

# Objectivity and Selectivity in Historical Inquiry

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## I. Background.

. . . Memory gives us access to the past, but not a direct vision of it. Thus all we can claim is to have a point of contact with past events, enabling us perhaps to divine their true shape in some degree, but not such that we can check our reconstructions by comparing them with it to see how far they are correct. For the rest, the sole criterion of truth available to us, in history as in other branches of factual knowledge, is the internal coherence of the beliefs we erect on that foundation.<sup>1</sup>

One cannot reflect long upon the question of truth in historical inquiry without coming to grips with a most important problem--that of objectivity. As Sidney Hook says, "To the extent that dignity and honesty in the conduct of human affairs rest on the belief in such objectivity, reflection upon it goes to the heart of the question concerning the nature and possibility of liberal civilization."<sup>2</sup> Can the writing of history be objective? Is truth about the past attainable? Does the necessary method of reconstruction preclude objectivity? Does not the fact that history is constantly being rewritten support the assumption of the subjectivists that objectivity is impossible? Does selectivity preclude objectivity? Can the historian escape personal bias?

Ever since 1821, when von Humboldt, reading a paper "On the Historian's Task" to the Prussian Academy, discussed the nature of past actuality, a definite philosophic split has occurred among practicing historians and philosophers.<sup>3</sup> The difference became the focal point of much epistemological debate between those espousing the scientific method and those espousing the historical method. Among the latter, the two major positions can be identified as that of the subjectivists and that of the objectivists.

<sup>1</sup>W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Sidney Hook, ed., *Philosophy and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 257.

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm von Humboldt, "On the Historian's Task", *History and Theory*, (1967), pp. 57-71. This paper has been credited by some as instrumental in the development of the concept of historicism.

## II. The Problem:

### A. *What is the essence of the subjectivists' position?*

Benedette Croce, in distinguishing the essential difference between what happened and why it happened, thought that every history was a contemporary history, *i.e.*, that the past is dead except as it is “unified with an interest of the present life.”<sup>4</sup> Croce assumed that the reconstruction of past reality was a creation of an individual spirit (similar to Hegel’s Absolute Spirit). Hence he has been called a presentist, *i.e.*, one who interprets history in a subjectivist manner; who sees history as a projection of present-day needs and interests into past reality. This position assumes cognitive subjectivism. History is not just a product of the present, it is a creation. The historian creates history.

In “That Noble Dream,” Beard, defending the case for historical relativism, argues that no historian can describe the past as it truly was and that the very methods which the historian must use to reconstruct the past, *i.e.* his selection of facts, his omissions, his emphasis, his ability to describe events, are inseparable from the historian’s own personality and from the age in which he lives.<sup>5</sup> In another paper Beard expresses his position thusly:

The historian who writes history, therefore, consciously or unconsciously performs an act of faith, as to order and movement, for certainty as to order and movement is denied to him by knowledge of this actuality with which he is concerned. He is thus in the position of a statesman dealing with public affairs; in writing he acts and in acting he makes choices, large or small, timid or bold, with respect to some conception of the nature of things. And the degree of his influence and immortality will depend upon the length and correctness of his forecast--upon the verdict of history yet to come. His faith is at bottom a conviction that something true can be known about the movement of history and his conviction is a subjective decision, not a purely objective discovery.<sup>6</sup>

Historical relativism was further defended by Becker when he distinguished between a fact and the meaning and significance of this

<sup>4</sup>Benedette Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1928), pp. 64, 82. Translated by Douglas Ainslie.

<sup>5</sup>Charles A. Beard, “That Noble Dream,” *American Historical Review*, 41, No. 1, (1935). pp. 74-87.

<sup>6</sup>Charles A. Beard, “Written History as an Act of Faith,” *American Historical Review*, 39, No. 2, (1934), p. 226.

fact in an interpretative account of the past.<sup>7</sup> He believes that the past is gone and that the world of history is an intangible world recreated only imaginatively in our minds.<sup>8</sup>

Another attack on the possibility of objectivity in the writing of history was made by Walsh, who believed that individual creativity is a barrier to it.<sup>9</sup> His view is borne out by the fact that historians more frequently than not disagree with one another in interpreting the same event.

