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Past as Prologue: War in the Modern World

The Trouble with History

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The distinguished historian Sir Michael Howard once admitted that the past, which he aptly referred to as an “inexhaustible storehouse of events,” could be used to “prove anything or its contrary.”¹ Howard’s admission exposes an underlying problem with history that most historians prefer not to acknowledge. The past has indeed served many masters and conflicting purposes over time; its storehouse of events has been used to validate or discredit practically every major theory, precept, or principle. While historians are aware of this, few of them have actually taken the pains to examine what it is about history that permits the past to be used in such contradictory ways.

Their reluctance stems, at least in part, from a fundamental concern that the rigorous scrutiny necessary to arrive at the root of the problem might, at the same time, reveal the limits of history—limits that might in turn undermine the purported value that history and, thus, historians bring to education, especially military education. After all, professional military education, more than other forms, strives to impart a certain level of understanding across a broad array of topics in a relatively short period of time.

Accordingly, history faces stiff competition for curriculum space from other disciplines—the political and behavioral sciences, for instance—all of which claim (more or less dubiously) to be more relevant to the task of preparing military leaders to address contemporary challenges. The issue of relevance, for instance, while a favorite criterion of curriculum developers, is often overplayed. As a general rule, the greater the relevance of any particular knowledge, the shorter its shelf-life. Moreover, the problems that plague history and allow it to be abused are essentially epistemological in nature, and thus afflict the political and behavioral sciences as well.² Therefore, while this article focuses on the troubles underlying history, it should not be construed as an argument for replacing history with another equally troubled discipline. On the contrary, despite the faults that will be discussed here, history has much to offer. But not in the way traditionally thought.

The traditional argument in favor of including history in military education is that the vicarious experience it offers is the “most effective means of teaching war during peace.”³ That argument, however, is untenable. There is no reliable way to determine whether such experience is rooted in a close approximation of the past, or in a historian’s own imagination. Military professionals would benefit much more by engaging in a critical study of the past than by absorbing the anecdotal incidents of history. Accordingly, institutions responsible for educating military professionals should include a brief course in historiography designed to teach students what history is—a body of knowledge that is incomplete, deeply flawed in places, and essentially and inescapably dynamic. Moreover, emphasizing that students must view the past analytically, rather than vicariously, facilitates the development of their critical thinking skills—skills that have an enduring quality and will serve military officers well into the future.

History and the Past

History, contrary to popular assumption, is not the past. The terms are commonly, but incorrectly, used interchangeably. The past, simply put, is *what happened*. History, in contrast, is the historian's *interpretation of what happened*. As Michael Howard stressed, history is merely what "historians write."⁴ Carl Becker, the renowned American historian of the early 20th century, put it somewhat differently when he noted that history is little more than the collective "memory of things said and done."⁵ Thus, history is just like human memory—fallible and prone to selective recall. As such, it is also highly idiosyncratic, and inevitably imperfect.⁶ Hence, as E. H. Carr, a British historian of considerable note, warned, one must "study the historian before studying the facts."⁷

The rub for historians is that the available evidence concerning the past is rarely sufficient, or is too abundant, to permit of only one interpretation. (Of course, one could say the same of the present.) Indeed, historians sometimes resort to educated guesses to fill the gaps left by insufficient evidence. Natalie Zemon Davis, a respected historian at Princeton University and author of the widely acclaimed historical work *Return of Martin Guerre*, used her "historical imagination" to compensate for a lack of evidence about the feelings and motives of her central character, Martin Guerre's wife.⁸ Davis essentially invented what Guerre's wife said and did based on her assessment of the attitudes of other women of that period; Davis remains convinced that her historical imagination, cultivated by extensive immersion in the available sources, led her to a correct interpretation. However, the lack of hard evidence to support her view means that other interpretations are certainly possible. Thus, while historians may be certain of the correctness of their interpretations, those views are not necessarily universal and would not necessarily hold up under cross-examination.

