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Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann and Georg Waitz: Two Models of Scholarly Integrity

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Although ‘scholarly integrity’ is a phrase of twentieth-century origin, reflection on what constitutes good scholarly conduct is as old as scholarly inquiry itself. Some of the most famous scientific controversies – think of Thomas Hobbes’s criticism of Robert Boyle’s ‘air-pump’ experiments in the 1660s – were, among other things, debates over standards of proof and methods of research. Without much anachronism, it can be argued that they pertained to what would nowadays be called scholarly integrity (was it wrong to engage in probabilistic reasoning, as Boyle did, or did Hobbes make himself guilty of dogmatism?). Interestingly, as Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer have argued, the debate ran high because participants did not agree on what counted as proper scholarly conduct. This was partly because, in seventeenth-century England, such conduct was imbued with social and political meaning: deviation from ‘philosophy’ of the sort represented by Hobbes was, to some extent, a political act.

But integrity could also be contested because scholars disagreed on the relative importance of virtues and skills that they believed to mark a good physicist, biologist, or philologist. If scholarly integrity denotes a ‘proper order’ in the values and virtues guiding scholarly research, as Damian Cox and others have argued,¹ then the history of scholarship offers quite a few examples of scholars quarreling about integrity. This is to say that scholarly integrity is not a black and white issue, but an area full of grey zones that require careful weighing and balancing of values and virtues. How important is intellectual courage in relation to accuracy, or trustworthiness compared to creativity?

In the nineteenth-century, historical studies was generally seen as a very important field of inquiry. Historical study mattered because it provided orientation, most notably in matters of national identity. Although not everyone agreed with E. A. Freeman’s famous dictum, ‘history is past politics, and politics present history’, the motto nicely captures to what extent history was perceived as laying bare the roots of the present and as uncovering patterns of development that politicians, among others, could ignore only at their peril. At the same time, history as

practiced in especially the German lands had an aura of scientific rigour. It was here that students were trained in archival research and so-called ‘auxiliary sciences’ (paleography, diplomatics) needed for deciphering and understanding medieval charters. Also, it was German history professors who took a lead in lecturing and writing about historical methodology. Yet the question remained: how did archival research, conducted in accordance with the newest methodological findings, relate to history’s task of providing orientation in matters of national identity?

The most illustrious representative of nineteenth-century German historical studies, Leopold von Ranke, did not see much tension between the two. In his harmonious worldview, relying on authentic historical documents was a way of allowing the past itself to speak. When Ranke famously stated that ‘I wanted, as it were, to extinguish myself, and to let the things speak for themselves, to let the powerful forces appear on their own’, the powerful forces that he intended to make visible were national identities as they emerged and matured in the course of history.² For Ranke, archival research was therefore simultaneously a mark of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* (scholarly rigour) and an expression of belief in the historical power of national identities.

As this approach rested on contentious metaphysical assumptions (how ontologically real are national identities?) and made rather heavy demands on historians (many archives were not yet well-ordered or publicly accessible), it comes as no surprise that Ranke’s approach met with resistance. At the University of Berlin (now the Humboldt University), for instance, historian Heinrich Leo chastised Ranke for overrating the value of archival research. Nonetheless, the Rankean paradigm eventually overcame most opposition: its combination of scientific rigour and nationalist commitment turned out to be attractive at a time when ‘scholarship’ and the ‘nation’ were generally treated with reverence.

Scholarship and the nation were not fixed entities, though. In nineteenth-century Europe, the amount of archival material available for scholarly inquiry exploded when growing number of archives opened their doors to the public and archival ‘expeditions’ revealed masses of hitherto unknown material. At the same time, German national identity became a political reality when the long-held dream of German unification was realized with the establishment of the German Empire in 1871. Both developments challenged the Rankean synthesis of nationalism and *Wissenschaftlichkeit*. Was it a matter of public duty for state-paid academics to support the Empire, for instance by legitimizing it as a historical inevitability? Or did scholarly integrity require a certain amount of detachment from the politicized public sphere in early Imperial Germany?

