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David Stack

Objectivity and the historian: Beyond the fried egg test

Is objectivity bad for a historian? I am asking for a friend. Whereas once objectivity might have been considered the historian's superpower—an enviable ability to rise above the fray and see all sides of the mountain (more on this mountain later)—it now seems that it might be a malady. The postmodernists, of course, have long diagnosed objectivity as a self-serving delusion or sleight of hand with which we bolster ourselves and seduce our readers.[1] But could it be worse than that? In an age where employees are urged to 'Speak Your Truth', and the *Harvard Business Review* advises us to bring 'our whole, authentic self to work', is the suppression of self that objectivity might be thought to entail the reason why so many of my colleagues seem unhappy?[2] Are we engaged in a collective act of ascetic self-harm in which our individual perspectives are sacrificed in pursuit of a chimaera?

The trouble, if trouble it is, is usually traced to Leopold von Ranke, the so-called 'father' of modern historical scholarship.[3] The ambition he set in the preface to his *History of the Latin and Teutonic Peoples* (1824), to empirically establish 'as things really were' ('wie es eigentlich gewesen'), through a wide-ranging examination of primary source materials, has provided the profession with its enduring rationale. On one hand, it was a claim of demurring modesty: Ranke was not interested in 'judging the past', and he eschewed the 18th-century ambition—epitomised in Voltaire—of learning 'lessons' from history.[4] On the other, it was a vaulting ambition, which demanded historians 'extinguish' their own personality in order to 'immerse themselves in the epoch and assess it in a manner appropriate for that time'.[5]

It is tempting to say that the objective of being objective haunted historians thereafter, but it is more accurate to say that an aspiration for, and a sense of justification in, the notion of objectivity was imbibed and internalised but less frequently theorised by the profession. It was no doubt comforting to think of one's trade as an empirical science (the translation of Ranke's *Wissenschaft* did a lot of heavy lifting in the Anglophone world), and most historians assumed that they were, or ought to be, objective, but it would be a mistake to assume that

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historians ever held to a clear, consistent view of what that actually meant.[6] The major theme of Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (1988) was the fragility of the profession's foundational conviction.[7] The 'noble dream' in his title derived from a 1935 Charles Beard jeremiad that concluded: 'The formula of Ranke and its extension as Historicism do not and have never formed the official creed of the [American Historical] Association'.[8] Four years earlier, in 1931, Carl L. Becker had summed up what he saw as the ineradicable relativism of historical knowledge in his AHA Presidential Address, 'Every Man His Own Historian'.[9]

In general, historians tended to agree on the importance of an objective understanding of the past but, as the distance between E. H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961) and Geoffrey Elton's *The Practice of History* (1967) shows, not always on the best way to achieve it. For postmodernist critics like Keith Jenkins, however—whose edited collection, *The Postmodern History Reader* (1997), did much to promote an understanding of postmodernism within the British historical profession—the differences between Carr (who was open to a degree of relativism) and Elton (who was more hard-line in his concept of historical objectivity) were as nothing compared with their shared failings. Both, he argued in *On 'What is History?'* (1995), should be ditched as methodological guides in favour of Richard Rorty and Hayden White. Carr and Elton's commitment to dialogue with the 'reality' of a non-historiographically constituted-past-as-history, argued Jenkins, was inappropriate to the postmodern condition.[10] By contrast, Rorty and White were lauded for calling attention to their own processes of production, flagging their own assumptions and indicating explicitly and repeatedly the constituted rather than the found nature of their referent, 'the historicised past'.[11]

Three overlapping and inter-related elements were bound together in this assault on the possibility of writing objective history. First, and most fundamentally, Jenkins was arguing that however deeply one immersed oneself in the past, no historian could access a mirrored reality. There would always be a distance between history-as-it-happened and history-as-it-is-written. Hans-George Gadamer's strictures on the historicity of our being, Michel Foucault's insights into the influence of power on discourse and Jacques Derrida's highlighting of the absence of stable meanings all told against the possibility of attaining objective historical knowledge.[12] Second, far from being able to 'extinguish' ourselves, as Ranke hoped, historians were, Jenkins noted, always 'disturbingly present' in the production of the past. We cannot free ourselves from ourselves, and all 'historical thinking', as Gadamer put it, 'must take

14678705, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/criq.12824 by Test, Wiley Online Library on [19/04/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

account of its own historicity'.[13] Third, rather than discovering, Columbus-like, a past 'as things really were', the historian was always actively engaged in constructing a narrative out of the otherwise chaotic data sets they gathered during research. This was the process which Hayden White, adopting a term coined by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, called 'emplotment'.[14]