The fundamental problem for historians is that, aside from being able to refer to such demonstrable facts as do exist, they have no *objective* references for determining (beyond a reasonable doubt) to what extent the histories they write either capture or deviate from the past. Put differently, they have nothing resembling the scientific method to aid them in determining whether what they have written is somewhat right, mostly right, or altogether wrong about the past. Quantitative history, intellectual history, "history from below," and oral history, for example, each employ different methods. Yet none of those procedures can lay claim to the reliability of the scientific method—that is, developing a question or a hypothesis, conducting experiments to test it, revising the original hypothesis, then conducting further experiments to confirm the revised hypothesis, and finally reaching a conclusion.

Although historians may begin their research with a question or hypothesis, they cannot conduct the various experiments necessary to determine whether the main conclusions they have drawn about what happened are in fact valid.⁹ They cannot duplicate Pickett's charge at the battle of Gettysburg with all the variables exactly as they were, for instance, and then change a few of them to determine whether the Confederate assault might have succeeded under different circumstances: earlier or later in the day, perhaps, or further to the left, or more to the right.¹⁰ Nor can they isolate the variables in a past event for closer study in the same way scientists—chemists, for example—can separate the key elements in a compound. Removing all the elements surrounding Pickett's charge does not make the charge any easier to understand. In fact, without the historical context, the past is likely to remain essentially mute, unable to tell us much about itself. We might not be able to recognize Pickett's charge itself as a charge.

To be sure, historians do have recourse to certain *subjective* measures—such as their abundant reviews of each other's books and access to the advice of other, perhaps more accomplished, historians—to aid them in capturing the past. However, subjective measures tend merely to reinforce a veritable Cartesian circle of interpretation: historians write what they do based in part on the fragments of the past, but how they see those fragments is largely influenced by knowledge they have gained in the present, including the works of other historians who may indeed only be offering their best guesses as to what those fragments mean. This proved to be the case with historical interpretations of military thinking

before the First World War; historians tended to view that era's military theory and doctrine through a "lens colored red by the seemingly prolonged and futile slaughter of 1914–18," and thus reinforced one another in a series of misunderstandings.¹¹ In addition, the impact of recent events or experiences sometimes causes historians to focus on factors and values that are quite different from what the historical actors had in mind—perhaps giving those factors and values an artificial existence. Hence, the present, as historian Christopher Bassford once noted, serves as "prologue" to the past.¹² As Carl Becker explained, "Left to themselves, the facts do not speak. . . . [F]or all practical purposes there is no fact until someone affirms it."¹³ And affirming a fact, of course, shapes how it is understood. Thus, historians tend to see in the past what they have been trained to see, or—for those inclined to buck convention (which requires a certain training of its own)—what they want to see. Neither tendency is necessarily wrong. Yet neither is necessarily right, either.¹⁴

The problem is not so much that history is a "fable agreed upon," as Napoleon reportedly said, but that, except for those accounts that blatantly contradict or disregard the available facts, the reader cannot determine *objectively* which history is more accurate than another. Ultimately, historical truth, like beauty, remains in the eye of the beholder.

History and Historical Truth

For their part, historians have long struggled to overcome the lack of objective references or methodologies in their craft. German historians of the 19th century thought they could arrive at a more "complete Truth" by insinuating the historian's own intellect or spirit (*Geist*) into historical writing.¹⁵ Leopold von Ranke, considered by some to be the father of modern history, said that the historian's spirit needed to become one with the historical spirit that "dwells within the sources."¹⁶ Historians of the German General Staff took this approach to a self-serving extreme, claiming that their professional training gave them a special insight, an intuitive feel or sense (*Takt*) for the past.¹⁷ Unfortunately, they sometimes used that insight to rewrite history in ways that supported their own doctrinal predilections. More recently, a historian by the name of Terence Zuber, who has had experience in the *Bundeswehr*, has resorted to a similar claim of special insight as a product of his military experience to support his reinterpretation of the Schlieffen plan. Other modern-day historians, such as Natalie Zemon Davis, call it using the historian's imagination, which at root differs little from Ranke's approach. Ironically, then, the historian's claim of historical truth often rests on no firmer a foundation than his or her imagination. While imagination may play an important role in human understanding, it can be difficult to distinguish from mere wishful thinking.

