

dangerous events have passed. But there is also no doubt that there are impatient attempts to normalize our historical consciousness; and that will not be so easy to do.

I am not trying to bring the discussion to the point where it loses itself in complexity, but I would like to make the debate more difficult. I am chiefly interested in two things: that our relationship to that difficult period of our history be clear, truthful, and responsible; and that we respect the borders within which the dispute can be carried out fruitfully and without damage.

In contrast to many other disciplines, history survived the shake-up of the years after 1968 and benefited from this experience. The discipline's standards have remained intact. It has discussed its problems in a fair and hard dispute. Its unity and its standards of quality have really not suffered. This was presumably in part because our subject was challenged from the outside so that we had to defend it together. Occasionally I ask myself whether it is not regrettable that no West German historians became Marxists at that time. For then others could have studied under them and learned what that means and would not constantly have to call non-Marxists Marxists.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is said that humor is when one laughs in spite of it all, and it can also be said that ideology is when one can believe in spite of it all. I would like to suggest the following formulation: Pluralism is when unity prevails in spite of it all—in the fundamental and mutual sense, that is. And I would not like to have that undermined.

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## THOMAS NIPPERDEY

### Under the Domination of Suspicion: Scholarly Statements Should Not Be Judged by Their Political Function

[It would be nice, dear Eberhard Jäckel, if this “great debate” could be focused on a scholarly problem—to what degree Gulag and Auschwitz are comparable, i.e., simultaneously similar and/or different, or even causally related. Although this is controversial, it can be decided. And with Jürgen Kocka one can also soberly ask whether what one learned from this or from comparison with Pol Pot was worth the effort. Or whether Nolte's interpretation of Weizmann was not a wild misconstruction. But Habermas's attack cannot be played down in this way. One cannot ignore his attack on Hillgruber by saying that it overstated its case—even ignoring its bogus quotations; nor can one agree with Hans Mommsen, Habermas's comrade-in-arms in the political mispositioning of historians.]\*

From quite diverse historians, Jürgen Habermas constructs a group of “revisionists” and facetiously designates them as part of an ideological-political program that Michael Stürmer is supposed to have formulated. Habermas inquires about the motives, the social and moral consequences, and the political functions of historical statements. And since he does not want to be just an observer of politics, these statements are given moral valuations. Morally unassailable colleagues are associated with Nazi apologists. The goal of these men, it is argued, is not to compare and differentiate but to exonerate the past and to turn to a kind of historical thinking that is ideologically in league with NATO and the *Wende*, or conservative shift.

He equates his own political tendency with truth, and, almost incidentally, the “annihilation” of the kulaks becomes their “expulsion.” It is the old tune: The interpretation of National Socialism is used as a weapon in the political fray. But this time it is more: It is the dominance of “suspicion” (Hegel), of self-confident virtue, and of a monopoly over the truth—the differentiation of good from evil. For this reason, it is correct to speak of insinuation, of prohibiting questions. The mere publication of Nolte's

\**Author's Note:* The original manuscript contained the bracketed passage.

article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* was for Habermas almost a sin in itself. The notions that Tacitus did not write *sine ira et studio* and that the criticism of ideology is legitimate do not carry as much weight for Habermas as this one ideological error. The moral imperative of scholarly investigation demands that the arguments of participants in a discussion be examined independently of origin, motives, and consequences. The level of the argument must be separated from that of the context. Everyone knows enough examples of scholarly and political positions not being identical. The “moralizing” interpretation of contexts cuts off the process of scholarly discussion, which can only be sustained by new discoveries and new perspectives and sometimes even lives on the inventive force of ideological interests. The Habermas kind of interpretation also cuts off freedom and the duty to permanently engage in revisionism. [I do not believe that that is an overreaction. Of course, we are humans, and our political and moral convictions carry over into our discipline. But here there is a method to the madness. Habermas, the “crafty sleuth on the trail of conservatives” (Henrich) has also branded a whole group of his fellow philosophers as intellectual constitutional police (as if we did not all want to protect the constitution) and Henrich as being a conservative philosopher prior to the establishment of a conservative shift. His philosophy of historical scholarship is “like [that of] a missionary in search of consensus” (Udo Marquard)—in search of forced unity. And what can be universalized is to be determined, in domination-free discourse, by the administrators of progressive morality. There are still “readings,” but only of one text, i.e., the one from the project of modernity. But it is also a part of the discipline and of the morality of scholarly work to limit such excesses. The domination of suspicion is undermining the thin ground of pluralism.]\*

I am thus opposed to judging scholarly statements and the knowledge they bring with them by their asserted political function. Now, one can proceed from individual statements to general perspectives. Then, to take an example, we arrive at the contrast between “apologetic” and “critical” historical scholarship. That there is such a thing as apologetic history is trivial; what is in question is the discipline itself. The so-called “historicists,” who desire to understand the past on its own terms, are viewed by their opponents as apologetic or affirmative. Habermas, too, points out such traditions, and since the beginning of the “great debate” lesser intellects have been blowing this same horn. On the other side there is the branch of the discipline that calls itself critical—not because it, like every scholarly discipline, employs critical methods but because it subjects the past to its critical view. The past is demasked, politicized, moralized, and

\**Author's Note:* The original manuscript contained the bracketed passage.

even hypermoralized using the omnipotent principle of emancipation. This is the only way the road can be cleared for the monopoly on the future claimed by the utopias.

Previously, also in this newspaper, I argued against this critical history, written by prosecuting attorneys and judges, which does more to block than to open up access to the past. In the end, the moralized past destroys real history. We must “historicize” National Socialism.

But that remains to be done. Beyond apologetics and criticism, beyond conservative and progressive partisanship, there is objective history, which we, despite the limitations of our—transnational—scholarly endeavor, are closing in on. Everyone knows it: There simply is, beyond our bickering about values, history writing that is more or less valuable, outmoded or merely provisionally valid. Scholars dedicated to critical-emancipatory or apologetic endeavors and those committed to a search for identity can contribute to this.

It is the first commandment of a pluralistic scholarly morality to recognize the coexistence and open competition of such larger trends in scholarship. In the present case, that means that one must oppose the monopolistic claim of critical history writing and its damning judgments. Today the purpose of enlightenment is to defend objectivity and pluralism and, taking recourse to that movement’s skeptical heritage, to resist militancy, to resist the cocksureness of compact morality and the all-encompassing desire to force consensus on others. The type of scholarship envisioned would insist on the finiteness of man and, to speak with the enlightener Max Weber, endure the struggle of the gods and the value-neutrality of knowledge.

History has meaning for life. History has to do with our identity—that is nothing new. My identity is always a piece of the common identity. Why we are how we are and why others are different—we can only understand this historically. For identity is also always heritage. And since it is difficult to recognize the way we are and the way we are different, this recognition is also an achievement of history. Granted, history also has other functions, and here, too, a part of the morality of pluralism is to recognize this multiplicity. Emancipation is a universalizing project aimed at unity. Identity, on the other hand, including national identity with its program of pluralization and multiplicity, acts as a counterweight to the difficulties stemming from the leveling tendencies of modernism. History assures us of our identity and stabilizes this identity—politics also lives on this process.

National identity exists prior to and parallel to scholarly activity. Scholarship clears up questions of memory and disempowers traditions. The more plural—and the more scientific—the discipline has become, the richer in tension is its relationship to identity. It is not a Machiavellian idea of Stürmer’s that there is a political right to memory—it is a simple