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Impartiality, Objectivity, and Political Engagement in Nineteenth-Century French Historiography: Monod and the Dreyfus Affair

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ABSTRACT

At the end of 1897, the French historian Gabriel Monod was one of the first intellectuals and the first academic to publicly engage in the case of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army officer condemned for high treason. Using his technical skills in paleography, Monod had concluded that Dreyfus could not be the author of the single exhibit and therefore had to be innocent. This article traces the connections between Monod's public engagement and his ideas about the purpose, methods, and epistemology of history, and historical impartiality in particular. It will be shown that in late nineteenth-century French historiography, the virtue of impartiality, which traditionally is conceived of as taking a stance "above the parties," was strongly connected with methodological procedures, technical skills, and source criticism—features associated with the newer epistemic virtue of objectivity. Furthermore, the article argues that historians' epistemic virtues were embedded in a broader ethos that informed their behavior both inside the professional context and in the world outside academia. This entanglement between the epistemic and the ethical will provide the basis for explaining Monod's conduct during the Dreyfus affair and the ways his engagement caused him, in turn, to rethink his epistemics. In so doing, the article contributes to recent debates among historians of historiography on scholarly practices and epistemic virtues by introducing the dimension of ethical and sociopolitical situatedness.

 n November 5, 1897, the French historian Gabriel Monod (1844–1912) decided that he couldn't keep silent anymore on a matter that had been haunting him for over two years—the question of the guilt or innocence of Alfred Dreyfus, the French army officer of Alsatian-Jewish descent who had been charged

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with high treason.¹ Dreyfus was condemned at the end of 1894 to degradation and life-long deportation to French Guyana on the basis of doubtful evidence and a secret dossier. Doubts regarding Dreyfus's guilt had been existed from the moment he declared his innocence during the humiliating public degradation ceremony. However, only by the end of 1896 the case had become an affair, when Dreyfus's condemnation was denounced as a judicial error inspired by anti-Semitism and rumors began to circulate about the hush-hush policy in the war ministry. After another year, Monod sent an open letter to several newspapers announcing that he was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence, that this conviction was based on carefully undertaken research into the dossier, and that he now felt forced by the gossiping press to make public his opinion.²

By doing so, he became the first academic and one of the first intellectuals to pronounce on the question, anticipating even Émile Zola, who published his "J'accuse" in January 1898. The situation in which Monod found himself and the dilemmas he had to face as a result resemble somewhat those that Carlo Ginzburg experienced during the trial of his friend Adriano Sofri.³ In the years that followed Monod's first intervention, the affair laid bare deep-rooted ideological and religious divisions in French society. The affair gave birth to the species of the French public intellectual, a "man of the cultural world, creator or mediator, who is put in the situation of the politician."⁴ Among the intellectuals actively participating in the affair, professional historians played a key role, not only because they had a prominent position in French society, but also because the question of Dreyfus's guilt depended on the identification of handwriting, a technical issue for which they were professionally trained. And among those historians, Monod, whose involvement in the affair is the subject of this essay, was one of the most prominent.

Monod is not selected just for his early commitment; he was one of the main organizers of the historical profession at the end of the nineteenth century, for which his methodological and epistemological work was vital. It also affected his engagement in the Dreyfus affair, since he transposed to the juridical and political domain historians' technical practices, methodological principles, and epistemic virtues. While Mo-

1. This article was written during my stay as a visiting postdoctoral fellow at the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin with a grant from the Distinguished Women Scientists Fund of the Dutch Network of Women Professors. I wish to thank the members of Department II of the MPIWG, and in particular Lorraine Daston, for their comments on earlier versions of the article.

2. Gabriel Monod, "Lettre au directeur du *Temps*, 5 novembre 1897," *Le Temps*, November 6, 1897.

3. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentieth-Century Mis-carriage of Justice*, trans. Antony Shugaar (London: Verso, 2002).

4. Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France: De l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, Tempus (Paris: Perrin, 2004), 15. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

nod became a major representative of the Dreyfusard party, he nevertheless constantly referred to the “impartiality” he had learned to cultivate in historical research. The quandary he thus found himself in, between keeping up historians’ impartiality and the inevitability of choosing sides, urged him to rethink his ideas on doing professional history during the last decade of his life. And, as will become clear, whereas Ginzburg finally came to make a sharp distinction between the truth that is pursued by judges and historians, Monod chose a very different solution. This essay will show how his ideas regarding the purpose and methods of historical work and the epistemic virtues required for this work predisposed him to his engagement in the Dreyfus affair, and how, in turn, this engagement led him to question and reformulate his scholarly principles.

Thus, the essay contributes to recent research in the history of the humanities on scholarly practices and self-conceptions or *personae*.⁵ These approaches have been developed in order to go beyond the study of the (mainly written) outcomes of the humanities by shifting the attention to the persons that produce them and the activities they undertake. In this context, the concept of “epistemic virtues” has been borrowed from the domain of epistemology and adapted in order to study the norms of what counted as good scholarship in certain times and places. It is employed to describe the personal dispositions of scholars conducive to certain kinds of behavior that are deemed necessary to arrive at adequate scholarly results.⁶ Part of the appeal of the concept of epistemic virtues in studying the historiography of the nineteenth century lies in the fact that it is, in a sense, an actor’s category. In this age of professionalization, and sometimes even “scientification,” of the historical discipline, questions concerning what it would take to be a good historian, that is, about the scholarly persona, became acute. They were often phrased in the virtue language that lay at hand for these scholars of bourgeois descent.⁷ The fact that this virtue language appears both in the professional domain of scholarship and in the wider ethical context of society allows us to also study the ways scholarship is embedded in and affected by this wider context.

5. Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Ian Hunter, eds., *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “Leopold Ranke’s Archival Turn: Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography,” *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 3 (2008): 425–53; Philipp Müller, “Geschichte machen: Überlegungen zu lokal-spezifischen Praktiken in der Geschichtswissenschaft und ihrer epistemischen Bedeutung im 19. Jahrhundert; Ein Literaturbericht,” *Historische Anthropologie* 12, no. 3 (2004): 415–33; Herman Paul, “What Is a Scholarly Persona? Ten Theses on Virtues, Skills, and Desires,” *History and Theory* 53, no. 3 (2014): 348–71.

6. Herman Paul, “Performing History: How Historical Scholarship Is Shaped by Epistemic Virtues,” *History and Theory* 50, no. 1 (2011): 1–19.

7. Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, eds., *Der bürgerliche Werthimmel: Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

Previous research in this direction (i.e., into personae and epistemic virtues) has focused mainly on German scholarship.⁸ The reason for this is Germany's reputation as the apex of humanities scholarship in the nineteenth century, as it was in this country that most practices and institutions that would become standard, such as the research seminar, were first developed. This leads to the question of what happens if this perspective is applied to other national contexts. If epistemic virtues offer a fruitful research perspective for studying the situatedness of historical scholarship, the different positions historians take within different (national) societies and their public interventions have to be taken into account. By applying this perspective to the French situation, the possibilities for widening it will be explored.

The principal aim of this article is to provide a closer look on which virtues were valued in the historical profession in France at the end of the nineteenth century, what was understood by them, how they were embedded in a broader ethos, and how they led to particular behaviors and opinions both inside and outside the professional context. In their seminal study *Objectivity*, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison argue that objectivity—that is, the regulative ideal of scientific investigation without disturbing interference by the subject of the investigator—was established as a new scientific norm in the nineteenth century and led to a procedural epistemology, in which methodological prescriptions were deemed to warrant the suppression of the subjective.⁹ In a more recent article, Daston expands this idea to the history of historiography, where she distinguishes between the traditional judicial virtue of impartiality and the newer virtue of objectivity, which in the second half of the nineteenth century came to coexist with the former. Whereas impartiality stood for the capacity of historians to righteously judge on the past by leaving behind one's own prejudices and taking a stance “above the parties,” objectivity would be warranted by the application of a set of techniques and methodological procedures to the investigated object, the possible prejudices of the historian notwithstanding.¹⁰ This explains, according to Daston, the paradoxical (at first sight) fact that certain historians such as Heinrich von Treitschke and Heinrich von Sybel could defend the most nationalistic viewpoints in their work, while claiming to be strictly objective at the same time. Since objectivity was about procedures and methods, and not about requirements on the side of the historian, it could be combined without problems with the most severe kind of partiality.

8. A notable exception pertains to a Belgium case: Jo Tollebeek, *Fredericq & Zonen: Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008).

9. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

10. Lorraine Daston, “Objectivity and Impartiality: Epistemic Virtues in the Humanities,” in *The Making of the Humanities*, vol. 3, *The Modern Humanities*, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 27–41.

In this article I argue that the distinction between objectivity and impartiality that enables their opposition does not apply to the French situation. Rather, the words *impartiality* and *objectivity* appear to be used interchangeably sometimes, but most often objectivity is conceived as an attitude of self restraint that is a precondition for attaining a position of impartiality. This excludes the possibility of an opposition between the two epistemic virtues. Objectivity and impartiality, if conceptually distinguished at all, refer to the different levels of means and ends. Furthermore, it will be shown that the epistemic virtues of the historian greatly correspond to his moral dispositions, to the extent that they cannot be disentangled from the ethical contexts the historian lives in—both the internal academic environment of his professional life and the extra-academic social world. In particular, it has to be taken into account that in late nineteenth-century France, academically trained historians were state servants who operated in a republican regime that considered history the “queen discipline” for all levels of school education. French historians—also those holding the highest positions in the academic hierarchy—wrote textbooks for schools and were consulted on matters of educational programs or public commemorations.¹¹ They in turn considered themselves active contributors to public debate. This entanglement or overlap between domains will provide the basis for explaining Monod’s conduct during the Dreyfus affair and how his sociopolitical commitment and ethical concerns caused him to rethink his epistemics.

The first section of this article is devoted to Monod’s contributions to the shaping of the historical profession in France from the end of the 1860s onward. His ideas on the importance of objectivity/impartiality and how it is to be achieved are discussed. I then examine his involvement in the Dreyfus affair and how he mobilized his scholarly work. In the final section I analyse how the Dreyfus affair led Monod to a reconsideration of the epistemics and moral implications of doing history and take a look at how he, while doing so, both reverted to an earlier generation of historians and announced a new one.

CREATING A HISTORICAL PROFESSION IN THE 1870S

More than for his publications on early medieval sources, Monod is known as one of the founding editors of the *Revue historique* (1876), the first academic journal in France exclusively devoted to history. He edited the journal until his death and was largely responsible for filling its pages, mostly with methodological texts and the “Bulletin his-

11. Monod published a series of textbooks for secondary schools with Édouard Driault from 1897 onward (adapted several times to new educational programs).

torique,” the regular chronicle of the profession and book review section.¹² The bulletin was crucial to the formation of an academic historical discipline, since it not only permitted information exchange but also played a normative role by defining the criteria for good historical scholarship. Moreover, Monod played an important role in the education of new members of the profession by teaching at the *École normale supérieure* and the *École pratique des hautes études*, where he introduced the system of seminar education. While the *École normale supérieure*, founded during the Revolution, had the education of future teachers and professors as its principal aim, the *École pratique* was founded in 1868 to offer students an active—practical—training in doing research, instead of just transmitting the results of scholarship. In its historical and philological programs, most attention went to technical training in source criticism. With his key positions in these schools, Monod can be considered one of the leading figures of France’s historical profession of the end of the nineteenth century.

In some respects, however, he was an improbable leader, given both his personal background, which was more cosmopolitan than was the case with most French historians of his age, and his academic career. Coming from an internationally oriented Protestant family, he graduated with honors from the *École normale supérieure* at the age of 21 but never obtained a doctorate. Neither did he undertake the path of secondary school teaching that was usually required for obtaining a position in the central Parisian institutions of higher education. Instead, between 1865 and 1868, he completed his education with long study tours abroad. His first destination was Florence, where he became a frequent visitor of the salon of Malwida von Meysenbug, a feminist liberal writer and former revolutionary of 1848, who also counted Friedrich Nietzsche among her regular guests and was entrusted with the guardianship of Alexander Herzen’s children. Monod would later marry the youngest of them, Olga. Monod next went to Germany, where he was disappointed by the teaching of the then 72-year-old Leopold von Ranke but very enthusiastic about the Göttingen-based medievalist Georg Waitz and his work on early medieval sources. During the “German crisis in French thought” of the late 1860s and 1870s, in which French scholars increasingly felt surpassed by the intellectual and technical achievements of the German university system—a sentiment for which confirmation was found in the French defeat in the 1870 Franco-German war—Monod’s thorough familiarity with this university system and

12. On Monod, see Rémy Rioux, “Gabriel Monod: Visions de l’histoire et pratique du métier d’historien, 1882–1912” (master’s thesis, Université Paris I, 1990), and “‘Saint-Monod-la-critique’ et l’obsédante affaire Dreyfus,” *Mil Neuf Cent* 11, no. 1 (1993): 33–38. For a discussion of Monod’s contributions to the *Bulletin historique*, see Alice Gérard, “Histoire et politique: La *Revue historique* face à l’histoire contemporaine (1885–1898),” *Revue historique* 100, no. 2 (1976): 353–405.

the research method developed there was very appreciated by French policymakers.¹³ Hence, in 1868, Minister of Education Victor Duruy called him as a lecturer to the newly established *École pratique*.