Another school of thought goes so far as to claim that historians can overcome the ineluctable shortcomings of subjective interpretation by wholly embracing subjectivism itself. Its central assumption is that by arriving at "the sum total of all possible subjectivities," historians can achieve an objective interpretation of the past.¹⁸ However, this approach overlooks the reality that an infinite number of subjective interpretations of the past are possible; we would need an eternity to accumulate all of them, and another eternity to read and understand them. Moreover, this view implies that we must know everything before we can know anything, which—in an epistemological sense—is patently absurd.¹⁹ Even if we could amass all subjective interpretations of the past, our subsequent *interpretation of those interpretations* would ultimately—and quite paradoxically—be a subjective one.

Another approach, suggested by historian Peter Novick, author of *That Noble Dream*, recommends that historians abandon the idea of historical truth, or objectivity, altogether and turn instead to plausibility.²⁰ This view resembles one recently put forward by John Gaddis, namely, that historical interpretation should try to reach "a consensus of rational opinion over the widest possible field."²¹ Plausibility is a prerequisite to achieving consensus. However, these comparable solutions merely put history on par with historical fiction. Fiction writers, especially authors of historical fiction, such as

Michael Shaara who wrote *Killer Angels* and other novels about the Civil War, can also lay claim to plausibility. Shaara's depiction of Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg is at least plausible, and it is largely based on the existing historical literature—the prevailing scholarly consensus—about Lee. Thus, without an objective standard of some sort, plausibility hardly separates history from popular fiction.

Even if historians could find a way to write objective history, the history they would be able to write would still be incomplete. Their ability to write about the past depends on what is or can be known about the past, and that changes as access to the past changes and as our ways of understanding change. Newly opened archives permit historians to rewrite history with a more informed perspective. However, that perspective is not necessarily more complete, because new evidence tends to raise new questions, new doubts. Also, the history considered true or credible by one generation is sometimes completely overturned or rewritten by a later one equipped with different frames of reference or ways of understanding. Military history once focused almost exclusively on military factors, overlooking the roles of culture, politics, and economics, for instance. Now, however, a new generation of historians has made military history more comprehensive, including the influence of such cultural factors as race and gender. Thus, history—being what historians write—is dynamic rather than static; it changes as our knowledge of the past changes, and it changes as our ways of understanding change.²²

Yet these changes do not necessarily move history forward. History is not inherently self-corrective, because, as every author knows, revisions do not always make a thing better. Practically everything of significance that Azar Gat's book *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* offers as new or original concerning Clausewitz's thinking was already said by Peter Paret in his work *Clausewitz and the State*, though one actually has to read Paret's book to know that.²³ Moreover, history is often revised for the sake of fame, if not fortune, or even for the sake of some rather more sinister motives: the "Holocaust-denial" literature comes to mind as perhaps the most egregious example.²⁴ Finally, so-called "corrected" history may arrive, like the proverbial Owl of Minerva, too late to prevent major harm to those who desire—or are required—to learn from the past. The claim that history will eventually "get it right" is thus of little comfort, for it is nigh impossible to tell when the "right" history has come, and the "wrong" has left.