These were not the only questions dividing German historians in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had launched an anti-Catholic campaign known as the *Kulturkampf*, the long-term effects of which made it particularly difficult for Catholic historians to participate on equal footing with Protestant colleagues. Jewish historians suffered even more from exclusion: conversion was virtually a precondition for entrance into the profession. Women, atheists, and socialists did not fit the template of a German university professor either. All this brought a degree of contestation to issues of scholarly identity. It was not only ideals of professionalism that elicited controversy; their corresponding mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion evoked resistance, too.

Late nineteenth-century German historical scholarship was therefore a house divided in itself. From a distance, it could seem as if German historians were united in their commitment to archival research, methodological rigour, and innovative pedagogical practices such as the history seminar (*historische Übungen*). Yet at closer inspection, social, political, and religious fault lines turned out to generate irresolvable tensions among historians.

That these tensions easily translated themselves in disagreement on what integrity entailed came to the fore in 1886. Within twenty-four hours of each other, Ranke and one of his most influential students, Georg Waitz, breathed their last breaths. Following social custom, the deceased were honored with obituaries in newspapers and scholarly journals. The image of Waitz presented on this occasion, especially by his students, was that of an impeccable scholar who personally embodied the idea of integrity. Alfred Stern, for instance, praised Waitz for his ‘extraordinary critical sense’, ‘iron diligence’, and ‘strict conscientiousness’.³ Others highlighted Waitz’s ‘industry’, ‘meticulousness’, and ‘impartiality’. The image of Waitz emerging from these obituaries is that of a historian who tried at all cost to avoid unproven hypotheses, to abstain from literary ambitions, and to be indifferent to recognition beyond academic circles. As Waitz’s French pupil Gabriel Monod summarized it: Waitz’s devotion to the cause of historical scholarship had ‘made him worry less about his reputation than about the progress of science, the absence of all partisanship, of all fanaticism, of all small-minded vanity’.⁴

The first remarkable thing about this image is the prominent role of virtue language. Waitz was not remembered because of scholarly breakthroughs, but because of character traits that he had embodied and tried to cultivate in his students. What seemed to matter was, in other words, not Waitz’s published work, but his ‘scholarly self’. Typical of this self was, in the second place, its asceticism. The virtues attributed to Waitz were ascetic in the sense that they

contributed to self-restraint and self-control for the sake of scholarly advancement. The Waitz-style historian was not a brilliant stylist or flamboyant political commentator, but someone who tried to ‘extinguish’ himself, as Ranke had put it. This reference to Ranke, finally, is fitting because the character traits ascribed to Waitz were virtues that Waitz himself had regarded as typical for the Rankean tradition. If Waitz was presented as an embodiment of ‘criticism’, ‘precision’, and ‘penetration’, these were virtues that Waitz had claimed to have inherited from Ranke.

Others, however, discriminated between Ranke and Waitz, arguing that Waitz lacked Ranke’s breadth of vision. Heinrich von Sybel, most notably, claimed that Ranke had been a scholar, artist, and political commentator at once, whereas Waitz had excelled only in the first of these capacities. This implied that the kind of historian represented by Waitz was one-sided in comparison to Ranke. By willfully sacrificing artistic aspiration and political commitment, the ascetic historian became a specialist who pursued ‘scholarship’ at the expense of the ‘nation’, thereby destroying Ranke’s synthesis and exploiting his legacy in a rather reductionist manner.⁵ Unsurprisingly, this attack did not go unanswered. Loyal students rushed to Waitz’s defense, arguing that it was one thing to please the general public with well-written history books, but quite another to push the boundaries of knowledge and set new standards for future generations of scholars. In their view, Waitz’s asceticism was not a limitation, but a virtue *par excellence*.

