonetheless objective. In contrast to art, which must present its subject matter as a smooth, harmonious whole, the empirical sciences, including history, ‘haben keine strengere Pflicht, als die Lücken festzustellen, die in den Objekten ihrer Empirie bedingt sind, die Fehler zu kontrollieren, die sich aus ihrer Technik ergeben, die Trageweite der Methoden zu untersuchen’.

The objective historian must not give in to the temptation to generalize prematurely or to edify or entertain at the expense of the hard-won facts that had been dug out of the archives and purified by Quellenkritik. Of course, there was
no objection to a fine style per se, but Droysen frowned on the perfervid prose of Michelet, who poured his own subjectivity into the past. But such ‘subjektive Auf-fassen’ had to be straitened by ‘objektive Maße und Kontrollen’. Ranke, whose legendary seminar was the cradle of all these ‘objective measures and controls’ among the historians, renounced any intention of writing vivid, edifying history: that is the context of his famous declaration that all he wanted to do was ‘bloß zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen’ – even at the price of a narrative that was ‘oft hart, abgebrochen, ermüdend’.

If historical objectivity lay in the methods of historical criticism, it is more comprehensible how politically engaged historians like Sybel and Treitschke could simultaneously reject impartiality and affirm objectivity. Both categorically affirmed their allegiance to these methods: if they were not the whole of history, then they were its solid, scientific foundations. Sybel urged the historian to be political and artistic as well as scientific, but while the historian qua writer might give imagination free reign, the historian qua critical researcher had ‘die Pflicht, jede Einwirkung seiner subjektiven Stimmungen zurückzudrängen’. However much he might mock the eunuchs of impartiality for their refusal to put history at the service of life, Treitschke never doubted but that the exacting standards of research in original sources deserved to be called objective, and were the basis for all history worthy of the name. Ranke’s commitment to understand the past in its own terms required literal selflessness, an attempt ‘mein Selbst gleichsam auszulöschen’. The objective historians who had learned their handiwork in Ranke’s seminar struggled to overcome, not indulge, their own subjectivity. This severity came at the cost of losing the greater part of at least the German reading public, who, Droysen complained, unaccountably ‘wollte lesen, nicht studieren’.

**Thucydides at the bar**

For historians the patron saint of their discipline had always been Thucydides. It is therefore particularly instructive to observe how Thucydides himself was judged at the bar of objectivity by late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century classicists and historians. Two questions, both revolving around the celebrated *Methodensatz* in I.22 of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, introduced the discussion of historical objectivity into scholarly work on Thucydides: first, to what extent was Thucydides himself consciously aspiring to the standards of objective history; and second, did he hold to these standards, especially in the matter of reporting speeches? The amount of learned ink spilt over the proper rendering of the *Methodensatz* in modern European languages since c. 1850 makes one chary of quoting any of the translations. Since, however, some general idea of what
Thucydides said is a precondition for understanding what all the scholarly fuss was about, I hesitantly offer the Loeb translation by Charles Foster Smith of I.22 as a reference point:

As to the speeches that were made by different men, either when they were about to begin the war or when they were already engaged therein, it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said. But as to the facts of the occurrences of the war, I have thought it my duty to give them, not as ascertained from any chance informant nor as seemed to me probable, but only after investigating with the greatest possible accuracy [akribeia] each detail, in the case both of the events in which I myself participated and of those regarding which I got my information from others. And the endeavor to ascertain these facts was a laborious task, because those who were eyewitnesses of the several events did not give the same reports about the same things, but reports varying according to their championship of one side or the other, or according to their recollection.