While some historians have made substantial, even ground-breaking, contributions to our knowledge of the past, none of those contributions has ever been complete enough, or so free of error, as to amount to the final word on a subject, despite many a publisher's claim to the contrary. For instance, a number of historical controversies, some centuries old, still remain unresolved. As Howard reminds us, such controversies usually end because "the participants are tired of them rather than because a consensus has been reached on which all can agree and which provides a firm platform for the proclamation of reliable conclusions."²⁵ As a case in point, historian Terence Zuber, mentioned earlier, recently cast some doubt on a number of long-held beliefs about Germany's so-called Schlieffen plan of 1914.²⁶ Zuber maintains that the Schlieffen plan was never intended as an actual war plan, and that it was merely a ruse to dupe the German parliament into increasing the budget for the Kaiser's army.²⁷ While Zuber exposes some of the flaws in Gerhard Ritter's critique of the Schlieffen plan, which has long stood as the accepted view, there is simply no compelling evidence to support Zuber's own contention.²⁸ Zuber recklessly extends his argument too far and, when called out by other historians to present his evidence, generally resorts to the "special insight" his military training has given him, as if that were all the evidence needed. To be sure, our understanding of the Schlieffen plan, particularly as it is currently taught in the major institutions responsible for military education, requires revision. Nonetheless, we should not fully accept Zuber's view, unless he produces some compelling evidence.

Unfortunately, the lack of objective measures for historians means that the body of literature known as history only grows larger, with good and bad contributions often sitting side-by-side on library bookshelves.²⁹ So, *caveat lector* (let the reader beware).

Implications for Military Professionals

Traditionally, history's importance to professional military education rested on the assumption that it could "exercise and develop" the "professional judgment" of officers through the analysis and critique of campaigns and battles of the past.³⁰ Since soldiers have few means of practicing their craft during peacetime, so the reasoning went, the reading of history offered them a way to acquire experience of war during times of peace.³¹ It was also largely assumed that this experience, though vicarious, could teach the military professional the "lessons" of the past. The military theorist Sir Basil Liddell Hart held this view, explaining that history could show the "right direction" to take, even if it could not give "detailed information about the road conditions."³² More recently, some institutions responsible for educating military professionals have added the goal of "historical consciousness" or "historical mindedness"—meaning an awareness of how change takes place over time and an appreciation for the ways in which political, social, and economic forces influence people and events.

The passage below, drawn from an essay by General John Galvin, reveals the importance attributed to vicarious experience in the education of military professionals:

The reader swelters with Lawrence in the burning Arabian sands and learns the brutality and fluidity of guerrilla warfare. He gasps at Chandler's description of the genius Napoleon arising at midnight to dictate his orders through the night to set the stage for the battle. He hammers at Lee's Army of Northern Virginia with Grant's memoirs; overcomes the terror of the Burmese jungle and turns defeat into victory with Slim; unravels the conceptual threads of battle and maneuver with Delbrück; relates war to nuclear weapons to politics with Brodie; freezes in Korea with Marshall at the river and the gauntlet; and cries out with MacDonald at the inanities of the Kall trail before Schmidt.

In the end he emerges as a veteran—more inured to the shock of the unexpected, better prepared to weigh the consequences of critical decisions, and imbued with the human drama breaking upon leaders and led in their march to destiny. He knows the fine line between foolhardiness and courage, between abstinence and conviction, between disgrace and glory. He has had a conversation with the soldiers of all time and has shared their lives and thoughts. His judgment is sharpened, and he is better prepared to lead.³³

What is often overlooked by such claims is that this vicarious experience, already highly dependent upon one's imaginative powers, derives not from the past itself, but from a historian's idiosyncratic and imperfect interpretation of the past—a dubious foundation, indeed. Although historian David Chandler was an acclaimed expert on Napoleon, his portrayal of Bonaparte's purported genius in *The Campaigns of Napoleon* is only one of many.³⁴ Any reader would at least want to consider the views of Owen Connelly, Geoffrey Ellis, and Russell Weigley as well.³⁵ S. L. A. Marshall's reports of combat actions in Korea were not based on his own eyewitness accounts, but derived mostly from selective interviews conducted after the fact; moreover, they were written not with accuracy in mind, but for the express purpose of creating a dramatic effect.³⁶ Hans Delbrück's dichotomy of battle and maneuver proved a false one. He actually made more significant contributions in the area of historical criticism, by emphasizing rigorous fact and source checking (*Sachkritik* and *Wortkritik*)—an emphasis that helped sweep away the "underbrush of legend" that generally surrounded the history of his day.³⁷ The memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant and Sir William Slim, though remarkably captivating, are ultimately no more reliable than human memory; both make use of facts, be they letters, dispatches, or something else.³⁸ Yet, in the reconstruction—the narrative of events—memory fills in the gaps, and the gaps may be quite significant indeed. Hence, the vicarious experience, lessons, and historical consciousness that history is believed to provide may be based more on fiction than fact.