Clearly, there was more at stake here than Waitz’s personal merits. Partly, the controversy was a struggle for power in a field with limited career opportunities. More importantly, however, the dispute fought out in Waitz’s obituaries was a debate about the marks of a good historian, focused on the importance of aesthetic talent and political commitment in comparison to research skill. The clash between Sybel and Waitz’s students revolved around the question of the causes historians should serve: scholarship only or scholarship for the benefit of German culture and politics?

If Waitz embodied an *ascetic* type of integrity, the *synthetic* type advocated by Sybel was often associated with Waitz’s former colleague Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann. Despite an age difference of 28 years, Dahlmann and Waitz had much in common. Both had been known for their sense of duty, lack of sentimentality, and other supposedly North German character traits. Both had taught at Kiel and Göttingen and been members of the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848-49. Their names even appeared together on the *Quellenkunde der Deutschen Geschichte*, a huge bibliographical survey better known as ‘Dahlmann-Waitz’, after its first two editors.

Nonetheless, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Dahlmann came to be seen as embodying a type of integrity quite different from Waitz's.

This was not how things had looked like half a century before. In 1837, Dahlmann had become famous almost overnight as the leader of the so-called Göttingen Seven: a small group of professors who had risked their chairs by criticizing the Hanoverian King Ernest Augustus for dissolving the parliament and suspending the constitution. Although this act of civil courage had been interpreted differently along the political spectrum, many admirers of Dahlmann and his colleagues emphasized their unswerving commitment to the law of their country, whatever the costs in terms of career, reputation, and personal freedom (Dahlmann had been dismissed from his chair and exiled from the Kingdom of Hanover). If this was integrity, it resembled the ascetic type in so far as it was characterized by a focus on a single good that was worth sacrificing others.

Increasingly, however, Dahlmann came to be remembered not only for his civic virtues, but also as a model of scholarly integrity. Characteristic of this model was a refusal to accept what one might call a compartmentalization of the self, caused by a differentiation of society. Whereas Waitz's name symbolized a sharp distinction between the 'scholarly self' and the 'political self', not to mention the 'religious self' and the 'familial self', Dahlmann came to be regarded as an uncompromised personality whose life and work had been 'one', in the sense that his professional virtues and vices could not be separated from his private ones.⁶

The model of integrity associated with Dahlmann resembled Waitz's in so far as it weighed and balanced different demands made upon historians. Both searched for a 'proper order' among values and virtues. The two were opposed, however, in their basic orientation. While the ascetic model kept non-scholarly commitments at bay, Dahlmann's model aimed to synthesize the demands of research, education, politics, and public service. This synthetic model, as we might call it, did not downplay the importance of such virtues as criticism, precision, and penetration. All admirers cited Dahlmann's three-volume history of Denmark as proof of how thoroughly its author had appropriated these modern epistemic virtues. The point, however, was that these were not the only virtues that mattered, given that a historical researcher usually also was a teacher, citizen, and public intellectual.

Whereas Waitz's ascetic model was embraced especially by historians engaged in source editing, Dahlmann's synthetic model found most resonance among the overlapping categories of loyal students such as Hermann Baumgarten and politically engaged historians such as Heinrich von Treitschke and Conrad Varrentrapp. The latter in particular appropriated Dahlmann as a forerunner of the so-called Prussian School of History, which gradually

developed into a major alternative to the Waitz school. Although these Prussian historians did not necessarily share all of Dahlmann's political views, they appreciated his characteristic 'position between scholarship and the state', as Treitschke called it.⁷ Accordingly, they granted Dahlmann and his legacy just as important a place in their genealogies of the discipline as Waitz's students did with Ranke.

The extent to which Dahlmann's model came to serve as an alternative to Waitz's is apparent from the fact that it was appropriated even outside the two groups just mentioned – Dahlmann's former students and the Prussian School of History. Scholars as diverse as Johannes Janssen, a staunch Catholic apologist, and Ludwig Weiland, a former student of Waitz with ambitions reaching beyond source criticism, wrote sympathetically about the man whose name increasingly came to serve as a symbol of protest against the hegemony of Waitz-style professionalism. Inevitably, this juxtaposition of Waitz and Dahlmann contributed to a certain schematization that emphasized the differences between the men more than their similarities. To some extent, indeed, the proper names of Waitz and Dahlmann became generic names or labels for distinct scholarly personae. They came to serve as coordinates on imaginary maps of the historical discipline, corresponding to distinct conceptions of scholarly integrity.