The *Revue historique*, molded after the German *Historische Zeitschrift*, opened with a piece signed by Monod that deservedly has the reputation of a manifesto for professional history writing in France.¹⁴ It offers a historiographical overview that both situates the current profession in a long-standing tradition and shows its important recent improvement, and it outlines the work to be done in the near future. In later texts, Monod frequently repeated in shorter formulations the programmatic ideas set out in extenso in this text, which therefore deserves to be discussed in some detail.

The discipline history that Monod sketches is a history of progress, in which new source editions, research tools, and critical approaches mark the milestones. These permit historians to take an ever more *scientific*—a word Monod frequently uses—stance toward the past, a development that still has not been fully realized but that has accelerated drastically since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Science thus progresses through methodological improvement. Yet, the foremost requirement for scientifically researching history is a position of political neutrality, a stance “above those passionate and exclusive parties” that allowed historians to righteously judge the past.¹⁵ The historian had to create a distance between himself and his subject of research. For Monod, method and criticism were ultimately instruments for performing this distancing—because of the self-restraint they entailed and because they permitted control by other members of the discipline—rather than sufficient themselves. Put another way, preparedness in operating this distancing was for Monod a precondition for being able to use method in the correct manner.

Hence, if sixteenth-century French historiography did not meet the standards of historical science that were current in Monod’s time, the reasons for it were twofold. On the one hand, “contemporary passions exerted a too powerful influence on the people of the 16th century to be able to judge with impartiality the institutions of the past,” while on the other “there were still not enough published documents, the auxiliary sciences of history weren’t sufficiently developed, critique was too irresolute to en-

13. On this “German crisis in French thought,” see the classic study of Claude Digeon, *La Crise allemande dans la pensée française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959). For its consequences in the historical discipline, see Gabriele Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere: Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

14. Gabriel Monod, “Du progrès des études historiques en France depuis le XVIe siècle,” *Revue historique* 1 (1876): 5–38.

15. *Ibid.*, 38.

able to solve all the questions they approached with a juvenile confidence.”¹⁶ This also explains why Monod stated that the historical rupture caused by the French Revolution and the Empire had “permitted to judge the past from farther away, with more impartiality.”¹⁷ On a previous page, in very similar wordings but using “objectivity” instead of “impartiality,” he had already pointed to the Renaissance as the cradle of historical thought, since in that period, people started considering the past as separated from the present, which enabled them “to study it from an objective viewpoint as from a distance.”¹⁸

Method therefore was a disciplining technique, required for history to meet the standards of science that Monod would sometimes call “objective” but most of the time “impartial.” Consequently, the epistemic threat it was deemed to counteract was, as Monod phrased it elsewhere, “the influence of subjective theories in history, of political and religious bias.”¹⁹ The wording he seemed to prefer was “scientific impartiality,” a term that combines the scientific connotations of “objectivity” with the judicial value of “impartiality.”²⁰ Monod was well aware that elevating oneself “above the parties” not only was an intellectual operation but also demanded the cultivation of a certain habitus, a molding of the self. In a lecture for students at the *École normale supérieure* in 1888, he admitted that the exercise of historical criticism was a “long labour, often tiresome, where one sometimes spends much time on the impossibility to arrive at a conclusion.” But this, according to Monod, would “accustom the mind to distinguish between degrees of certainty . . . to doubt and to admit one’s ignorance.” He added, “Being able to know not and being able to doubt are scientific virtues.”²¹ The reward would be worth it, since only by this hard labor could one arrive at what Monod held as the ultimate aim of the historian’s activity: the truth about the past.²²

Despite the requirement of distanciation, the pursuit of scientific impartiality did not imply a retirement from society. To the contrary: Monod conceived historians’ impartiality as the trained and regulated equivalent of the general capacity of independent judgment, which he in turn considered vital to republican citizenship. In *Allemands et Français*, which contained collected newspaper articles on his experiences

16. *Ibid.*, 14.

17. *Ibid.*, 26.

18. *Ibid.*, 8.

19. Gabriel Monod, “Georges Waitz,” *Revue historique* 32 (1886): 385.

20. Monod, “Du progrès des études historiques en France depuis le XVI^e siècle,” 37.

21. Gabriel Monod, “La pédagogie historique à l’École normale supérieure en 1888,” *Revue internationale de l’enseignement* 54 (1907): 202.

22. *Ibid.*; Monod, “Du progrès des études historiques en France depuis le XVI^e siècle,” 38.

during the Franco-German war, Monod showed the merit of historical impartiality for dealing with topical questions.²³ Training in historical method, Monod believed, would sharpen the capacity of independent judgment in political matters too and would therefore be of exceptional value for the education of future state officials. Or, as Monod put it to the same students to whom he just had conceded the toughness of historical work, “Someone who arrives at this high form of impartiality that renders everyone the justice one deserves is much better prepared to pay attention to politics. . . . Once one is convinced of two things—that the present is indissolubly linked to the past and that history doesn’t repeat itself—one associates respect for the past with desire for progress; one is equally preserved from both a reactionary and a revolutionary spirit. History cannot pretend to teach you political opinions; she teaches you to add to the defence of your political opinions a spirit of prudence, critique and moderation.”²⁴ The *normaliens* thus had to learn to do historical research, regardless of whether they would ever write a piece of historical scholarship later in life.

As his advice for the *normaliens* shows, Monod’s pursuit of impartiality is rooted in an ethos of moderation and prudence that had a moderate republicanism and a basal patriotism as its political counterpart. Yet, it is excessive—and simply incorrect with regard to both the mixed social and religious backgrounds of the contributors and the contents of the articles—to brand the *Revue historique* as a “journal of combat,” as Charles-Olivier Carbonell has done.²⁵ The unavoidable fact of having a personal background or a certain political opinion doesn’t make a historian necessarily biased in his professional activities. Patriotism, in contrast to militant forms of nationalism, was not considered a political option per se, but the precondition for any kind of politics, even if the reactions to *Allemands et Français* showed that the boundaries were thin.²⁶ Whereas some German journalists condemned the book as anti-German, French nationalist critics deemed it unpatriotic, thereby suggesting that only an uncritical celebration of one’s own nation could be called truly patriotic.²⁷ For Monod and most of his contemporaries, on the contrary, patriotism did not exclude the possibility of im-

23. Gabriel Monod, *Allemands et Français: Souvenirs de campagne; Metz, Sedan, la Loire* (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1872).