Even if history were less idiosyncratic and more objective, drawing lessons or insights from the past or building a historical consciousness would still remain potentially dangerous enterprises. Each event in the past's "inexhaustible storehouse of events" was caused by a set of unique circumstances that are never exactly replicated, and that historians can never fully capture. The lessons and awareness drawn from those circumstances would not necessarily prove valid in other situations. Consequently, the only lessons that history can provide are the kind that do not rise above the level of common sense: things sometimes happen that are unforeseen, be alert, be careful, and choose wisely. Similarly, the historical consciousness it offers may be more false than true.

History, Historians, and Military Professionals

Does all this mean that there is no role for history or historians in professional military education? Quite the contrary. History's saving grace is the saving grace of the humanities in general. Which is to say it can help students understand that beyond the well-balanced world of simple mathematics—where both sides of an equation remain equal—definitive answers are not always possible. Some answers must await more information, whenever it may come, and some answers may never be known. In the world of the humanities, as with most of the practical world, it is often necessary to make decisions based on incomplete information, with the understanding that the answer is tentative and may be completely wrong. This realization is an important one for those on the path to higher education.

The role that history should serve in professional military education is not that of a foundation for experiencing war vicariously, but as a way to develop higher-level critical thinking skills. The objective of professional military education should not be to recreate or relive past battles (for that is simply to indulge in fantasizing), but to move students along a progression from simple knowledge of facts to higher levels of comprehension. One model of such progression is the taxonomy of cognitive outcomes developed nearly 50 years ago by Benjamin Bloom and others, shown at Figure 1.³⁹ The model is not without its shortcomings, regarded as too scientific by some and not scientific enough by others. Yet, the point is that it is a model, and models help give expression to potential outcomes or goals by providing a conceptual structure.

It is worth noting that under Bloom's model, the final two stages—which some experts consider of equal difficulty—force the student to employ the very different but complementary skills of creative and critical thinking. The last, in particular, requires the ability to acknowledge when something cannot be fully known, and why. The goal of progressing through the taxonomy is to build an appreciation for the limits of rational thought. Because it furthers that appreciation, history—like the other branches of the humanities—offers something of truly incontrovertible and, indeed, lasting value, especially for military professionals learning about the complexities of strategy.

Like any model, however, Bloom's taxonomy should not be allowed to become the new orthodoxy, the institutional straitjacket into which all methods of teaching must fit. Indeed, in order to permit progress toward the very goals it articulates, Bloom's taxonomy must also be subjected to rigorous critical analysis. Research into, and examination of, other models must therefore be supported.

Historians thus perform a valuable service in education in general, and professional military education in particular, by facilitating the development of critical and creative thinking skills, that is, by equipping students to examine historical interpretations rigorously and then by holding them to a high standard when developing their own, all the while stressing that definitive answers may forever remain out of reach. Taking the historian out of history amounts to taking interpretation out of the past, leaving the reader with little more than sterile chronicles of names, dates, and events—a solution that would likely please neither the person who chronicles the events nor the person who must read about them. For their part, historians are after what Jack Hexter, one of the more famous and controversial of historians, once

called that “elusive entity—the Truth.”⁴⁰ They want to understand what really happened, whether or not it is actually possible to do so, and then to explain why it happened. Institutions of higher learning need professionals possessed of just such a “determination to find things out,” whether they succeed or not.⁴¹ Thus, the most valuable contribution that history and historians can make—and why they should remain integral to higher education—is that they attempt to understand things that lie outside the realm of certainty. Their answers may be flawed, but it would be unsatisfactory for the human species to limit itself to knowing only those things that can be verified by the scientific method.