It should be kept in mind that the terminology of objectivity and subjectivity that came to be regularly applied to this passage were themselves still something of a novelty in the mid-nineteenth century, although they became quickly and widely entrenched thereafter. In Franz Wolfgang Ullrich’s pioneering work, Beiträge zur Erklärung des Thukydides (1846), which advanced the hypothesis that Thucydides had composed his history in two parts (breaking at V.25), the words ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’ hardly figure. Ullrich consistently rendered Thucydides’ own ‘akribeia’ as ‘genaue Sorgfalt’. However, in later works on how Thucydides had composed his work, and particularly those that treated the question of the authenticity of the speeches he reported, analyses of I.22 were peppered with the vocabulary of objectivity and subjectivity. Ranke’s ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen’ was arguably a deliberate echo of Thucydides I.22. The wholesale and, for the most part, unreflecting importation of these modern termini into the analysis of what exactly Thucydides might have meant in I.22 concerning the reporting of deeds and speeches is all the more striking against the background of the meticulous philological analysis of every single word and grammatical construction in the passage. Every semantic shade, every syntactic wrinkle is explored with the pow-
erful instruments of classical philology by scholars with a princess-and-the-pea sensibility for anachronisms and editorial interpolations. But the framework of objectivity and subjectivity, barely a century old in 1900, is taken over with hardly a murmur.

In these late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century works on Thucydides’ historical methods the answer to the first question – To what extent did Thucydides aspire to the standards of historical objectivity? – was usually answered in the affirmative, or simply assumed. So Max Pohlenz, writing in 1919, credits Thucydides with ‘die erstmalige Festlegung einer objektiven Richtschnur’ in the Methodensatz, in welcome contrast to Herodotus’s notorious liberties in reporting both deeds and speeches.28 August Grosskinsky, in his 1934 Heidelberg dissertation, agreed with this aspect of Pohlenz’s interpretation, if in nothing else: Thucydides opposes himself to the ‘subjektiven Willkür Herodots’, and at least in his reporting of deeds (erga) in the Peloponnesian War had striven toward ‘völlige Ausschaltung jeder Subjektivität’.29 Even classicists who sensed uneasily that Thucydides might not perhaps have subscribed to the modern creed of objectivity felt themselves trapped within its vocabulary. Harald Patzer, in his 1936 Berlin dissertation on what had come to be known as ‘die Thukydideische Frage’, complained that ‘die modernen Begriffe “frei” und “subjektiv”’ were responsible for many misunderstandings of Thucydides’ handling of the speeches, but he was unable to shake free of the accumulated weight of commentary formulated in terms of the opposition between the objectivity or subjectivity of the speeches.30

Indeed, one of the principal reasons why the second question – to what extent did Thucydides hold to the standards of historical objectivity, especially in his reporting of the speeches – was elevated to ‘die Thukydideische Frage’ was because the subjective/objective distinction had become ineluctable for historians by the turn of the twentieth century. There may have been murmurings already in antiquity about Thucydides having put words in the mouth of the speech makers,31 but his worth and integrity as a historian was rarely at stake. Nor were his methods objects of intense scrutiny by earlier scholars: I.22 seems to have become the Methodensatz only in the late nineteenth century. The preoccupation with the authenticity of the speeches and the objectivity of his methods – even the attribution to Thucydides of a methodology – mirrored the concerns of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century historians and philologists themselves. For my purposes, the answer to the question whether or not Thucydides did indeed invent the speeches and if so, how and to what end, is beside the point: my interest is in the sudden urgency of the question, and its entanglement with the relatively new historical value of objectivity, particularly the objectivity of methods. To put the matter very simply, probably too simply: the struggles of
the classicists to reconcile Thucydides’ towering reputation as an historian (and I have yet to find a single commentator who believed that his reputation was undeserved) with what they had come to regard as subjective’ practices shows the extent to which objectivity, as opposed to impartiality, dominated the ethos of historians.32

A new religion

The difficulties faced by these and other classical philologists in answering such questions mal posées – Did Thucydides try to be objective? Did he succeed? – arise from the mismatch between epistemic values that have different meanings and dictate different practices. Impartiality may not require exact quotations; truth may dispense with Quellenkritik. The mystery of objectivity is how it managed, in a relatively short time, to become so preeminent among the values of the historian that it swallowed up all others. Here once again, Nietzsche supplies a clue.

