

The Real Threat to the Humanities Today: Andrew Nicholson, *The Nay Science*, and the Future of Philology

A Response to Andrew Nicholson’s Review of Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology*, forthcoming in *The International Journal of Hindu Studies* (draft version published on Academia.edu on October 10, 2015).

Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee

It is not our practice to respond to reviews of our work, but when a review contains as many misrepresentations as Andrew Nicholson’s review of *The Nay Science*, we feel an obligation to scholarship to respond. Our task is made more difficult by the fact that we regard Nicholson as a colleague and as a friend. Our response takes the form of a quotation of key passages from his text, followed by a clarification beneath the respective passage. The passages from Nicholson are set in italics; our text is in roman. (References to *The Nay Science*, abbreviated as *NS*, are placed within the text.)

I also have questions about the authors’ frequent use of the word “pseudocritical.” Is their position that a true “critical Indology” is possible, but that German Indology has fallen short? There are two instances where Adluri and Bagchee seem to suggest that Indology has succeeded in being genuinely critical. One is the critical edition of the Mahābhārata completed by scholars at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, to whom the book is dedicated The other genuinely critical attitude mentioned by Adluri and Bagchee is Mohandas K. Gandhi’s approach to the Bhagavad Gītā. (4)

Nicholson confuses textual criticism with historical criticism, a distinction that is one of the central themes of the book. We defended textual criticism in the introduction (*NS*, 11–12) and wrote that we would focus on historical criticism (*ibid.*, and see also *NS*, 1–2, 22–25), which sounds similar, but is neither historical nor critical (*NS*, 17–18, see also 1, n. 1), being rather the

name of a movement within Protestant theology advocating a Christocentric approach to the Bible, particularly the Old Testament (*NS*, 315–24, see especially 318). There is a good reason why we defended the work of the Bhandarkar Institute scholars: textual criticism is mechanical, rigorous, and follows objective and explicitly stated principles. The Bhandarkar Institute scholars were following textual criticism, not the pseudo-critical, anti-Semitic method of historical criticism.¹

Unlike textual criticism, which seeks to provide a better and more authentic text of a given work for interpretation and/or literary investigations, historical criticism is a theologically driven method that questions the integrity of the transmitted work as a way of undermining the notion of the canon and the interpretive communities founded upon it. In the case of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, this took the form of arbitrarily identifying “layers” in these texts, so as to frustrate literary and philosophical interpretations of these works.

The question of what makes Indology “pseudo-critical” is thus easily answered. “Pseudo-critical” is a synonym for “historical-critical” and this was explained in the introduction when we went through the different senses of “critical” (*NS*, 11–12, see also 23–25, with particular attention to notes 95 and 99). A “critical Indology” is simply one that abandons historical criticism and concentrates on two tasks: textual criticism and philosophical hermeneutics.² (The task of a history of India goes back to the historiographers and historians in History Departments, who are best equipped to do it. The only thing that German Indologists brought to it was their Protestant suspicion of the Brahmins systematically applied at the level of the method; see *NS*, 381–93.)

¹ This distinction can also be seen from the distinction made in this sentence between higher and lower criticism: “It would make no sense to castigate lower criticism work for its ideological perspective” (*NS*, 19), footnoted with the comment: “This has been attempted by Peter van der Veer in his essay ‘Monumental Texts: The Critical Edition of India’s National Heritage,’ in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 134–55, but with less than successful results. Lower criticism work must be criticized from a lower critical perspective, higher critical work from the perspective of revealing its underlying ideology” (*NS*, 19, n. 82).

² The term is Nicholson’s and not ours. In the entire book, we used the expression only once (*NS*, 428), but we did so without terminological significance. We simply meant an Indology cognizant of its own past. In our view, a critical Indology, as the designation of a field, a movement, or a discipline, is impossible: if Indologists were to become aware of the reasons why they do what they do, they would cease to do it.