Level	Definition	Sample Verbs	Sample Behaviors
<i>Knowledge</i>	Student recalls or recognizes information, ideas, and principles in the approximate form in which they were learned.	Write List Label Name State Define	The student will define the six levels of Bloom’s taxonomy of the cognitive domain.
<i>Comprehension</i>	Student translates, comprehends, or interprets information based on prior learning.	Explain Summarize Paraphrase Describe Illustrate	The student will explain the purpose of Bloom’s taxonomy of the cognitive domain.
<i>Application</i>	Student selects, transfers, and uses data and principles to complete a problem or task with a minimum of direction.	Use Compute Solve Demonstrate Apply Construct	The student will write an instructional objective for each level of Bloom’s taxonomy.
<i>Analysis</i>	Student distinguishes, classifies, and relates the assumptions, hypotheses, evidence, or structure of a statement or question.	Analyze Categorize Compare Contrast Separate	The student will compare and contrast the cognitive and affective domains.
<i>Synthesis</i>	Student originates, integrates, and combines ideas into a product, plan, or proposal that is new to him or her.	Create Design Hypothesize Invent Develop	The student will design a classification scheme for writing educational objectives that combines the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.
<i>Evaluation</i>	Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria.	Judge Recommend Critique Justify	The student will judge the effectiveness of writing objectives using Bloom’s taxonomy.

Figure 1. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Outcomes.

Similarly, professional military education must equip students to understand the difference between historical reality (which, like the reality of the present, we may never fully know) and attempts to describe it. It must refrain from reinforcing the tendency among military students to regard history as, in Liddell Hart’s term, a “sentimental treasure.”⁴² Military professionals are better served by learning to be critical

of the history that historians write, by building a habit of rigorously scrutinizing facts and sources, and of detecting biases and specious arguments, and by developing an eye for penetrating the myths that surround the past. They should regard the history they read, as Gaddis advises, as something between art and science.⁴³ They must learn that a prerequisite to building a strong argument is the ability to recognize a weak one.

To be sure, military professionals will find this difficult to do because throughout their careers they have been searching for commonalities—parallels and patterns—that permit them to accumulate knowledge and arrange it in a way that makes it available for application later. They have not necessarily been looking for formulae, but their emphasis has been on accumulating and distilling knowledge rather than analyzing and evaluating it. They have been sorting through vast amounts of data seeking objective truths—or signposts that point out the “right direction,” as Liddell Hart mentioned—that they can trust to guide them in the future. However, they need to remember that the signposts they extract from history may be valid only for a landscape that differs significantly from their own in terms of time, space, and local inhabitants.

As military professionals begin to move through Bloom’s taxonomy, they will eventually come to understand the limits of history. As they do so, history will fall from the pedestal on which they had once placed it. After all, they once thought history and the past were the same. Yet, in the long run, the value of history as a means to help them move toward more sophisticated levels of understanding will grow. With a little patience and persistence, they may even write a history of their own.