What Nietzsche detested most about historical objectivity was its air of pious self-deception. His charges of ‘superstition’ and ‘mythology’ echo the charges of Protestant reformers against popery, which were turned against religion in general by the Enlightenment philosophes. Nietzsche smelled in the cult of historical objectivity a false faith:

Was, es gäbe keine herrschende Mythologien mehr? Was, die Religionen wären im Aussterben? Seht euch nur die Religion der historischen Macht an, hebt acht auf die Priester der Ideen-Mythologie und ihre erschundene Knie! Sind nicht sogar alle Tugenden im Gefolge dieses neuen Glaubens? Oder ist es nicht Selbstlosigkeit, wenn der historische Mensch sich zum objektiven Spiegelglas ausblasen läßt?33

There remains the puzzle of how the new religion of historical objectivity, if religion it was, won so many converts, and in so short a timespan, since it promised the opposite of immortality. It is a truly Nietzschean problem, since the religion in question carried with it a distinct odor of asceticism, of clenched self-restraint in subordinating eloquence to method and method to the analysis of error. The acolytes of this new and decidedly uncomfortable religion of historical objectivity were almost all formed in the new-style research seminar initiated by the reformed German universities and imitated widely throughout the learned world by the end of the nineteenth century. It was the research seminar that in reality disciplined the disciplines. It was the prime mover behind the multiplication of
specialist societies and journals. In the seminars students learned that *Wissenschaftlichkeit* meant method, and method in turn meant the mastery of esoteric techniques through long, arduous application. Whether the technique in question was paleography learned at the Berlin philology seminar or error analysis learned at the Königsberg physics seminar, the craft knowledge imparted by close contact of professors with students resembled nothing so much as an apprenticeship with a master. The glittering noun *Wissenschaft* spanned associations from the character-firming to the culture-making, but the more sober adjective *wissenschaftlich* referred almost invariably to the painstaking, abstruse techniques – those very methodical ‘methods of research’ – that certified a piece of work, be it an experiment or an edition, as objective.

Diligence, attention to minute detail, devotion to technique, an ethos of responsibility and exactitude, and the habits of collective discussion united the seminar-trained physicist with the seminar-trained philologist. All had experienced the gradual transition from the repetition of the known (checking archival sources, producing a chemical reaction) to the unknown; all would have experienced ‘ein gegenseitiges Nehmen und Geben zwischen Lehrer und Schülern’, and all would have felt, as the philologist Hermann Diels put it, the ‘unsichtbare Fäden des Vertrauens zwischen den Teilnehmern eines solchen Thiasos’. Thiasos’ has several meanings in ancient Greek, ranging from a Bacchic revel to a troop of warriors, and no doubt Diels, virtuoso Hellenist that he was, played upon all of these shades of meaning in his evocation of the seminar. The center that holds together all the senses of ‘Thiasos’ is that of belonging to a group of initiates, especially a religious confraternity, and it was in this sense of belonging that one must seek the extraordinary power of the creed of historical objectivity. The new creed of historical objectivity was imbibed and realized in seminars like Ranke’s when he took up a chair at the University of Berlin, which met for decades in his own private study in his Giesebrecht apartment, day in, day out, making an exception only for Christmas Eve, when ‘the assistants ritually rebelled and stayed home with their families, much to Ranke’s dismay’.

**Conclusion: Intensely disinterested**

One of the most curious features of the history of scientific curiosity is how the most unbridled subjectivity has been transmuted into purest objectivity. Or to put it in other terms, intense interest in the objects of scientific research turns into disinterest in everything else. Disinterest in one’s nearest and dearest is only the most extreme form of a pinpoint focus of interest that excludes the rest of
the universe and concentrates all intellect, emotion, and energy like a powerful, pencil-thin laser beam on one spot. This indifference to 99.9% of the rest of the universe, both human and natural, is often equated with disinterestedness or even objectivity.