Aron, writing on “Relativism in History,” stresses the historian’s values or “center of interest” as an important principle in selectivity. Such values have no universal validity but vary from age to age. As he says:

When once we cease to interpret our knowledge of the past by the criterion of a transcendental ego which gives form to an inert mass of material, when once we put the historian back into reality and take the structure of reality as the point of reference, then the whole sense of the relativist formula is transformed. Past human existence is rich in the same significances and the same fruitful ambiguities as historical knowledge itself. History cannot give a final, universally valid account of societies, epochs and extinct civilizations for the very reason that they never had a unique and universally valid significance. The never-ending discovery and rediscovery of the past is the expression of a dialectic which will last as long as the human race and which is the very essence of history . . .<sup>10</sup>

Collingwood’s *The Idea of History*, was one of the most important expressions of the relativistic idea.<sup>11</sup> He was an English philosopher who defended history as an autonomous branch of human knowledge and felt that history was a re-enactment of past thought and action in the mind of the historian. He particularly stresses the role of the imagination in writing history.

To sum up a brief account of relativism, historians adhering to this

<sup>7</sup>Carl L. Becker, “What are Historical Facts,” in Hans Meyerhoff’s *The Philosophy of History in Our Time* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1959), pp. 120-137.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>9</sup>W.H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967), pp. 93-107.

<sup>10</sup>Raymond Aron, “Relativism in History,” in Hans Meyerhoff’s, *The Philosophy of History in Our Time* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959), p. 160.

<sup>11</sup>R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946).

viewpoint are sure that the achievement of certainty is impossible. Some reasons why it is impossible are the following: (1) Not all facts can ever be known; (2) all interpretations have a valuational character due to a conscious or unconscious cultural viewpoint; (3) no description can adequately communicate action; (4) an event itself is always fuller or richer than a reconstruction of it; (5) to be objective, an account must be a direct examination of a phenomenon and not an examination of a testimony about it, which is twice removed from actuality; and (6) conclusions are not universally acceptable.

#### B. *What is the essence of the objectivists' position?*

Von Ranke in the early part of the nineteenth century, has been credited with creating a new concept, *i.e.*, that history should be written only from eye-witness reports and from the “purest” documents. He states in his *Preface to Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations from 1494-1514*. “To history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high offices their work does not aspire: It wants only to show what actually happened (wie es eigentlich gewesen ist.)”<sup>12</sup> Von Ranke thought that objectivity in the writing of history could be achieved by finding, reporting, and arranging all the documents on the theme and then by repeating what the documents say happened.

Ratner<sup>13</sup> argues “that the natural scientist is not given objectivity, he achieves it by the creation and perfection of techniques and instruments that enable him to correct the biases and errors he is liable to.” Just as the scientist’s inquiry is never complete but is constantly being refined, so is the historian’s approach to truth. Ratner attacks the subjectivists’ view that no history which fails to reproduce the past in all its complexity can be considered objective. He believes that the historian must “formulate his postulates rigorously, construct and consider alternative postulates--sets critically yet sympathetically, and forswear identification of the familiar with the true.”

Meadows attacks the differing arguments of the subjectivists by developing an approach based upon the following assumptions: (1) “An event has a hierarchical pattern, each component part being an

<sup>12</sup>Weopold von Ranke, “The Ideal of Universal History,” In *The Varieties of History*, F. Stern, ed. (New York: Meridan Books, 1956), p. 57.

<sup>13</sup>Sidney Ratner, “Presupposition and Objectivity in History,” *Philosophy of Science*, 7, (1940), pp. 499-505.

event with its own constituent elements,” *i.e.*, since knowledge is never based on all the elements in an event, when an element is newly found, it may alter or even nullify previous knowledge, and (2) the consideration that valuational factors enter into the writing of history does not prove that history is a matter of subjective judgment.<sup>14</sup> He says: “The nature of historical enterprise is the uncovering of the relationships of events to one another. In historical analysis the task is the determination of the events upon which a given event is existentially dependent.”<sup>15</sup>

White, Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, defends the objectivists’ view by showing a difference between the process of discovering historical knowledge and the process of justifying a historical interpretation.<sup>16</sup> He says:

Although the historian cannot present the enormous list which would constitute history in the ideal sense, his task remains that of presenting a briefer one which is representative of the enormous list. His selection, in other words, is to be justified on the basis of a connection with the ideal history, analogous to (though not identical with) the way in which a good statistical sample is said to represent an infinite population.<sup>17</sup>

One of the merits of White’s approach is the recognition of a “truth-transcending quality,” *i.e.*, a quality of “memorability” which shows an irreducible judgment or value of what is important to the historian out of a large number of possibilities, all true, that may be offered to explain a past event.

Nagel, in attacking a form of skepticism concerning objectivity in history which holds that no account can ever render “fully reality,” argues that:

Accordingly, since every historical account covers only a few aspects of an occurrence and stops at some point in the past in tracing back its antecedents, every proposed explanation of that occurrence is said to bear the mark of arbitrariness and subjectivity. Part of this objection can be summarily dismissed with the reminder that it is never the task of any inquiry initiated by a

<sup>14</sup>Paul Meadows, “The Scientific Use of Historical Data,” *Philosophy of Science*, 11, (1944), pp. 53-58.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup>Morton White, *Social Thought in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 220-35.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 228.

specific problem to reproduce its subject matter, and that it would be a gratuitous performance were a historian in the pursuit of such a problem to formulate “all that has been said, done, and thought by human beings on the planet since humanity began its long career.” Not only is the bare fact that inquiry is selective no valid ground for doubting the objectivity warranted character of its conclusions; on the contrary, unless an inquiry were selective it would never come near to resolving the specific question by which it is generated.<sup>18</sup>

Melden objects to historical relativism, not because all history is therefore reduced to the level of propaganda, but rather because “...propaganda which purports to be descriptive of matters of fact, is possible only if relativism is false. For in propaganda, the lie, and half-truth, and even the truth are disseminated in order to serve ulterior and often concealed ends. Success, however, rests on a hope that relativism declares to be impossible, namely that those to whom propaganda is addressed can understand and believe that statements made in abstraction from the propagandist’s values or interests. Even propaganda involves communication, and communication between those whose values and interests differ is, for the relativist, impossible.”<sup>19</sup>

Blake, in supporting the objectivists’ position, assumes standards corporately used to determine accuracy as well as intellectual honesty among historians.<sup>20</sup> He states:

Now the relevance of this to the philosopher’s argument is that, when he denies that history is objective, he cannot be claiming that there is no point in their common subject-matter upon which historians agree. In fact his claim is a peculiar one, for the objectivity which he denies is one that in any case could never be obtained. In either form of attack the philosopher is ultimately relying upon the complaint that written history is not objective because it is relative to the mental climate of an era or to the personal bias of the historian, and yet he pursues the attack by showing this state of affairs to be irretrievable. It is thus impossible that an objective history in this sense could be written, and from

<sup>18</sup>Ernest Nagel, “An Evaluation of Historical Relativism,” in R. Nash’s *Ideas of History* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1969), p. 211.

<sup>19</sup>A.I. Melden, “Historical Objectivity, A ‘Noble Dream’?” in R. H. Nash’s *Ideas of History* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 193-205.

<sup>20</sup>Christopher Blake, “Can History be Objective,” *Mind*, 64, (1955), pp. 61-78.

this derives the peculiarity, as well as the force, of the question “Can history be objective?” Standards of appraisal are ruled out of any reply to the question, since being objective is ruled out; for if history cannot be objective as long as it is necessary to select facts, or possible to state them ambiguously or by different locutions, then it never will be.<sup>21</sup>

Schaff argues against presentism (a subjectivist denial of objective truth) in favor of a limited version of perspectivism, which states in part that historical truths are partial and are socially determined, *i.e.*, having their roots in the present and possessing topical value.<sup>22</sup>

Once a historical problem has been selected, Hook believes the crucial point to be whether the end result does justice to the evidence. He says:

It seems to me that the conclusion is inescapable that what makes an historical account, not the truth about what it describes but truer than another, once the historical problem under consideration has been selected, is whether it does justice to the available evidence by means of a method and criteria of relevance, which do not differ fundamentally from the way in which conclusions are confirmed in other fields like medicine or geology, in which hardly anyone raises the question about the possibility of warranted assertions or advocates a position of wholesale skepticism about objective knowledge. Truths in history may be more difficult to obtain in other areas of experience: they are not more relative.<sup>23</sup>

Hexter believes that portion of the subjectivists’ argument which stems from the process of selection to be trivial. He says:

. . . it means that the decisions of historians on what to select from the record of the past for statement or consideration are based wholly on their own experience. This is entirely true and entirely trivial. Every word or action, not wholly reflexive, of everyone is subjective in this sense; and unless such “subjectivity” can be shown to have some special consequences for historians that it does not have for everyone else, the statement is not worth making. If

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>22</sup>Adam Schaff, “Why History is Constantly Rewritten,” *Diogenes*, 30, (1960), pp. 62-74.

<sup>23</sup>Sidney Hook, “Objectivity and Reconstruction in History,” in Sidney Hook’s *Philosophy and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 259.

the subjectivity of historians as such is supposed to have any special consequences it can only be to render them especially prone to bias which the universal subjectivity of men does not render other men prone to. Yet, this would seem to be the opposite of the case, since a great deal of the training of historians is directed precisely to the point of warning them of the possibility (not the necessity) that their experience will sometimes bias their judgments. It would seem that man's universal subjectivity would be less likely to bias the judgments of historians than those of men not alerted to the danger. The notion that the abundance of data and the inevitability of selecting from the abundance necessarily biases every judgment or explanation a historian makes is absurd. By identifying the very process of selection with bias, it renders impossible a distinction between biased and unbiased selection.<sup>24</sup>

### III. Approaches to History.

So much for outlining the positions of the subjectivists and the objectivists. Now I would like to turn to recent attempts to insure as much objectivity as possible. Some of these might be seen as attempts to quantify history and thus to bridge the philosophic gap existing between natural science and history.

The perspective approach to history, as suggested by Mannheim, recognizes two factors, the evidence which the historian must accept and his point of view, *i.e.*, his subjective element in interpretation. This approach holds that there are many perspectives on the same object and that the historian is influenced by his milieu to select one of them in developing his interpretation. The main point to make here is that objectivity in the writing of history, according to the perspective theory, is possible in only a limited and perhaps weakened sense. This theory would not support questions about different points of view in history. Which is more nearly true--the Southern version of Antietam or the Northern? The perspective approach would simply say that, providing that the facts are straight, each side would look at the battle from its own point of view. Walsh believes that the approach holds some meaning for the historian, that within a set of presuppositions, history can be written more or less well.<sup>25</sup> However, it has been criticized by Mandelbaum and others.

<sup>24</sup>Jack H. Hexter, *The History Primer* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971), p. 61.

<sup>25</sup>Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

The correspondence theory of truth in the writing of history was used by Mandelbaum to attack historical relativism. This theory would say that an account is true because it corresponds with the facts, *i.e.*, it “‘concorde’ with the fact with which it purports to deal.” According to Mandelbaum, there is no mystery here, so long as we remember that statements are couched in language and that it is the property of language to refer to non-linguistic entities. And we find that actual historical works all assume this theory of truth: that statements are true when they do refer to real facts, to actual relationships, and they are false in so far as they fail to do so.<sup>26</sup> “Concrete facts” are “nonlinguistic entities,” *i.e.*, “the fact itself leads on to further facts without any intermediation or selection based upon the historian’s valuational attitudes, class interests and the like.”<sup>27</sup>

Blake criticizes this view when he says:

In the correspondence view objectivity is seen as one-to-one correlation between the account and the actual event; but what if the actual event is no longer with us? The kind of picture-making of real events that is history must, then, be a representation. Any prospect of determining the accuracy of the second representation, of making quite sure that the historian has not coloured to his personal taste at the expense of objectivity, seems to be gone. In the correspondence view, the only kind of verification is by direct confrontation, and with history this is out of the question.<sup>28</sup>