Nicholson is also wrong when he avers that “the authors of the BORI critical edition self-consciously borrowed and applied the principles of textual criticism pioneered by 19th century Germans in their edition of the Mahābhārata” (5). Both the methodological debt to German scholarship and the role of German scholars in evolving the principles of the genealogical-reconstructive method (as it is correctly known) are overstated: Sukthankar was intensely critical of the critical pretensions of German Indologists such as Walter Ruben and French editors such as Paul Lejay and Gaston Paris played at least as great a role in the development of the genealogical-reconstructive method as Karl Lachmann (of whom Timpanaro has moreover shown that he was neither especially consistent in his use of stemmatic analysis nor its greatest champion) not to mention the major contributions of the Italian School in the past century.³

Claiming that the hermeneutics of suspicion “is justified only where we have reason to believe that the text is a product of false consciousness” (p. 299), Adluri and Bagchee refrain from subjecting Gandhi to the type of historically-informed critique in which they examine Richard Garbe and Rudolf Otto. The example of Otto is instructive because Gandhi and Otto share many similarities. The two men were born seven days apart in the autumn of 1869, in Gujarat and Lower Saxony, respectively Gandhi and Otto both interpret the Bhagavad Gītā in ways that appear biased from the perspective of contemporary historiography. Adluri and Bagchee illustrate at length how Otto’s concept of the mysterium tremendum led him to a personal and idiosyncratic reading of the Bhagavad Gītā. Yet they refrain from a similarly critical reading of Gandhi, though Gandhi’s understanding of varṇa, which he claimed to derive from the Gītā, was every bit as idiosyncratic [T]he authors consistently deny the hermeneutical charity to their German objects of study that they extend to Gandhi and to the authors of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute’s critical edition of the Mahābhārata. (4–5)

³ Note that with the ambiguous “Germans,” Nicholson also obscures the question of whose work the Bhandarkar scholars drew on: it was an earlier generation of German editors and critics in classical studies who primarily evolved the methods the Bhandarkar scholars adopted. Nicholson conflates German philology with German Indology and misleadingly suggests that it is to the latter that the Bhandarkar editors owed a methodological debt. (In this, he is in good company: Hermann Oldenberg, Sheldon Pollock, and Michael Witzel all attempt to claim for Indology achievements that properly belong to the classics.)

The question of why we did not extend a similar hermeneutical charity to the German scholars as we did to Gandhi is easily answered. Gandhi's idiosyncratic interpretation created a liberation theology and used the text for humanistic aims. The German scholars used the Bhagavadgītā to affirm Lutheran anti-Semitic stereotypes of the priests/rabbis. Gandhi offered his interpretation as merely an *interpretation* and as *one interpretation among many*. He readily acknowledged his scholarly limitations. The German scholars claimed that their views are not interpretations but *facts* and they did so under the cover of scientism (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*). They used science to repel all questions: either of method, or of interpretation, or of the aims of their work. They self-consciously set aside questions of value, of morality, of public service, and of the pedagogic value of their scholarship in favor of the fetishism of science and used the prestige attached with the term *science* to hinder any examination of their work or their discipline (*NS*, 426, with particular attention to n. 232; 444–45, with particular attention to n. 37). Finally, they placed this “science” in the service of the state, regardless of whether it was the Prussian *Kultusminister*, *Innenminister*, *Reichsführer-SS*, *Führer* (preceding citations and see also *NS*, 265–280).

Gandhi explicitly affirmed his status as a non-specialist, reading the Gītā for self-knowledge, a more profound understanding of agency, and political emancipation. In contrast to the German Indologists, who denied the validity of other interpretations (*NS*, 289–96, 296–97, 420, 426), he did not either claim or get paid for scholarly expertise. His gesture was essentially inclusive and his hope that more people would read the text and benefit from its “gospel of selfless action.” This stands in marked contrast to the German Indologists, who sought to stake authority over the text, polemicized against the native commentarial tradition, and used the rhetoric of scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) to consolidate state support and funding in their hands. Further, Gandhi interpreted the Gītā as a whole, allowing the text to act as a check upon idiosyncratic interpretation. The German scholars removed segments at the drop of a hat on a whim: would Hauer's racial interpretation have been possible had he been forced to interpret *the whole of the text*?⁴ At the very least, it would have been much more difficult for him.