Distraction, absent-mindedness, and disinterest are the obverse of an interest of laserlike focus and intensity. It is disinterest only because it is eccentric: the sage, scholar, and scientist choose to neglect what interests the vast majority of other people in favor of their own enthralling preoccupations. Their tranquility and incorruptibility with respect to the worldly rewards of fame and fortune, to the homely comforts of being firmly situated in time and place, and even to the egoism of an individuated self does not stem from temptations met and stalwartly resisted – they do not struggle like St. Anthony in the desert against the familiar demons of human desire, because their desires have been deflected into other channels and their attention diverted to other objects. All economies of attention are profoundly moralized. To attend to one thing is ipso facto to neglect another. Moreover, attention not only signals value; it creates value in its favored objects, which draw their aficionados, amateurs, devotees – the etymologies of all these words highly suggestive – deeper and deeper into obsession.

Obsession is the least sociable of states. Only in the last hundred years or so have monomaniacal scientific pursuits been imagined in the context, rather than at the expense of a community. Collective research is a familiar feature of laboratory and field sciences, but ‘Big Science’ was pioneered by scholars in the humanities, especially in classical philology and history. It was the physicists and chemists who self-consciously imitated the seminar model of teaching advanced students in philology at Göttingen and Berlin in the early nineteenth century; it was the members Physikalish-Mathematische Klasse of the Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften who in the late nineteenth century envied their colleagues in the Philosophisch-Historische Klasse big, collective projects like Theodor Mommsen’s Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.

Despite their asocial (if not anti-social) associations, objectivity in both the natural and human sciences was instilled and cultivated in the small, face-to-face communities of the seminar, the research group, and the conference. The suppression of the self by the self that constitutes scientific objectivity was peculiarly well-suited to the rhetoric of self-sacrifice in the name of the community – but also to that of ascetic virtuosity that commands admiration and deference. As in the case of the early Christian saints, the asceticism of objectivity demanded an audience, as Nietzsche recognized all too well.
Notes


2 Ibid., 114.

3 For the definition of ‘epistemic virtues’ and an account of the development of objectivity in the natural sciences, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).


6 Ibid., 135.


8 The Prussian army had been mobilized on July 15, 1870; by August 6, 1870, Alsace was overrun by German forces. Theodor Mommsen published two letters to the Milanese newspaper *La Perseveranza* addressed to the Italian people, ‘La Guerra’ (10 August 1870) and ‘La Pace’ (20 August 1870); the status of Alsace-Lorraine is discussed in the second letter. See Lothar Wickert, *Theodor Mommsen. Eine Biographie*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1959-1980), vol. 4, 170-179.


17 Wolfgang J. Mommsen, for example, concludes that Sybel was a superficial thinker and Treitschke a divided soul: W.J. Mommsen, ‘Objektivität und Parteilichkeit’, 138, 146-147.

19 Ibid., 81, 84.

20 Ranke, Geschichten, vii-viii.

21 W.J. Mommsen, ‘Objektivität und Parteilichkeit’, 140, 156.


23 Droysen, Grundriss, 79.


25 Franz Wolfgang Ullrich, Beiträge zur Erklärung des Thukydiides (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1846), e.g., 128-130.


29 Grosskinsky, Programm, 35, 45.


31 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, On Thucydiides, ed. and trans. W. Kendrick Pritchett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), chs. 34-49, 26-49. However, Dionysius is overwhelmingly concerned with rhetorical style and diction in the speeches, not with their accuracy as verbatim records of what was actually said. He criticizes Thucydiides not for putting words in the mouths of speakers but for putting the wrong words in, for example, the text of the Athenian emissaries in the Melian dialogue: ‘Words like these were appropriate to oriental monarchs addressing Greeks, but unfit to be spoken by Athenians to the Greeks whom they liberated from the Medes, to wit, that justice is the normal conduct of equals to one another, but violence is [the law] of the strong against the weak’ (ch. 39, 31; cp. ch. 41, 33).

32 More recently, some Thucydiides specialists have expressed doubt as to whether ‘objectivity’ is an applicable category: see especially Jacqueline de Romilly, ‘Die Objektivität in der griechischen Geschichtsschreibung’, in Werner Becker and Kurt Hübner (eds.), Objektivität in den Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften (Hamburg: Hoffmann u. Campe, 1976), 41-51, on 46.
Objectivity and Impartiality

33 Nietzsche, ‘Vom Nutzen’, 127.