24. Monod, “La pédagogie historique à l’École normale supérieure en 1888,” 203.

25. Charles-Olivier Carbonell, “La naissance de la *Revue historique*: Une revue de combat (1876–1885),” *Revue historique* 255, no. 518 (1976): 331–51. This interpretation is contested by Isabel Noronha-DiVanna, *Writing History in the Third Republic* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

26. I’m aware that in recent nationalism studies this distinction is sharply criticized for being unstable, to the extent that it cannot be upheld. For my current purposes, it is, however, more fruitful to adopt this common (by that time) distinction.

27. See Monod’s reply in the preface to the second edition of *Allemands et Français*, 11–17.

partiality; both pointed in the same direction of a reconciling view of the nation's history, neither "reactionary" nor "revolutionary," as he preached his students.²⁸

This moderation conformed not only with Monod's personal political dispositions as a bourgeois, cosmopolitan member of a religious minority but also with the political situation at the moment he was writing—the regime of the "opportunists" (i.e., moderates, centrists) who in the 1870s and 1880s built up a more or less stable French republic and pursued a policy of laicization.²⁹ The opportunist educational and historical policy was motivated not only by concerns of national and republican identity building but also by a widespread Comtean and especially Littréan positivism, according to which scientific progress forms the basis for social improvement.³⁰ It was hoped that calm and impartial historical research following verifiable procedures, and the spread of its results through education, would help to overcome three-quarters of a century of political strife over the meaning of the (recent) national past. Monod's convictions about the historian's responsibilities predisposed him to actively take part in the Dreyfus affair, as the next section will show. However, this affair would jeopardize the shared ethos of political moderation, historical reconciliation, and positivist faith in progress in which these convictions were embedded.

A HISTORIAN'S AFFAIR

From the beginning, historians played a role in the Dreyfus affair because of their skills in paleography.³¹ The whole case was set in motion when a *bordereau* surfaced that suggested that someone in the French army was selling sensitive information to the German intelligence services. No evidence apart from this *bordereau* surfaced, but suspicion fell quickly on the Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus, and no alternative leads were

28. For a similar remark, see Gabriel Monod, "Bulletin historique," *Revue historique* 9 (1879): 414.

29. For the agreement between the *Revue historique's* program and republican education policy, see, e.g., Gabriel Monod, "Bulletin historique," *Revue historique* 19 (1882): 378, and "Bulletin historique," *Revue historique* 34 (1887): 104.

30. Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Claude Nicolet, *L'idée républicaine en France, 1789–1924: Essai d'histoire critique*, Tel (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

31. On historians' engagement in the affair, see Ursula Bähler, *Gaston Paris dreyfusard: Le savant dans la cité* (Paris: CNRS, 1999); Vincent Duclert, "Histoire, historiographie et historiens de l'affaire Dreyfus (1894–1997)," in *La postérité de l'affaire Dreyfus*, ed. Michel Leymarie, Antoine Prost, and Serge Berstein (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du septentrion, 1998), 151–233; Olivier Dumoulin, *Le rôle social de l'historien: De la chaire au prétoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), 164–70; Bertrand Joly, "L'École des chartes et l'affaire Dreyfus," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 147, no. 1 (1989): 611–71; Madeleine Rebérioux, "Histoire, historiens et dreyfusisme," *Revue historique* 100, no. 2 (1976): 407–32; Thomas Ribémont, "Les historiens chartistes au coeur de l'affaire Dreyfus," *Raisons politiques* 18, no. 2 (2005): 97–116.

investigated. Five handwriting experts enlisted during the first lawsuit, among them an archivist. After comparing the *bordereau* with other pieces written in Dreyfus's hand, three of the experts concluded that the exhibit might indeed have been written by Dreyfus, a result that sufficed to condemn him. Although several officers had already been informed in 1896 that the true culprit was the officer Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy, the general staff and the ministers in charge refused to reopen the case until 1899. In the meantime, the affair grew into a nationwide crisis, permeating all aspects of political debate and intellectual life. Only in 1906 was Dreyfus officially declared innocent and rehabilitated. The subsequent lawsuits related to the affair engaged some forty technical experts, including numerous trained historians or archivists.

From the moment the affair came to the fore early in 1898, historians were among the most engaged professional groups, although they preferred means of action that were not perceived as an infringement on their professional impartiality and therefore often hesitated to explicitly choose sides and sign petitions.³² In turn, the affair intensified methodological debate within the profession. Although paleography and source criticism concern only part of the whole range of activities that make up historical research, these were crucial for a profession that considered technical problem solving as the driving force of scientific progress. But while using the means of modern epistemics, the engaged historians also revived an old tradition, stemming from the early modern period, of affinity between historical and juridical judgment.³³ Moreover, the historical profession of the late nineteenth century shared with the juridical domain a strong emphasis on the establishment of "facts," a concept understood as rather unproblematic and straightforward in both domains.³⁴ Vincent Duclert distinguishes three possible configurations that took the engagement of scholars: the technical expert who impartially judged the case with his skills, the critical scholar devoted to finding the truth, and the democratic citizen assigning himself a mission in society.³⁵ Often, as Monod's case shows, these three went together, making the distinction more useful for describing different kinds of behavior that can be shown by the same people at different stages of the affair than to classify people. While Monod's commitment initially conformed to the first two of these stances, he in due course felt called to act more as a public intellectual

32. Rebérioux, "Histoire, historiens et dreyfusisme," 421–22.

33. Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550–1720* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003): 34–62.

34. In history, the concept of "fact" would become the object of debate shortly thereafter, in reaction to the development of sociology.

35. Vincent Duclert, "De l'engagement des savants à l'intellectuel critique: Une histoire intellectuelle de l'affaire Dreyfus," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 24, no. 1 (1998): 25–62.

with a general moral responsibility, a turn that unavoidably had epistemological consequences.

