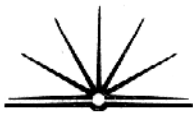
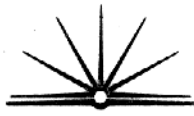


The tension between the notion of subjectivity and objectivity in historiography is one often argued among historians. Albert Prior Fell, in his source "That Noble Dream: The Problem of Historical Objectivity", outlines some of the reasons ~~and~~ why history cannot always be completely objective, though this may be the desire of the historian. This fundamental idea correlates with the view that though subjectivity cannot be removed completely from historiography, historians still seek and in most cases find a near enough version of truth which makes their ~~at~~ inquiry into the past a worthy investigation.

Fell discusses the problems and limitations faced by historians from a range of times and schools of

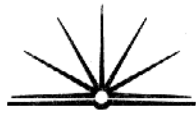


historical thought. He believes that an awareness of these <sup>is</sup> crucial to the reading and understanding of history, as ~~ex~~ "it amounts to a lack of critical perception to ignore or disregard limitations of a similar kind in the histories we read." He does not relegate the use of incomplete evidence solely to ancient historians; though he highlights the discrepancies of the "fathers of history"; Herodotus and Thucydides, he also refers to an historian of the Enlightenment era, Gibbon, and later historians such as Macaulay and Burckhardt. He gives reasons for missing evidence, such as Gibbon's "weakness in the German language" and Macaulay "ignoring evidence which did not fit in with his own judgements." Fell describes



a form of subjectivity present in the works of all the historians he mentions, yet he does not condemn them. He acknowledges that "each of the historians made good use of substantial evidence"; but emphasises his view that the reader must be aware of missing evidence or bias. In this way Fell rejects the idea that it is possible to achieve complete objectivity in historiography, but he does not render history useless on these terms.

Keith Windschuttle, in his The Killing of History, 1994, presents a similar view. Rejecting a tenet of postmodernism - the notion that since all history is subjective, it cannot find truth - he argues that history is



still about "research, dispute, claim and counterclaim"; and that through this historians "have made genuine advances in humanity's understanding of itself." ~~But such~~ Such a view is reminiscent of the Van Ranke school of historiography, concerning itself with "how, essentially, things happened" ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> wishing to "let the past speak for itself." ~~This~~ Whichever school Windsuttle subscribes to, he supports the argument that a form of truth can be found in history and that this makes it a worthwhile endeavor. The comment from Michael Foucault, that "I am well aware that I have never written anything but fiction"; echoes post-modernist thought and would be too concerned with subjectivity for

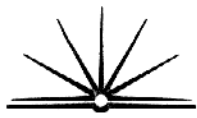


Windshuttle. Windshuttle himself continues to argue for the possibility of finding truth in history in a postmodern era.

Eric ~~Hobsbawm~~ Hobsbawm, writing On History in 1998, describes himself as a Marxist and as such believes history to be the history of class conflict. He is also a supporter of a form of objective history, stating that "I strongly ~~strongly~~ support the view that what historians investigate is real." By acknowledging that he "continue to find Marx's 'materialist conceptions of history' the best guide by far to history," he is affiliating himself with truth in history and an economic premise on which to base it on.

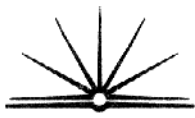
This also upholds the notion of an historian having the ability to reconstruct the past in a fundamentally truthful manner.

~~Other~~ Other historians, however, concern <sup>themselves</sup> ~~themselves~~ significantly with the concept of bias and subjectivity. Vincent is one of these, and in his An Intelligent Person's Guide to History, 1995, he puts forward the notion that "distortion ~~is~~ is part of the very nature of history", as an historian cannot escape the bias within him or her. Vincent notes that "under modern conditions, bias is socially determined" and in this way an historian will be affected by their social status and life experiences, and ~~that~~ therefore bias



will be apparent in their work.  
 ~~Vincent~~ This is perhaps best  
phrased by E.H. Carr, who stated that  
"the facts speak only when the  
historian calls on them." Vincent himself  
does not appear to believe that  
bias in historiography is negative,  
but he acknowledges that the  
wider society may see it this way:  
"our society has a bias against  
bias. In a truth centred culture,  
bias ~~is seen as~~ means departure  
from the scientific model."

Perhaps Fell and Vincent would  
agree on the view that subjectivity  
is an inescapable element of  
historical study, and that it is  
important that historians and  
their readers are aware of this.



Subject: The awareness of subjectivity may serve to make us more aware of other views of the same historical events and therefore more open and tolerant to differing interpretations. In his discussion, Fell ~~and~~ concludes that "the historians did not have all the evidence nor did they use it in a way which is beyond question, qualification and dispute." Schools of thought along the lines of Marcuse and Van Ranke's are equally valid, yet it may be a positive contribution of postmodernism that historical accounts are open to "dispute", so that we ~~to~~ may view history from a variety of perspectives.