The “principle of non-vacuous contrast” was suggested by Blake in describing an attempt to achieve greater objectivity. If history cannot be objective because facts must be selected, then history will never be objective. This argument violates the principle of non-vacuous contrast,

. . . *i.e.*, the general requirement that no predicate apply either to everything or to nothing in its universe of discourse, since such a rule of use would be tantamount to no rule at all. If a question is asked that pivots on a choice between alternatives, in this case between objective and subjective, then the question can have

<sup>26</sup>Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Liveright Pub. Corp., 1938), p. 186.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>28</sup>Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

meaning only if the choice exists. If the choice is *ab initio* ruled out, then the question has no sense.<sup>29</sup>

Believing that the term black would have no meaning unless there were something white, Blake concludes that when the subjectivist asserts that all history is subjective, the statement has no meaning unless one assumes that some history is objective. Dray has criticized this principle by taking it out of the realm of history and by contrasting it with some objective area of knowledge such as found in the “generalizing” sciences.<sup>30</sup> The type of historical writing attempted also makes a difference, *i.e.*, whether it is descriptive or explanatory.

The “ideal observer” approach (or the meta-ethical approach) probably stems from the “moral sense theory and essentially includes the concept that the observer can be defined as a standard for evaluation or comparison. What would the reactions of the ideal observer be? What are some hypothetical characteristics of the ideal observer?” He would know all the facts. He would be disinterested and dispassionate. His evaluative decisions would be consistent. These characteristics are the same for the ideal historian. Presumably this approach would give only one correct evaluation of a given phenomenon. Thus it would lead to objectivity. Kuklick supports this approach, adding:

The ideal observer theory makes explicit what is implicit in ordinary evaluations. My model will then make explicit what it is to make an evaluation in history according to the ideal observer theory. The characteristics of the model will be similar to the characteristics of any plausible theory which attempts to make explicit what it is to make an evaluation in history. It may then be claimed that the ideal observer theory has no more relevance than any other meta-ethical theory. This argument is, however, unsound, for the ideal observer theory is peculiarly applicable to the discussion of human conduct which occurs in the writing of history. It stresses just those facets of evaluative language stressed by historians.<sup>31</sup>

The theory of an objective historical consciousness has been suggested as an alternate to the perspective theory already mentioned.

<sup>29</sup>Blake, *op cit.*, pp. 61-78.

<sup>30</sup>William Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 29-30.

<sup>31</sup>Bruce Kuklick, “The Mind of the Historian,” *History and Theory*, 8, No. 3, (1961), p. 320.

It hopes for a single historical viewpoint based upon a set of “presuppositions” which all historians would accept and which would help develop a historical “consciousness in general,” *i.e.*, a standard way of thinking about history. Walsh has criticized this concept, saying:

. . . it is that, for objective understanding of the kind contemplated, the historian needs are merely standard knowledge of how people do behave in a variety of situations, but further a standard conception of how they ought to behave. He needs to get straight not merely his factual knowledge, but also his moral and metaphysical ideas.<sup>32</sup>

In his article “History as a Rigorous Discipline,” Gert Muller develops the transcendental-analytical theory in which he tries to show that there can be universally valid, formal, and analytical propositions about history, “. . . which are also transcendental and *a priori* propositions with regard to all empirical events. They hold for all actual events as well as for all historical knowledge, irrespective of the constants which may take the place of the relevant variables.”<sup>33</sup> He continues:

Merely individualistic and psychologically-oriented attempts at explanation fail to recognize that it is much easier to understand historical actions by recognizing the frameworks or codes which, as the conditions of the possibility of action, are at the same time the conditions for the possibility of understanding such actions.<sup>34</sup>

Muller then proceeds to develop “founding functions” and a series of symbolic equations and concludes by indicating that he has shown how history can be an analytical science.

In the special field of sport history, there have recently been attempts to achieve objectivity by the use of models emanating particularly from the social sciences. Some sport historians are attempting to use such techniques as game theory, the theory of conflict resolution, role analysis, and econometrics. In efforts primarily directed toward depth of meaning, toward the “why”, toward an understanding of the history of sport, Metcalfe, Glassford,

<sup>32</sup>Walsh, *op cit.*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>33</sup>Sen Muller, “History as a Rigorous Discipline,” *History and Theory*, 6, No. 3, (1967), p. 312.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 307.