⁴ Nicholson quickly glosses over Hauer as “a relatively minor thinker in the history of German Indology” and accuses us of “exaggerating” his importance. But he misses the true significance of Hauer to German Indology:

As the text makes clear, we explicitly identified what distinguished Gandhi's reading of the Bhagavadgītā from the pseudohistorical reconstructions of the German scholars. We quote:

Gandhi does not naïvely think that it is possible to arrive at an original meaning of the text without any prejudice. Rather, Gandhi's sophistication lies in the self-consciousness of his interpretive stance and his clarification of it to the reader. He tells us what he is doing and why. And the what and why are subject to ethical introspection and practice. (NS, 441)

Nicholson appears to have missed this passage, as he appears to have also missed the import of most of the book. For the central point of *The Nay Science* was not that "certain non-German historical-critical and text-critical scholars [are] praiseworthy, while others are condemned" (5) (Nicholson's conflation of these two terms illustrates, once again, his lack of understanding about textual criticism), but that the sovereignty of historical concerns in the humanities is a problem, regardless of who asserts it, because it displaces ethical concerns from thinking. It was this absence of ethical concerns, indeed, their methodological exclusion in a misguided search for "original" meanings that we found most blameworthy about the German Indologists.

It is this same absence of concern with ethical questions that we found most troubling about Nicholson's review and that, aside from his technical confusions, prompted us to write this response: In a book that is entirely about how Indian studies were used to fashion anti-Semitic narratives in Germany we fail to understand how someone can review the work and fail to mention anti-Semitism even once. Oversight? Or, possibly, a decision to downplay the problem of anti-Semitism in German Indology? The theme of anti-Semitism connects chapter with chapter, building up to the conclusion that German Indology was *institutionally* and

Hauer's racial interpretation of the Gītā would not have been possible had not the German Indologists so gaily laid the foundations for it by cutting up the text. That is why the careful progression of the third chapter, to show where the method leads once we stop respecting the canonicity of the text. Nicholson also misses the fact that Hauer was Richard Garbe's student and successor to his chair in Tübingen; the story of academic Indology would thus be essentially incomplete without considering him. Nicholson's efforts parallel Grünendahl's in this respect.

methodologically anti-Semitic. It is not just that his review misrepresents our book; it is also unethical of Nicholson not to mention an issue of such ethical significance. As we have articulated in a recent article,⁵ the connection between German Indology and German anti-Semitism was deeply rooted and much more far-reaching than an earlier generation of scholars could have imagined. In *The Nay Science* itself, we noted, “the Indologists’ anti-Brahmanism was not simply an accompanying phenomenon, *but the central principle that endowed their reconstructions with legitimacy*” (NS, 290), where “anti-Brahmanism” is a technical term that refers to the imputation or projection of anti-Semitic prejudices to/onto the Brahmans of India.

Instead, Nicholson very quickly turns the review to a discussion of his own issues. We were baffled by the relevance of the phrase “ethnocentrism, plagiarism, and bias transcend national boundaries” to our book, until Nicholson clarified that it was a “wink” at his own controversy.⁶ We appreciate Nicholson’s concern: plagiarism is indeed endemic to the German academic system. The online collaborative plagiarism documentation platform Vroniplag had, at last count, examined 153 cases of plagiarism in PhDs and Habilitations at German universities. In 35 of these cases, investigations carried out by Vroniplag led the concerned universities to revoke the titles of the persons involved.⁷ One of those exposed (though not by Vroniplag) was the German minister of education Annette Schavan. Even within German Indology, Reinhold Grünendahl raised serious charges of plagiarism against his colleague Thomas Oberlies, professor of Indology at the University of Göttingen. These objections were extensively documented in an article published in the journal of the German Oriental Society.⁸ One of us

⁵ Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, “German Indology, Aryanism, and Anti-Semitism”; https://www.academia.edu/16637955/German_Indology_Aryanism_and_Anti-Semitism.

⁶ “The ‘plagiarism’ reference was a wink to readers familiar with the most recent R. Malhotra controversy. Perhaps you’ve heard about it: https://www.academia.edu/15489777/Proof_of_plagiarism_by_Rajiv_Malhotra_and_Aravindan_Neelakandan-identified_by_Richard_Fox_Young.” Andrew Nicholson, *Personal communication to Vishwa Adluri; email sent October 12, 2015*.

⁷ Those affected include the German minister of defense Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg, members of the European parliament Silvana Koch-Mehrin and Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, members of the German parliament Daniel Volk and Annette Schavan (the latter, the German minister of education until her title was revoked). The current German minister of defense Ursula von der Leyen’s dissertation is currently under investigation.