The contention that between the archive and a history book lay at least three procedures—selection, ordering and interpretation—in which the personality, ideology and practice of a living, breathing, active historian intervened was hardly a revelation. Carr, after all, had himself highlighted the role of the historian.[15] What troubled the profession was the uncomfortable conclusion that because all history was, in some sense, constructed, and no past was accessible as it was, all accounts of the past might be equally valid. In the face of this absolute relativism, historians attempted to develop positions that were variously described as 'qualified objectivity', 'practical realism' or 'prudent relativism'.[16] For their critics, each of these terms, which attempted to salvage some remnant of objectivity, were unconvincing. But for *practising* historians—and the adjective is key—the terms, however theoretically fragile, captured their sense that some accounts are *more objective* than others, and a good historian could tell the difference between partisan propaganda and a fair and honest attempt to tell the truth.

The great champion of what we might call this common-sense approach to objectivity was the redoubtable Richard Evans. His *In Defence of History* (1997) was a bravura performance, which pleased many in the profession with its contention that 'objective historical knowledge is both desirable and attainable'.[17] Evans quoted approvingly Carr's argument that just because a mountain takes on different shapes from different angles of vision does not mean that it either has no shape at all or an infinite number of shapes.[18] Indeed, so taken was Evans with this metaphor that he returned to it, in an embellished form, in a later book where he compared historians to 'figurative painters' sat at various points around a mountain, each painting in different styles, deploying different techniques and depicting it in different lights. However varied their images, all were agreed that they were painting a mountain. Anyone who painted a railway engine or a fried egg was beyond the pale.[19] Objectivity had its limits—there was no God's eye view of the mountain that the historian could achieve—but so too did relativism. A mountain was always a mountain and never a fried egg. 'An objective historian', wrote Evans, was 'simply one who works within these limits. They are limits that allow a wide latitude for differing interpretations of the same document or source, but they are limits all the same'.[20] Not all accounts

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were equally valid; some (those based upon thorough research) were more valid than others; and some were not valid at all.[21] History had to pass the fried egg test.

In Defence of History was popular, in part at least, because Evans made a case for an understanding of objectivity in history based on his own experience—as an outstanding historian of modern Germany—and which thereby spoke directly to the day-to-day practices of those in the field. This gave him an inestimable advantage over Jenkins and other postmodernist critics. For many readers, the book appealed as the manifesto of a 'working historian', although for those critical of the discipline's claims to objectivity, this persona itself was problematic. According to Dominick LaCapra, distinguishing 'working' or 'practising' historians on one side from theorists on the other was an 'invidious binary' which perpetuated an outmoded research paradigm, 'loosely modelled on a certain objectifying idea of science'.[22] An acknowledgement of the role of language in constituting any object, LaCapra argued, ought to have broken down the 'fetishism' which led historians to 'give unquestioned priority to (preferably archival) research' over theory.[23] But this was not a message most historians wanted to hear: some because they feared that if they did, it would spell the end of their discipline; others because they retained the belief that writing *about* history was and is different to (the infinitely preferable task of) *doing* history.[24] *In Defence of History* reassured readers that the concept of objectivity was sufficiently robust to allow working historians to carry on with their trade. The objectivity Evans chose to defend was rooted in the profession's empirical, source-based identity. In this, he captured the way in which most of us work, most of the time, and put into words how most of us think about the question of objectivity, to the extent that we think about it at all.[25]

History, it is often noted, is a less theorised discipline than many other subjects in the humanities and attempts to change this have met with only limited success.[26] Its ostensibly empirical character has always been part of its appeal for practitioners, and the historian's empiricism has generally been that of an artisan rather than a scientist. Historians at Johns Hopkins University were outliers in calling their historical seminar 'a laboratory'; it has been far more common, certainly since the mid-20th century, to find examples of historians reaching for a workshop analogy.[27] Marc Bloch's enduringly influential *The Historian's Craft* (1954) claimed to be 'the memorandum of a craftsman who had always liked to reflect over his daily task, the notebook of a journeyman who has long handled the ruler and the level, without imagining himself to be a mathematician'.[28] This self-image as an artisan or craftsman