After the journal *Le Matin* published a facsimile of the *bordereau* in November 1896 in order to convince its readers of Dreyfus's "unquestionable guilt," Monod compared it to several pieces of Dreyfus's handwriting he had collected—and came to the opposite conclusion.³⁶ But, instead of making public his findings, he only communicated them to several politicians and journalists whom he trusted, considering them in a better position to take action.³⁷ After insinuations in the anti-Dreyfus press on Monod's involvement in the pro-Dreyfus camp, Monod felt forced to publish his opinion in November 1897, though he maintained that he did so not out of personal sympathies or for partisan reasons but rather out of a "pure scruple for justice."³⁸ With this open letter, which figured heavily in public debate, Monod became the first academic to openly engage in the affair.

Yet, what is most striking in this first public intervention is Monod's contention that he was not choosing parties but rather was speaking from a position of impartiality. As reason for his initial reluctance, he shared his fear that he would be accused of bias owing to his Protestant background. He had hoped that a Catholic would "stand up as a new Voltaire to defend this new Calas."³⁹ Monod then explained in detail how the handwriting of the *bordereau* indeed showed similarities to Dreyfus's at first glance—which explained why three of the five experts had attributed the piece to him—but appeared very dissimilar when studied with greater scrutiny—which explained why he and two of the five invoked experts rejected the attribution. Moreover, he specified that he had obtained the pieces of Dreyfus's original handwriting needed for the comparison by means of a third person and "without making contact with the family of the captain, since [he] cared about avoiding personal influences."⁴⁰ He indeed met the captain's brother and principal defender Matthieu Dreyfus only in the summer of 1898. Although Monod afterward had consulted a "very skillful graphologist" who corroborated his findings, he "came to his conviction alone, without having undergone the in-

36. "La culpabilité de Dreyfus éclate indiscutablement" ("La Preuve," *Le Matin*, November 10, 1896).

37. Gabriel Monod to Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, November 2, 1897, Archives privés de Scheurer-Kestner, Archives nationales, Paris, 276/AP/2; "Déposition Monod du samedi 14 janvier 1899," in *La Révision du procès Dreyfus: Enquête de la Cour de Cassation*, vol. 1, *Instruction de la Chambre criminelle* (Paris: Stock, 1899), 456–62.

38. Monod, "Lettre au directeur du *Temps*, 5 novembre 1897" (Monod's letter was also published by *La Libre parole*, *L'Intransigeant*, and *Le Journal des débats*).

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

fluence of none of those who occupy themselves with this affair.”⁴¹ In so doing, he took into account all required measures to warrant the impartiality of his judgment.

If Monod in the end considered himself sufficiently qualified to publicly intervene, it was because of his being a historian. His signing of his letter with “member of the Institute, professor at the *École normale* and at the *École des hautes études*” was not only a way of establishing authority but stemmed from the fact that he considered the whole case a “historical problem,” a problem for which the methodological toolbox of the historian provided the solution.⁴² He discussed these methodological issues, for instance, in a letter to his friend and colleague at the *École pratique*, the philologist Gaston Paris: “Lasteyrie’s declaration rests on a misunderstanding: the voluntary confusion between copies and facsimiles. One often has the occasion to accuse youngsters to rely on copies instead of resorting to originals; never, I believe, this question has raised in the case of photographic facsimiles that are reproduced by engraving, which are always considered identical to the originals for the use ‘chartistes’ [archivists trained at the *École des chartes*] make of them.”⁴³ Writing to his former student the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriel Hanotaux to ask him to use his influence to open up the case for revision, Monod appealed to the “firmness of his conscience and the historian’s clearheadedness” of his former student.⁴⁴ And in a letter of support to the journalist Joseph Reinach, who was sued in the so-called Henry Affair, related to Dreyfus’s, he made clear that subjectivism and the historian’s capacity of for judgment were, for him, two opposing things: “I am astonished and scandalized by the judgment pronounced against you in the Henry Affair, even more as a historian than as a citizen. . . . It is a wholly subjective appraisal. Many historians think just like me.”⁴⁵ Whereas Monod initially chose not to disclose his opinion because he as a teacher and historian didn’t

41. *Ibid.*

42. “Membre de l’Institut, professeur à l’*École normale* et à l’*École des hautes études*” (*ibid.*); “Problème historique” (Gabriel Monod to Abbé Duchesne, August 22, 1898, quoted in Rioux, “Saint-Monod-la-critique” et l’obsédante affaire Dreyfus,” 34).

43. “La déclaration de Lasteyrie repose sur une équivoque: la confusion volontaire entre les copies et les fac similés [*sic*]. On a souvent occasion de blâmer les jeunes gens de se fier à des copies au lieu de recourir aux originaux; jamais je crois la question ne s’est posée pour des fac similés [*sic*] photographiques reproduits en gravure, qui sont toujours considérés comme identiques aux originaux, pour l’usage qu’en font les chartistes” (Gabriel Monod to Gaston Paris, March 2, 1898, Correspondance Gaston Paris, lettres de Gabriel Monod, no. 285-6, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises [hereafter BNF, NAF], 24450). The difference between *copies* and *facsimiles* here lies in the fact that facsimiles were mechanically produced, while copies were not.

44. “Déposition Monod du samedi 14 janvier 1899,” 459.

45. Gabriel Monod to Joseph Reinach, June 17, 1902, Correspondance Joseph Reinach, lettres de Gabriel Monod, no. 335-6, BNF, NAF, 24882.

consider himself the right person to do so, he legitimated his actions and opinions by precisely invoking his capacity as a historian from the moment he spoke up in public.

This did not imply that Monod's commitment to the case was limited to actions that were in line with his usual activities as a researcher, teacher, and journal editor. As civil unrest grew, Monod frequently intervened in the newspapers, lobbied politicians, and stirred up several of his colleagues and students to action.⁴⁶ From its establishment, he adhered to the Human Rights League, a group of active Dreyfusards that rapidly grew into a large and overtly leftist extraparliamentary political movement. If needed, he did not hesitate to leak intercepted letters to the press.⁴⁷ He offered his help to Dreyfus's family and the advocates of different people persecuted in cases related to the affair.⁴⁸ And, last but not least, he gave evidence in the revision process of Dreyfus's case before the court of cassation in 1899.⁴⁹

Despite all this, Monod did his utmost to keep his independence and protested against the politicization of the affair, especially the attempts by more radical Dreyfusards to use the case as a weapon for attacking the moderate republican regime in general.⁵⁰ He therefore refused to sign the different petitions circulating in intellectual circles, apart from the "appeal to unity" that his colleague Ernest Lavisse issued in January 1899 in an attempt to calm the minds and to separate the juridical question from wider political matters.⁵¹ This did not prevent him, however, from letting the affair enter the historical profession; more precisely, since he considered the affair a historical problem, he deemed the institutions of the profession particularly suitable forums in which to discuss it. While he admitted in 1898 that "the literature on the Dreyfus affair hasn't come out of the domain of polemics in order to enter that of history," he nonetheless reviewed several publications about it in the "Bulletin historique."⁵² A year later, he stated that it "had provoked some excellent pieces of historical critique," to which he

46. Bähler, *Gaston Paris dreyfusard*, 32; Joly, "L'École des chartes et l'affaire Dreyfus," 628. A list (however incomplete) of Monod's interventions in the press can be found in Vincent Duclert, "L'usage des savoirs: L'engagement des savants dans l'affaire Dreyfus (1894–1906)" (PhD diss., Université Paris I, 2009).