⁸ Reinhold Grünendahl, “On the Frame Structure and ‘Sacrifice Concept’ in the Nārāyaṇīya and Tīrthayātrā Sections of the Mahābhārata and the Craft of Citation,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

personally experienced the problem when, a few years ago, he was alerted to the fact that Georg von Simson, in the introduction to his translation of the Mahābhārata,⁹ had lifted ideas from his PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Marburg.¹⁰ But as important as these issues are, we consider them irrelevant to a review of our book, especially since the book is mainly a history of *method* in German Indology.

In footnotes, the authors fault James L. Fitzgerald and Angelika Malinar in particular for their erroneous application of the “pseudocritical” methods of German Indology to the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavad Gītā, respectively. In discussing Hauer, the authors write that [as] with all other Indologists, his scholarship was placed entirely in the service of religious, nationalistic, or ethnocentric needs’ (p. 277). Sweeping statements such as this appear frequently, but the authors of The Nay Science fail to substantiate these charges with any sustained analysis of the interpretive mistakes of living scholars. As it stands, the evidence presented against contemporary Indological scholarship in this book consists primarily of guilt by association. (4)

The Nay Science is a very careful book, extremely precise in its scope and addressing only a specific strain, albeit an important one, within German Indology. This can be seen both from the way we set up the project of the book and from the extraordinary attention (and length) we devoted to definitions (see *NS*, 19–25). *The Nay Science* is specifically a history of *method* in Indology (*NS*, 1–2); it undertook a genealogy of method in Indology (*NS*, 5); it defined *German* in German Indology not by race or national identity but by adherence to a certain set of methodological principles and institutional and political allegiances (*NS*, 7); it focused specifically on German Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā interpretations from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century (*NS*, 19–20); it acknowledged that there were many German scholars, men of integrity, who did not fit into our definition of German Indology

152, no. 1 (2002): 309–40. Oberlies’s response is in “The *Craft of Citation?* Eine Entgegnung,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 153, no. 1 (2003): 371–77.

⁹ Georg von Simson, *Mahābhārata: Die Große Erzählung von den Bhāratas* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011).

¹⁰ Simson had access to a copy of the dissertation before publication of his book. In personal correspondence with Alf Hildebeitel, he expressed his admiration for the author’s ideas. In response to several emails questioning the originality of the ideas and asking for a clarification of their source, Simson remained evasive and was never able to satisfactorily account for the sudden appearance in his work of ideas originally expressed by the author.

(NS, 21); it understood German Indology to refer primarily to a *mode* of doing scholarship (ibid.); and it was restricted to a discussion of what might be termed a “Tübingen-Bonn axis” in Indology (NS, 24).¹¹

In fact, the only way Nicholson is able to create the impression that our book abounds in “sweeping statements” is to cite us out of context. The passage he refers to (“As with all other Indologists, his [Jakob Wilhelm Hauer’s] scholarship was placed entirely in the service of religious, nationalistic, or ethnocentric needs”; NS, 277) occurs in the context of a discussion of six reconstructions of the “original” Gītā, in which we demonstrated that these reconstructions—more specifically, what the respective scholar chose to identify as the most fundamental intention of the Gītā—could best be understood out of the religious commitments and political situation of the respective scholar (NS, 156–277). The sentence thus looks back at the six Gītās discussed in the preceding fourteen sections (NS, 157–277); the phrase “as with all other Indologists” refers *only to the six Indologists* whose Gītā interpretations are under discussion,¹² as is clear when one takes a look at it in context:

Borrowing ideas of “critical” reconstruction from his teacher Garbe, Hauer offered yet another Gītā tailored to distinctly German needs. As with all other Indologists, his scholarship was placed entirely in the service of religious, nationalistic, or ethnocentric needs. Yet, it could be so only because he was drawing on a broad continuity in German Gītā scholarship. (NS, 277)

¹¹ Note also the careful definitional restrictions on page 22:

“1. This epithet [i.e., German Indology] refers strictly and exclusively to an Indology based on the historical-critical method and following certain agendas that can best be understood out of German Protestantism.

2. This study takes a text-based approach, and its claims refer to a highly circumscribed group of texts and/or authors. Whether and in what way these claims can be extended to the work of other Indologists working in other fields (e.g., Vedas, Purāṇas) remains a subject for a separate study.