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should not be misunderstood as a synonym for a simplistic belief in a historian's quest for 'as things really were'. Bloch was not an uncritical admirer of Ranke and had no illusions about a given past; for Bloch, documents only spoke when they were questioned, but he was sure that a skilful cross-examination, rooted in an empirical concern for proof, would yield the best insights.[29] His craftsman comparison not only spoke to a desire for autonomy (a prized characteristic for most historians) but also carried with it an acknowledgement that historians (like artisans) are both trained and creative.[30] Seventy years on from the posthumous publication of Bloch's work, and 80 years after his death at the hands of the Gestapo, his imagery is still resonant.[31] Rather than foisting theory upon students, history degrees generally begin by attempting to build practical skills and provide opportunities for apprentices (students) to work alongside established practitioners (their tutors in seminars), while developing their craft (in essays and other tasks), culminating in an apprentice piece (the undergraduate dissertation). Along the way, they are trained to interrogate evidence in ways which make questions about 'the origins, intentions, veracity, and bias of evidence' reflexive.[32] This provides practitioners with a means by which to distinguish good history from bad history and provides professional standards by which we police the boundary. Anyone can interact with the past—collectors, antiquarians, enthusiasts and propagandists—but trained, professional historians interact with it in certain, agreed ways. A desire to establish the veracity of sources; a commitment to balance in the use of evidence; and a transparency about methodology, motives and funding are all key to academic history. These standards and mechanisms do not guarantee objectivity. But, when tested continually in a collective environment, they do help us approach a broader, more rounded, more verifiable and, thereby, ultimately, *more* objective understanding.

The popular image of the historian as the lone scholar obscures this important point: An approach to objectivity is only possible because history is a collective endeavour. And it is this acknowledgement of the collective character of historical understanding, and our shared determination to keep to professional standards in the use of evidence, that enables us to answer the question 'Is objectivity bad for me?' with a resounding 'No'.

The idea that objectivity requires an almost superhuman self-effacement is, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's now classic study of *Objectivity* (2007) highlighted, the product of a very specific 19th-century form of 'Mechanical objectivity'.[33] This was never the only way to understand objectivity, and it was bookended in the late-18th

and early-20th centuries by other versions, 'Truth-to-nature' and 'Trained judgment', in which the active, interpretative role of the scientist was more obvious. By highlighting its historicity, Daston and Galison demonstrated the extent to which any version of objectivity, however noble the intentions of its devotees, is always limited and culturally conditioned. From the 18th century on, the practices of scientists helped them to eliminate, or at least minimise, certain acknowledged forms of prejudice or fantasy—such as religion and mysticism—in interpreting evidence from the natural world, but at the same time left unacknowledged androcentric, Eurocentric and racist assumptions.[34] Science began to move beyond these only as it opened up to previously marginalised groups, and feminist and postcolonial critics provided a range of different perspectives needed to help to build a more objective science.[35]

Much of what is commonly called objectivity in history is, more precisely, historians working 'from the balance of evidence reflecting the intersubjectivity of truth'.[36] And our shared understanding will be richer and more robust if that is built out of multiple perspectives. Far from demanding the elimination of the self, therefore, the search for an ever more objective understanding depends upon us being ourselves. As Nietzsche put it: 'There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival "knowing"; the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our "concept" of the thing, our "objectivity." But to eliminate the will completely and turn off all the emotions without exception, assuming we could: well? would that not mean to *castrate* the intellect? …'[37] Bring your authentic self to work, Nietzsche might as well be saying, in his own understated way, because it will enrich, expand and deepen our understanding of the past.

The increasing concern with the profile of the historical profession—in terms of gender, race and class background—is not simply a matter of fair representation and social justice. It also speaks to a desire for a balanced history, on the assumption that it matters *who* the historian is.[38] Bertolt Brecht's point that it takes a 'Worker' to ask: 'Alexander conquered India/He alone?'/'Caesar beat the Gauls/Was there not even a cook in his army?' was well made. If history were simply the pursuit of universally valid data, two historians, given access to the same archive, might produce the exact same book.[39] But no one expects this. History is an ineffably human activity. Even when we all agree to follow certain conventions in obtaining, weighing, evaluating and interpreting evidence, we will produce variant accounts. A profession drawn from a more diverse range of backgrounds has the potential to produce a

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concomitantly diverse range of questions and an enriched range of answers. This is not an automatic process. There is no social essentialism that guarantees that a historian from any given background will produce work of a particular character. Those coming to history from underrepresented backgrounds may still adopt the tone and pose of a 19th century patrician.