47. Gabriel Monod to Joseph Reinach, January 6, 1900, Correspondance Joseph Reinach, lettres de Gabriel Monod, no. 289-90, BNF, NAF, 24882.

48. Gabriel Monod to Fernand Labori, December 11, 1898, Papiers Fernand Labori, Carrière juridique: Affaires plaidées (1892–1917): Affaire Dreyfus et autres affaires s'y rapportant, Affaire Dreyfus, Correspondance (Aghion-Philips), BNF, NAF, 28046 (10), no. 211.

49. "Déposition Monod du samedi 14 janvier 1899."

50. See, for instance, Gabriel Monod, "Lettre au directeur du *Temps*, 8 février 1898," *Le Temps*, February 12, 1898.

51. "L'appel à l'union," *Le Temps*, January 24 and 27, 1899.

52. Gabriel Monod, "Bulletin historique," *Revue historique* 68 (1898): 323.

himself contributed—although under a pseudonym—an *Exposé impartial de l’Affaire Dreyfus* that he whole-heartedly recommended in the “Bulletin.”⁵³ Even if it was certainly not a coincidence that the book appeared just before the start of the first process of revision, so that it might influence public opinion at that crucial moment, it was a factual account of the events from 1894 onward, *sine ira et studio*, as the Tacitean epigraph stated.

One of the earliest historical studies of the affair was a publication by a former student of Monod’s, titled *Les faits acquis à l’histoire: Affaire Dreyfus*, which Monod praised in a prefatory letter for “exposing in an impartial and objective manner, with all supporting documents, all the stages of this painful drama,” thus enabling “every Frenchman to examine, without passion and previously taken position, the facts that make up this sad affair. It is so simple and clear in itself that everybody would quickly have recognized and understood how the error was committed and who is the true culprit.”⁵⁴ The quote expresses Monod’s firm belief that facts convince and that methodologically established truths, by virtue of their being established by means that can be checked, are shared by everyone. For Monod, Dreyfus’s innocence was a matter of fact, a truth, and the truth cannot be partial. Yet, it was precisely this trust in the universality of truth and the persuasiveness of science that was undermined by the bitter experiences of the years to come.

Two objections against Monod’s position in the Dreyfus case emerged that both questioned the historical method behind Monod’s approach. The first was that many anti-Dreyfusards simply didn’t accept Monod’s appeal to impartiality. The right-wing critic Charles Maurras, for instance, who some years later became the leader of the nationalistic, royalist and openly anti-Semitic league *L’action française*, attacked Monod as a member of a foreign Protestant “tribe” that aimed to impair the French army.⁵⁵ Moreover, in Maurras’s eyes, Monod’s method was “German” and hence antipatriotic and was led ipso facto to conclusions that went against the French national interest.⁵⁶ In the years to come, Maurras would devote countless pages to rage against the “Monod state,” which would be a “concentrated extract of Jewish, Protestant, and Masonic in-

53. Gabriel Monod, “Bulletin historique,” *Revue historique* 70 (1899): 381; Pierre Molé [Gabriel Monod], *Exposé impartial de l’affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Stock, 1899).

54. See the prefatory letter by Gabriel Monod in E. de Haime, *Les faits acquis à l’histoire: Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Stock, 1898), xv.

55. Laurent Joly, “Gabriel Monod et l’État Monod’: Une campagne nationaliste de Charles Maurras (1897–1931),” *Revue historique*, no. 664 (2012): 837–62.

56. Charles Maurras, “Je m’appelle Monod,” *L’Action française*, February 27, 1909, and *La bagarre de Fustel: Ou les débuts de la ligue d’Action française*, *Les cahiers d’occident* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1928), 43–47.

terests, united in the Old Republican Party” infiltrating the French nation in alarming numbers.⁵⁷ These attacks of Maurras, with all the aggression they contained, demonstrate that in the midst of the political strife, the distance needed for impartiality was impossible to maintain. Moreover, the affair, and the crumbling of the republican consensus it caused, revealed the affinity between scientific impartiality and a moderate republicanism that now became difficult to uphold.

Despite Maurras’s verbal violence, the second strike against historical method was even more serious, since it directly undermined its reliability, that is, precisely what was valuable in it. This strike was twofold. First, Monod had to accept the fact that not all who were trained in history and knew how to use its methods drew the same conclusions from it. Three of the experts consulted during the first lawsuit against Dreyfus had concluded on the basis of handwriting comparisons that the *bordereau* could have been made by him. Furthermore, several of the alumni and students of the prestigious *École des chartes*, which educated archivists and historians, proved to be convinced of Dreyfus’s guilt, especially the more traditional Catholics among them who often distrusted the republican regime and advocated a strong army.⁵⁸ The obvious, in hindsight, falsity of this conclusion doesn’t alter the fact that it was reached with the same set of paleographic skills and methodological principles that led Monod to the right one. This implied that these skills and principles did not suffice to produce truth and that something more was needed. Second, some, including the literary critic and editor of the *Revue des deux mondes* Ferdinand Brunetière, contested both the scientific character of history and the application of scientific methods beyond a strictly circumscribed domain of science.⁵⁹ Thus, he in fact criticized the whole positivist project to organize society by means of science.

This downplaying of science proved a very effective weapon for anti-Dreyfusards who because of their anti-Semitism didn’t accept Dreyfus’s innocence in principle—or who, even if they accepted that Dreyfus was innocent, rejected the idea of reopening a process that was decided years ago. For Monod, this was difficult to understand: in February 1898, he wrote to Gaston Paris: “What I do not understand, is how critical minds are able to believe in the certainty of D.’s guilt after all that is known.”⁶⁰ Method, the Dreyfus affair revealed, didn’t warrant impartiality, wasn’t necessarily verifiable, and didn’t automatically produce truth. And some just didn’t bother with it.

57. Charles Maurras, “L’état Monod & les états confédérés—2,” *Gazette de France*, April 25, 1902. 58. Joly, “L’École des chartes et l’affaire Dreyfus.”