This, then, implies that late nineteenth-century German historians worked with more than one view of integrity. Although few of them doubted the need for accuracy and precision, the issue that divided them was how important these virtues were in relation to other, overlapping or competing virtues. What was contested, in other words, was not the virtues as such, but their relative weight. If scholarly integrity consists of a 'proper order' among virtues, different schools of historians subscribed to different conceptions of integrity.

This, finally, helps explain why historians in late nineteenth-century Germany lent a human face to issues of integrity by personifying them. Models of integrity were associated with individuals, not because they were invented by Waitz or Dahlmann, but because these historians were seen as embodying a 'proper order' of virtues. This is not to say that concerns about integrity were the only reason for historians to commemorate their predecessors. Honouring outstanding scholars was part of the moral economy of nineteenth-century scholarship. Reciprocal loyalty between teachers and students, more specifically, was one of the key assumptions underlying academic teaching and mentoring practices. However, as suggested by the case of Dahlmann in particular, personified models of integrity were not only invoked by historians with social obligations to the deceased. Waitz and Dahlmann served as *exempla* also because they showed in concrete detail how virtues could be lived out.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that lithographs or photographs of Waitz and Dahlmann were eagerly shared among historians, as were anecdotes of the sort told by a Belgian visitor to Waitz's seminar in Göttingen: 'Once, when one of the class made a new observation, M. Waitz cried out: "I have learned something myself on a subject I thought I had exhausted!" and drawing his little silver pencil from his pocket, he noted the matter upon the margin of his text.'⁸ Such anecdotes served as stories of commitment, as emblems of virtue, or as icons of integrity, just as pictures conveyed what a scholar committed to ascetic or synthetic integrity looked like in practice. A history of scholarly integrity therefore amounts to more than a history of abstract virtues and vices. It has to pay attention to 'portraits of integrity', both in a literal and figurative sense.⁹

Recommended Reading

Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's study, mentioned in the opening paragraph, is entitled *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). A good introduction to Waitz's life and work is provided by Robert L. Benson and Loren J. Weber, 'Georg Waitz (1813-1886)', in *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, ed. Helen Damico and Joseph B. Zavadil, vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1995), 63-75. The best available biography of Dahlmann is Wilhelm Bleek, *Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann: Eine Biographie* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2010). Nineteenth-century debates on the proper order of virtues and the *personae* that embodied them are discussed in Herman Paul, 'The Virtues and Vices of Albert Naudé: Toward a History of Scholarly Personae', *History of Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2016): 327-338 and 'The Virtues of a Good Historian in Early Imperial Germany: Georg Waitz's Contested Example', *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 681-709.

¹ Damian Cox, Marguerite la Caze, and Michael P. Levine, *Integrity and the Fragile Self* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 8.

² Leopold Ranke, *Englische Geschichte vornehmlich im sechszehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1860), 3.

³ Alfred Stern, 'Georg Waitz', *Die Nation* 3 (1886): 538-540, at 538.

⁴ G. Monod, 'Georges Waitz', *Revue Historique* 31 (1886): 382-390, at 384.

⁵ Heinrich v[on] Sybel, 'Georg Waitz', *Historische Zeitschrift* 56 (1886): 482-487.

⁶ Conrad Varrentrapp, 'Zur Erinnerung an Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann', *Preussische Jahrbücher* 5 (1885): 485-510, at 501.

⁷ Heinrich von Treitschke, 'F.C. Dahlmann', in *Historische und politische Aufsätze vornehmlich zur neuesten deutschen Geschichte*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1865), 359-445, at 408.

⁸ Paul Fredericq, *The Study of History in Germany and France*, trans. Henrietta Leonard (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1890), 17.

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