But the evidence is encouraging. The last half century has seen a simultaneous opening of the academy (to a still too limited extent) and an increasing number of scholars willing to research and write history from feminist and postcolonial perspectives. More recently, there has been a growth in historians who, rather than de-centre and de-emphasise their self, openly acknowledge and discuss 'the emotional impulse' behind their research.[40] This has produced some innovative and thought-provoking histories—such as Sarah Chaney's outstanding *Am I Normal? The 200-Year Search for Normal People (And Why They Don't Exist)* (2022)—which incorporate elements of memoir and display a demystifying vulnerability that would have been unimaginable for much of the 20th century. By their act of being present as themselves, these authors can change or deepen our understanding of the past.

This is vital. History does not produce definitive chronicles. The past is never fixed or settled. That is why 'rethinking' is such a ubiquitous word in the titles of our books, articles and conferences. Argument, interpretation, revision and dispute are the lifeblood of academic history. Rethinking is always prompted in the present, by our own experiences and by the politics and society of our times. Just as we need the past as a tool to help us to understand the present, so too can the present help us understand the past: 'the lines of connection', as Bloch put it, 'work both ways'.[41] It is a strength of our discipline that the *#MeToo* movement can provoke a new perspective on sexual assault in 19th century Japan.[42] It would be pointless to apologise for such presentism or complain that it compromises objectivity. Historians do not stand outside of history, and presentism can illuminate our understanding of the past. But this is not a licence for misrepresentation or anachronism. For although, as the historian of science Hasok Chang puts it, 'like funerals, history-writing is for the living', our rendering of the past is also, like funerals, for the dead.[43] Our duty, as custodians of the past, is to render that past as fully and fairly as the evidence allows.

Objectivity, as pursued by the historical profession in the 21st century, therefore, does not demand that we extinguish our self but that we promote a profession open to a range of perspectives. Objectivity demands that we test our perspectives against what is and what is not known, according to the rules, conventions and critical standards the

profession has developed over the past two centuries. And that we do this with a humility that acknowledges that even our best work is provisional, uncertain and open to future revision. There is no *interpretative* finality. History is an endeavour to understand the past, in conversation with other historians. That conversation will be enhanced by diversity of thought, but that does not mean that all accounts are equal or that my standpoint should be my endpoint. Objectivity in history demands that I listen to the widest possible range of views and, when faced with overwhelming evidence, adjust my position accordingly. It is a reminder that mine is not the only way of seeing the world. In an age of identities, echo chambers and entrenched positions, in which online mediums foster division, simplification and polarisation, objectivity challenges us to *understand* in the broadest sense.[44] As an antidote to the worst excesses of our current age, objectivity in history is good for me and good for us all.

Notes

1 Alun Munslow, 'Preface to the Routledge Classics Edition', in Keith Jenkins, *Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. xi–xiv, at p. xii.

2 Graci Harkema, 'How to Bring Your Authentic Self to Work', *Harvard Business Review*, 15 Dec. 2023: https://hbr.org/2023/12/how-to-bring-your-authentic-self-to-work

3 F. Stern (ed.), *The Varieties of History: from Voltaire to the Present* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 54.

4 A. Boldt, 'Ranke: Objectivity and History', *Rethinking History*, 18 (2014), 457–474, at 463.

5 Ibid. 464.

6 *Wissenschaft* has no direct English equivalence and was often translated as 'science'.

7 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

8 Charles Beard, 'That Noble Dream', *The American Historical Review*, 41 (1935), 74–87, at p. 86.

9 Carl L. Becker, 'Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Minneapolis, December 29, 1931', *The American Historical Review* 37 (1932), 221–36.

10 Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?' From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995).

11 Ibid. 10.

12 For one response to the challenge posed by these three authors see Mark Bevir, 'Objectivity and History', *History and Theory*, 33 (1994), 328–344, Bevir's contention, that objectivity does not depend upon access to a given past—developed in his Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of*

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Ideas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), was, in turn, challenged by Alun Munslow, who questioned the ability of historians to achieve objectivity through the identification of intentionality in Alun Munslow, 'Objectivity and the Writing of History', *History of European Ideas*, 28. (2002), 43–50.

13 Hans-Georg Gadamar, *Truth and Method*. Second Revised Edition. Transl. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 300.

14 See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973) and Hayden White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', in Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 37–53. For a recent overview of White's importance, see Carolyn J. Dean, '*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, by Hayden White', *The American Historical Review*, 124 (2019), 1337–1350.

15 The subject of Carr's opening chapter was 'The Historian and His Facts'. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1961).

16 Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 254; Lynn Hunt, *History: Why It Matters* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); James M. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past: Why all History is Revisionist History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 264.

17 Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997), 252.