59. Ferdinand Brunetière, “Après le procès,” *Revue des deux mondes*, March 15, 1898, 443–46.

60. Gabriel Monod to Gaston Paris, February 9, 1898, Correspondance Gaston Paris, lettres de Gabriel Monod, no. 283-4, BNF, NAF.

REASSESSING HISTORICAL METHOD

During the last decade of his life, Monod undertook an important reformulation and clarification of his epistemology. Most of this took place within the context of the special public lectures he gave on “general history and historical method” at the Collège de France between 1905 and 1910. The affair set in motion a process of crystallization of his ideas that was further inspired by several subsequent disappointments that he had to suffer: the fact that the judicial system proved unprepared to revise the Dreyfus case; that many republican politicians refused to assume the practical consequences of the fair words on equality before the law and justice they had pleaded; that the authorities failed to protect him and other Dreyfusards against personal intimidation. To this were added the shock of the premature death of his gifted son and professional disenchantment caused by the feeling that the remarkable increase in scientific historical work since the 1870s had not resulted in a proportional advancement in understanding the past. Monod increasingly feared that the foolish accumulation of detailed studies did not contribute to any meaningful narrative about the past that could reach an audience beyond a handful of professional insiders. This was not what he had intended when he in 1876 declared that it was too early for historical synthesis.⁶¹

Despite the polarization of the political landscape, Monod stuck to his moderate republicanism and to the idea that a kind of politics that was neither traditionalist nor revolutionary followed logically from scientifically conducted history.⁶² If many republican politicians betrayed the ideals they had preached, that didn’t mean, according to Monod, that these ideals were wrong but rather that the politicians weren’t good enough to live up to these ideals.⁶³ And this, he realized, had important implications for the public responsibilities of historians. The Dreyfus affair had not disproved the principled idea that history had to contribute to civil education and political moderation but had instead revealed that the history that was done was not the kind of history society needed, and that historians hadn’t taken seriously enough their task to educate. A similar argument could be made for dealing with the fact that source criticism had appeared fallible; it did not mean that it was of no use in drawing conclusions regarding truth and falsehood and that historians should give it up; rather, it meant that

61. Monod, “Du progrès des études historiques en France depuis le XVI^e siècle,” 34.

62. See, e.g., Gabriel Monod, “Michelet, de 1843 à 1852: Leçon d’ouverture du Cours d’Histoire générale et Méthode historique au Collège de France (10 décembre 1908),” *Revue de synthèse historique* 17 (1908): 270.

63. Gabriel Monod to the Marquise Arconati-Visconti, June 23, 1905 and March 19, 1908, Correspondance de la Marquise Arconati-Visconti, Fonds Victor Cousin, Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Paris (hereafter Correspondance Arconati-Visconti), ms. 285, no. 5673-4, and ms. 286, no. 5889-90.

it was not enough and that personal dispositions such as a sense of responsibility toward society mattered.

Hence, Monod started to give more attention to the parts of the historical work that went beyond the basic tasks of gathering sources, testing their reliability, and establishing fact. In so doing, he enriched the epistemological discourse in history. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, he declared: “After a period during which serious historians, almost exclusively devoted to analysis . . . to criticism and hypercriticism, did consider with suspicion, if not with contempt, . . . all historical generalizations . . . the need to revert to synthesis is felt nearly everywhere.”⁶⁴ This was in no respect a return to previous times, since the new historical synthesis should incorporate the gains of critical method for achieving scientific impartiality. But Monod realized now more keenly than before that “a subjective element” was impossible to completely avoid in the interpretation of documents, even if the interpreting were done methodologically.⁶⁵ And, more importantly, critique and analysis had to be completed through other, “subjective” faculties such as imagination, intuition, and artistic writing, all of which demanded a kind of sympathy with the studied subject.⁶⁶ Thus, historians could provide a meaningful and guiding narrative for society and take up their educational responsibilities.

For all this, Monod heavily relied on Jules Michelet, the Romantic historian he considered his intellectual mentor and the father of the profession, even if he didn’t regard him as a teacher whose practices were still useful in his own days. Monod published extensively on Michelet from 1900 onward and devoted the greatest part of his lectures at the Collège de France to him. He described the aim of historical research in the same manner as Michelet had done in his most celebrated text as “to reconstitute in the series of times the integral life of humanity.”⁶⁷ Michelet’s big flaw, however, was that he had often refrained from “studying with impartiality” his subjects, giving free rein to his personal sympathies and antipathies. Therefore, “we will often have to show that [Michelet] would have given more strength to his ideas had he developed them in a more objective manner, better documented, and leaving more room for criticism and doubt.”⁶⁸ Despite his shortcomings, Michelet showed that a broad historical interest, not limited to high politics but encompassing all aspects of human life, could lead to a meaningful interpretation of the past that engaged the reader. Moreover, as a repub-

64. Gabriel Monod, “La chaire d’histoire au Collège de France: Leçon d’ouverture au Collège de France,” *Revue bleue*, 5th ser., vol. 4, no. 26 (1905): 805.

65. Gabriel Monod, “La méthode en histoire,” *Revue bleue*, 5th ser., vol. 9, nos. 15–16 (1908): 454.

66. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

67. Monod, “La méthode en histoire,” 449. Elsewhere, Monod also uses the Micheletian *revivre*.

68. Monod, “Michelet, de 1843 à 1852,” 272.

lican activist and moral authority, Michelet could still be a moral example for politicians and historians alike.⁶⁹ Michelet wrote history out of a deep concern for society, and this ethical commitment should be embraced by the modern historical science.