Lindsay, and Moriarty<sup>35</sup> have done significant work. Specifically, Metcalfe used the Marxian model based upon the materialistic concept of history to place Canadian sport in a social and economic context. In discussing the place of sport in the “life-style” of mid-nineteenth-century Canadians, Glassford used the Parsonian structural functionalism model as adapted by Loomis. Lindsay used Berkhofer’s behavioral approach model in trying to understand the contributions of W. George Beers. Moriarty’s molar research model for organizational history was discussed as a technique to describe those questions which pertain to organizations. Watkins suggested an “ideal type model”, which he thought held some potential in historical research.

Besides the question of validity raised by social scientists, the heavy use of models has been criticized as a limiting factor in the search for all the facts. One critic believes that one is not doing historical research when one uses such models but, instead, is doing sociological research. Be that as it may, the use of such models should certainly be given its day in court before being accepted or rejected.

#### **IV. Summary.**

Thus far I have discussed the background of the problem of communicating truth in historical inquiry. I have presented two widely divergent views, that of the subjectivists and that of the objectivists. In addition, I have presented some ideas as attempts to achieve greater objectivity. Now, it is appropriate to state some meaning for us in the subject-matter fields represented here today.

I do not believe that history is a science, *i.e.*, an experimental science; hence, I would expect it to have a different standard of objectivity from that of an experimental science. The historian deals with a synthetic recreation of past actuality. Hence, his knowledge of the past is inferential and indirect. The past can never be precisely replicated. It must be reconstructed. It is reconstructed on the basis of evidence which has been selected from pre-suppositions and for the historian’s purpose. It is finally interpreted so that the historian arrives at as much truth of past actuality as is possible with his incomplete knowledge and fallible judgment.

<sup>35</sup>Proceedings, *The Second Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education*, Ottawa, Sport Canada Directorate, Department of Health and Welfare, 1972.

I would argue against the belief of the subjectivists that no history that fails to reproduce the past in all its knowledge can be considered objective. Similarly, I would reject the Hegelian premise that unless everything is known, nothing can be known. The use of these criteria of objectivity would be as disastrous to the physical and biological sciences as to history.

Selectivity, a necessary tool of the historian, does not necessarily indicate bias (the argument here is that he is unwittingly a tool of his culture) unless the historian selects *only* the evidence that will support his contentions. At the same time I would reject von Ranke's position that the facts will speak for themselves. Objectivity must be related to the purpose which the historian has in mind. According to Melden:

It is true enough that the historical significance of an event is a matter which pertains to the effects of that event upon the values and interests of human beings. Further, as these effects unfold, our understanding of the historical significance of an event will change. And it is also true that in the case of a complex historical event or one with complex effects upon the social structure, a variety of points of view are possible in each of which the event is viewed in its causal relations to some type of value or interest. There may be, then, economic, religious, political, and other interpretations of the same events. And each such interpretation is the truth, in the sense that it provides an adequate explanation. . .

We need to know in history, whether the predisposition in favor of one rather than any other hypothesis is the expression of a well-founded generalization, a hasty conclusion, or a genuine bias. And what most of all we need is a humility in which conviction is proportional to the probabilities which our evidence supplies--the recognition that there are other possible explanations and that our own falls far short of explaining, as completely as we are tempted to suppose, the facts with which we are concerned.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, I should like to quote from John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*:

In the case of any person whose judgement is really deserving of

<sup>36</sup>A. I. Melden, "Historical Objectivity, A Noble Dream," *The Journal of General Education*, 7, (1952), pp. 17-24.

confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and to expound to himself, and upon occasion to others, the fallacy of what was fallacious. Because he has felt that the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this; nor is it in the nature of human intellect to become wise in any other manner. The steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it; for being cognizant of all that can, at least obviously, be said against him, and having taken up his position against all gainsayers--knowing that he has sought for objections and difficulties instead of avoiding them, and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter--he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup>John S. Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1956), p. 25.