18 Ibid. 224.

19 Richard J. Evans, *Telling Lies About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (London: Verso, 2002), 257.

20 Ibid.

21 Evans felt that his argument was frequently misunderstood, with critics charging him with a 'strong and traditional' understanding of objectivity when he in fact held to 'a weak and qualified one'. To remove doubt, he added an extra sentence to the German and US editions of *In Defence of History*, which read: 'Objective history in the last analysis is history that is researched and written within the limits placed on the historical imagination by the facts of history and the sources which reveal them, and bound by the historian's desire to produce a true, fair, and adequate account of the subject under consideration'. See Richard J. Evans, 'Author's Response to His Critics (4)', *IHR History in Focus*, 1999: Archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Whatishistory/Evans4.html.

22 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 24–25, 33–34fn.

23 Dominik LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 206; La Capra, *History and Reading*, 28fn.

24 For one of the more hyperbolic responses, see Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists* (Paddington, Australia: Macleay, 1996). Some, no doubt, would echo Richard Feynman's probably apocryphal put down of the philosophy of science ('as useful to scientists as ornithology is to

birds'), but most would probably concede that the conceptual foundations of history are indeed worthy of exploration, but not continuously or at the cost of the actual practice of history. Ben Trubody, 'Richard Feynman's Philosophy of Science', *Philosophy Now*, 114 (2016): https://philosophynow.org/issues/114/Richard_Feynmans_Philosophy_of_Science

25 'Even the most theoretically sophisticated of historians have to admit to intractable problems with their methods. For the most part, we ignore this issue by writing within the confines of conventional types of interpretation and with the conventional tools of the trade'. Lynn Hunt, 'History as Gesture; or The Scandal of History' in Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson eds., *Consequences of Theory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 91–107, at 100.

26 Banner describes history as 'undertheorised'. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past*, 240. For a compelling rendering of the argument that practising historians have not, as a rule, thought long and hard enough about the epistemological issues raised by the historical enterprise, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

27 John David Smith, 'Essay Review: "Scientific" History at the Johns Hopkins University', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 115 (1991), 421–26.

28 Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, transl. by Peter Putnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 114, 16.

29 Ibid. 53.

30 Bert De Munck, 'Artisans as Knowledge Workers: Craft and Creativity in a Long Term Perspective', *Geoform*, 99 (2019), 227–237.

31 Carole Fink, *Marc Bloch: A Life in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

32 Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past*, 240.

33 'By *mechanical objectivity* we mean the insistent drive to repress the wilful intervention of the artist-author, and to out in its stead a set of procedures that would, as it were, move nature to the page through a strict protocol, if not automatically'. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison *Objectivity* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2010), 121.

34 The presence of these features in, for example, Darwin's writings is well understood. See Adrian Desmond and James Moore, 'Introduction' to Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex. 2nd Edition of 1874* (London: Penguin, 2004).

35 Sandra Harding, *Whose Knowledge? Whose Science? Thinking From Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

36 Munslow, 'Objectivity and the Writing of History', 43, 45.

37 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, transl. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87.

38 Nicola Miller, Kenneth Fincham, Margot Finn, Sarah Holland, Christopher Kissane and Mary Vincent, *Promoting Gender Equality in UK History: A Second Report and Recommendations for Good Practice* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2018); Hannah Atkinson, Suzanne

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Bardgett, Adam Budd, Margot Finn, Christopher Kissane, Sadiah Qureshi, Jonathan Saha, John Siblon and Sujit Sivasundaram, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2018).

39 Bertolt Brecht, 'A Worker Reads and Asks' (1935) in *The Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2018).

40 Tracey Loughran and Dawn Manny (eds), *Emotion and the Researcher: Sites, Subjectivities, and Relationships* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2018), 6.

41 Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, 36.

42 Amy Stanley, 'Writing the History of Sexual Assault in the Age of #MeToo', *Slate*, 2018: https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/10/historians-sexual-assault-research-metoo.html. Stanley's essay was originally published in *Perspectives on History*, 24 September 2018. https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-2018/writing-the-history-of-sexual-assault-in-the-age-of-metoo.

43 Hasok Chang, 'Presentist History for Pluralist Science', *Journal for General Philosophy of Science*, 52 (2021), 97–114, at p. 99. For an equally positive take on presentism, see David Armitage, 'In Defense of Presentism', in Darrin M. McMahon ed. *History and Human Flourishing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 44–69.

44 X, formerly Twitter, arguably privileges discourse that is simple, impulsive and uncivil. See, for example, B. L. Ott, 'The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34 (2017), 59–68.

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