Monod himself undertook this task by regularly contributing to the newspapers, even after the Dreyfus affair, and by actively supporting initiatives for popular education, such as the “popular universities” that sprang up everywhere in these years. To an audience of Parisian workers and craftsmen, he declared: “History is the emancipatory study par excellence. It prevents to give an exaggerated value to one’s person, ideas and interests. It teaches that humanity is in perpetual evolution, that truth is ever changing.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, Monod recommended the use of historical comparison for increasing insight in both the past and the present: the Dreyfus affair, for instance, had shed a new light on the wars of religion of the sixteenth century.⁷¹

He thus anticipated the program with which Marc Bloch and Monod’s student Lucien Febvre in 1929 founded the celebrated *Annales* journal, expressed in their maxim that historical research had to be directed by clearly formulated questions that were inspired by current concerns.⁷² Monod also applauded new initiatives in the profession such as Henri Berr’s *Revue de synthèse historique*, in which topical issues in the theory of history were discussed and history was considered in connection to the social sciences.⁷³ Contrary to his colleague Charles Seignobos, who feared their rivalry, Monod welcomed the new psychology and the sociology of his former student Émile Durkheim for the opportunities they offered to widen the scope of historical research to questions of social history and collective historical psychology—something that came close to what later would be called history of mentalities.⁷⁴

The dialogue with present society is even more evident in research in contemporary history, a subdiscipline that, as Madeleine Rebérioux has shown, strongly developed and became professionalized in the immediate aftermath of the Dreyfus affair.⁷⁵ The medievalist Monod too, who mostly had worked with and taught about Carolingian

69. Monod to the Marquise Visconti-Arconati, March 19, 1908, Correspondance Arconati-Visconti, ms. 286, no. 5889-90.

70. Gabriel Monod, *Les leçons de l'histoire: Conférence faite à l'Université populaire du Faubourg Saint-Antoine* (Paris: Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques, Ollendorf, 1902), 11–12.

71. *Ibid.*, 18.

72. The *Annales* program is well outlined in Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–89* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990). About Monod as a bridging figure between Michelet and the *Annales*, see Camille Creyghton, “La survivance de Michelet: Historiographie et politique en France depuis 1870” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016).

73. Gabriel Monod, “Bulletin historique,” *Revue historique*, no. 77 (1901): 376.

74. Monod, “La méthode en histoire,” 489.

75. Rebérioux, “Histoire, historiens et dreyfusisme.”

sources, shifted his attention to this subject; in fact, his *Exposé impartial de l’Affaire Dreyfus* can be interpreted as one of the first attempts in the direction. The book demonstrated that not subject matter—the past—but distanciation and the way of asking questions could be taken to define the specificity of history as a scholarly activity. In 1910, Monod still planned to write another, and more complete, history of the Dreyfus affair, for clarifying what “France and the world owe[d] to him.”⁷⁶ The debates on the separation of church and state in 1905 inspired him to plan a large history of church-state relations.⁷⁷ Hindered by failing health, he realized none of these projects. But in all of them, the desire for truth continued to be the fundamental motivation, as had been the case in the engagement for Dreyfus. And while Monod recognized that subjectivity, even when bound by method, presented an unavoidable obstacle along the way, mutual verification and correction among historians provided the best warrant that truth would be attained in the end.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

The Dreyfus affair made Monod aware that what he had called “scientific impartiality” thus far—the positioning above the parties by the application of methodological procedures that can be associated with objectivity—was to some extent the trained version of his own moral and political convictions, which, obviously, were not shared by all. This, however, was no reason for Monod to give up these convictions or his belief in the merits of method. After all, he had been right that Dreyfus was innocent. His rethinking of the epistemology of history led him to reconceptualize methodological source criticism as just one aspect of historical work that couldn’t be isolated from a whole conglomerate of personal dispositions and virtues (both epistemic and moral), social responsibilities, and other tasks such as writing and teaching. The word *impartiality* appeared less and less in his texts after 1898, but his statements on historians’ political moderation and the pursuit of truth indicate that the idea was still there, even if Monod came to take more seriously the epistemic threat of subjectivity and became more skeptical about the possibility for historians to reach the truth individually. Monod’s engagement in the Dreyfus affair shows that truth was not only an epistemic good aimed at by historians but also a moral good. Whereas Ginzburg in his account of

76. Gabriel Monod to the Marquise Arconati Visconti, April 5, 1910, Correspondance Arconati-Visconti, ms. 287, no. 6074-5.

77. Gabriel Monod to the Marquise Arconati Visconti, March 22, 1905, Correspondance Arconati-Visconti, ms. 285, no. 5645-6.

78. Monod, “La méthode en histoire,” 492.

the Sofri trial sharply distinguishes between a historical and a judicial truth, this difference was not so big for Monod, since both truths were inherently moralized.

In the context of the scientific history of the end of the nineteenth century, the domains of epistemics and morals appear impossible to separate. This of course did not imply that capable historians automatically were persons of high moral standing. Neither does it mean that their desire to be objective and impartial should be unmasked as biased by political, in the sense of partial, preferences.⁷⁹ Such a reductionism does not take seriously the motivations and concerns of the historians we are talking about and passes over the fact that their efforts often yielded new, reliable knowledge and sometimes even something we can confidently call truth. Furthermore, this unmasking immediately provokes the question of the position of the researcher who does the unmasking. The entanglement between the epistemic and the moral simply means that the belief in the value of impartiality and in method as a means to arrive at it was itself rooted in a wider ethos that was both scientific and social.⁸⁰

Two elements can explain this entanglement and the how it informs Monod's choices and behavior. The first is specific to France and explains why the opposition between scientific, methodological objectivity and judicial or political impartiality that could exist in Germany was impossible there. In France, the world of the seminar was not as sheltered from wider society as it was in Germany: what happened inside academia directly concerned the world outside, and vice versa. Historical research, as a professional academic activity, always had education—understood in the broadest sense—as its end and was inconceivable without it. That is why Monod also wrote textbooks for schools and advised on educational programs. In the French Republic, which needed a kind of historical legitimation, history was everywhere, to the extent that the entire political debate could be understood in terms of historical debate.⁸¹ The historian's vocation was to illuminate that and to prepare citizens for it.

The second element is more fundamental and stems from the kind of epistemic threat that a procedural conceptualization of historical objectivity was deemed to remedy. As in the hard sciences, this epistemic threat was called “subjectivity,” the uncontrolled, biasing, and illegitimate interference of the subject of the researcher in his research. But, in the historian's case, this subjectivity didn't stem from flaws in the human

79. As Peter Novick does for American historiography; see *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

80. For a more general version of this argument, see Camille Creyghton et al., “Virtue Language in Historical Scholarship: The Cases of Georg Waitz, Gabriel Monod and Henri Pirenne,” *History of European Ideas* 42, no. 7 (2016): 924–36.

81. Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

faculties of perception or from preformed hypotheses but rather from political or religious sympathies. What was problematic in the subject was his partiality. Hence, objectivity had to suppress partiality, as a result of which it blurred with impartiality. Therefore, discussions about what counted as objective or impartial couldn't in principle be totally separated from the ethical situatedness of the historian, although they couldn't be reduced to it either, lest they unavoidably ended up in ad hominem argument. That is why objectivity and impartiality, while being vital to the debate on historical scholarship in the nineteenth century, could only function as regulative ideals that were impossible to define exactly and stayed essentially unattainable.

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