NOTES

1. Michael Howard, “‘The Lessons of History’: An Inaugural Lecture given in the University of Oxford, March 1981,” in *The Lessons of History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1991), p. 11.
2. The same can also be said of the political and social sciences. Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2d ed.; Chicago: Univ. Press of Chicago, 1970) reveals how rarely the sciences act like sciences.
3. Attributed to Count Helmuth von Moltke (1800–1891), <http://cbnet/orgs/dnss/history/core.htm>.
4. Howard, “Lessons,” p. 11.
5. Carl L. Becker, “What is Evidence? The RelativistView—‘Everyman His Own Historian,’” in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 7.
6. Even Sir Michael Howard and Peter Paret, esteemed historians both, committed errors regarding one of the centerpieces of their work together, Carl von Clausewitz. They got Clausewitz’s middle name wrong. Howard had it as “Maria”—which was similar to the name of Clausewitz’s wife, Marie; see Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), p. 6. Paret came closer; he had it as Philipp Gottlieb, an error also repeated by Azar Gat, who recorded it as Philip Gottlieb. See Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), p. 14; and Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 171. However, on Clausewitz’s tombstone, which presumably is based on his birth records, the name appears as Philipp Gottfried. See <http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/FAQs.html#Name>. On the other hand, the tombstone might be wrong, which only reinforces the point about history’s fallibility.
7. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (2d ed.; London: Palgrave, 1987), p. 30.
8. Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983). Robert Finlay, “The Refashioning of Martin Guerre,” *American Historical Review*, 93 (June 1988), 553–71, criticizes Natalie Davis for making the people of the past say and do things that are not supported by the sources. Davis responds in, “On the Lame,” *American Historical Review*, 93 (June 1988), 572–603. For another example of historical invention, see Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), which assigns historical significance to an event—a massacre of cats—for which no evidence actually exists. Harold Mah, “Suppressing the Text: The Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton’s Great Cat Massacre,” *History Workshop Journal*, 31 (Spring 1991), 1–20, critiques Darnton. Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), pp. 212–14, discusses the works of both Davis and Darnton.
9. Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (Princeton, N.J.: Marcus Wiener, 1994), pp. 47–48, discusses the differences between the scientific method and the method of the historian.
10. Carol Reardon, *Pickett’s Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1997).
11. Antulio J. Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers before the Great War* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2001), pp. 7–8.
12. Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815–1945* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 7.
13. Becker, “What is Evidence?” p. 19.
14. Although dissimilar in many regards, the post-structuralist theories of Michel Foucault, the deconstructionist notions of Jacques Derrida, and Dominick LaCapra’s techniques of literary criticism all have one thing in common—they attack some very basic assumptions about what we know and how certain we are about knowing it. To be sure, these theorists often wrap themselves in impenetrable jargon and make some seemingly absurd claims about all knowledge being reducible to a text. Yet, one of postmodernism’s central arguments—that the past “as it

actually was” is essentially irrecoverable and, therefore, unknowable—rings as true as Michael Howard’s observation that history is merely what historians write. The postmodernists go one step further, maintaining that historical writing itself, because it involves the personal interpretation of the historian and is therefore an inevitably imperfect rendering of the past, is closer to fiction than nonfiction. Indeed, they have a point. Compare: Frank Ankersmit, “Historiography and Postmodernism,” *History and Theory*, 28 (May 1989), 137–53; Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991); and Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1996). Indeed, in one sense, the post-structuralists, deconstructionists, and literary critics seem to have hoisted themselves on their own petards. One of the central premises of their argument—that the meaning of texts emerges independent of authorial intent—gives rise to a philosophical contradiction. After all, if a text can be interpreted in any way the reader desires without regard to authorial intent, then what would prevent historians from reading the texts of the postmodernists in any way that we choose, even in ways that reinforce the validity of historical writing? George G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1997) and Evans, *In Defense of History*, point out the contradiction and assert that it constitutes a basis for declaring victory. Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists* (Paddington, Australia: Macleay, 1994).

15. German historians deliberately rejected the more empirically based methods of their French and British counterparts which they considered woefully insufficient. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), pp. 183–91; and George G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 63–89.

16. See Leopold von Ranke, *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History*, ed. Roger Wines (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1981), p. 21; and Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), esp. pp. 10–11.

17. For more detail on the German general staff’s approach to history, see Antulio J. Echevarria II, “Heroic History and Vicarious War: Nineteenth-Century German Military History Writing,” *The Historian*, 59 (Spring 1997), 573–90.

18. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, “Epilogue: What is History Now?” in *What is History Now?*, ed. David Cannadine (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 155.

19. David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 65ff, makes this point.

20. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

21. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), p. 38.

22. This is essentially the point of R. G. Collingwood’s brilliant work, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956).

23. Compare Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, and Gat, *Origins of Military Thought*; the exception might be Gat’s last chapter, which discusses the dating of Clausewitz’s undated preface note to *On War*.

24. Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

25. As Thomas Kuhn maintains, the same holds true for science, where new paradigms do not necessarily displace the old ones until the old scientists die off. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. William Lamont, ed., *Historical Controversies and Historians* (London: University College London, 1998), discusses the state of a number of historical controversies. Howard, “Lessons,” p. 11.

26. Terence Zuber, “The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered,” *War in History*, 6 (July 1999), 262–305.

27. To trace the debate, see: Terence Zuber, “Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan,” *War in History*, 8 (November 2001), 468–76; Terence Holmes, “The Real Thing: A Reply to Terence Zuber’s ‘Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan,’” *War in History*, 9 (January 2002), 111–20; Zuber, “Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan—Again,” *War in History*, 10 (January 2003), 92–101; Robert T. Foley, “The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan,” *War in History*, 10 (April 2003), 222–32; Holmes, “Asking Schlieffen: A Further Reply to Terence Zuber,” *War in History*, 10 (September 2003), 464–79; and Zuber, “The Schlieffen Plan Was an Orphan,” *War in History*, 11 (April 2004), 220–25.

28. Gerhard Ritter, *Der Schlieffenplan: Kritik eines Mythos* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1956); trans. into English as *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (New York: Praeger, 1958); see also his *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland*, 4 Vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1954–64).

29. Zuber’s book was, incidentally, published by Oxford University Press; even respected publishing houses make mistakes. Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003).

30. This is a long-standing, traditional view; it was the role assigned to history at the Berlin *Kriegsakademie*, for example, which in some ways served as a model for other military schools. See “Ueber Militär-Bildung und Wissenschaft,” *Beiheft zum Militär-Wochenblatt*, No. 1 (1873), pp. 1–37.

31. See, for example, the role of history as discussed on the following US Army War College websites:

<http://cbnet/orgs/dnss/history/core.htm>; http://cbnet/orgs/dnss/history/why_read.htm; <http://cbnet/orgs/dnss/history/history.htm>.

32. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Why Don’t We Learn from History?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1971), p. 15. Liddell Hart, of course, believed that history—if free of prejudice and equipped with powers of discernment and proportion—could get at the Truth, and this should always be its goal, even if that goal is not completely attainable.

33. “Why Read Military History,” http://cbnet/orgs/dnss/history/why_read.htm.

34. David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (London: Macmillan, 1965).

35. Owen Connelly, *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon’s Military Campaigns* (Willmington, Del.: Scholarly Resource, 1984); Geoffrey Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991); and Russell Weigley, *The Age of Battles* (London: Pimlico, 1991). These works only scratch the surface, of course. The debate over Napoleon’s purported genius has been raging since the early 19th century.

36. S. L. A. Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet: Defeat of the Eighth Army by Chinese Communist Forces, November 1950, in the Battle of Chongchon River, Korea* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1953); John Whiteclay Chambers II, “S. L. A. Marshall’s *Men Against Fire*: New Evidence Regarding Fire Ratios,” *Parameters*, 33 (Autumn 2003), 113–21.

37. Gordon A. Craig, “Delbrück: The Military Historian,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986), p. 326; Arden Bucholz, *Hans Delbrück and the German Military Establishment: War Images in Conflict* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1985).

38. E. B. Long, ed., *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982); Sir William Slim, *Defeat into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942–1945* (New York: Cooper, 2000).

39. The taxonomy provides a common terminology for educators to use when describing various levels of learning. For more detailed explanations, see William H. Jackson, “Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Outcomes” (1998),

<http://internet.cybermesa.com/~bjackson/Papers/Bloom.htm>; and B. Bloom, et al., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*, <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/cogsys/bloom.html>.

40. J. H. Hexter, "The Historian and His Day," *Reappraisals in History* (Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1962), p. 4.
41. Gaddis, *Landscape*, p. 15.
42. Hart, *Why Don't We Learn from History?*, pp. 17ff.
43. Gaddis, *Landscape*, p. 18.