3. As German Indology is a broad term unifying various theoretical currents and approaches (e.g., *Indische Literatur, Indische Philologie, Indische Altertumskunde, Orientalische Philologie, Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft, Sanskrit Philologie, Indogermanische Studien*), the analysis here refers more narrowly to that part of Indology identified with a certain tradition of Indian historiography that followed specific ideological and fundamentalist agendas in its historiography of India” (NS, 22).

¹² That is, to Adolf Holtzmann Jr., Richard Garbe, Hermann Jacobi, Hermann Oldenberg, Rudolf Otto, and Jakob Wilhelm Hauer.

Further, contrary to Nicholson’s claim, Fitzgerald’s work is extensively discussed (see *NS*, 151–52, 71, and see also 53, n. 109). Of his writings, five are discussed and the only reason we did not include more is because of the repetitive nature of his work. Fitzgerald’s writings revive the Holtzmannian inversion hypothesis and thus, indirectly, also its racial, Aryanist, and anti-Brahmanic presuppositions (*NS*, 121–25, 134–35). Likewise, Malinar is cited as an example of the institutionalized prejudice against Indian scholarship in German Indology (see *NS*, 296–97, 307–308, see also 436, 441, and 444). Malinar rejects the Indian commentarial tradition as being insufficiently self-critical and historically self-aware, yet cites Adolf Holtzmann Jr., Richard Garbe, Hermann Jacobi, Hermann Oldenberg, Rudolf Otto, and J. W. Hauer as authoritative or at least unproblematic sources. She excludes the Sanskrit commentaries and modern Hindu interpretations of the text on the ground that they are “religiously” influenced, but does not extend the same principle to the German scholars, even though their work, as *The Nay Science* demonstrated, was permeated by theological and apologetic concerns. The connection between an earlier and a later generation of German Indologists is also stated at *NS*, 156, 161–62, and 349. Since publication of *The Nay Science*, we have authored two other works, an article and a book, that bring the story up to the present day. The first discusses the work of the post-1945 *Gītā* critics Mislav Ježić, P. L. Bhargava, and John Brockington¹³; the second discusses the work of the *Mahābhārata* critics Georg von Simson, Andreas Bigger, and Reinhold Grünendahl.¹⁴ A third work discusses the connection between the *religionsgeschichtliche* and *textgeschichtliche* approaches to Hinduism and the *Mahābhārata*, respectively, and focuses on the work of Heinrich von Stietenron, Axel Michaels, and James L. Fitzgerald.¹⁵ All three works demonstrate that the thesis of a heroic, Kṣatriya epic remains the basis of contemporary Indological reconstructions of Indian history.

¹³ Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, “Paradigm Lost: The Application of the Historical-Critical Method to the Bhagavad *Gītā*,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 1–97.

¹⁴ Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism* (London: Anthem Press, 2016).

¹⁵ “Bloß Glaube? Understanding Academic Constructions of *Bhakti* in the Past Century,” in *Proceedings of the Conference Archaeology of Bhakti 2013*, ed. Emmanuel Francis and Charlotte Schmid (Pondicherry: L’École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 2016), 79–126.

With these comments on Nicholson's questions and misrepresentations, let us turn to some wider issues raised by his review.

As valuable as this book is in its critique of scientism in philology, because of the authors' rhetorical choices, The Nay Science may exacerbate the false idea that there is an impassable gulf between the practice of Indology in continental Europe and the way it is practiced in North America. In reality, these boundaries are disintegrating thanks to the increasing interactions of a younger generation of European, North America, South American, and Asian Indologists. (5–6)

Nicholson frames our book as being about a gulf between the Continental and North American traditions of Indology. More generally, he presents it as being about the contrast between Western and Indian scholarship. Actually, however, the book is not about opposing Continental or, more specifically, German scholarship to other traditions of study. (What would be gained by such an opposition?) *The Nay Science* is a book about the concept of science proper to the humanities and an *ersatz* scientism whose origins lie in a misguided attempt to construe knowledge in the humanities on analogy with the knowledge obtained in the natural sciences.¹⁶ It focused on Indology as the paradigmatic example of a discipline that reflects all of the problems faced by the humanities in the past two centuries: their tortured relationship to the natural sciences, their problematic relationship to their own history, their inability to justify themselves after the collapse of the Humboldtian *Bildungsideal*, lack of epistemological clarity, uncertainty about their proper aims, closure of departments and, ultimately, social and intellectual irrelevance.

Specifically, *The Nay Science* used the example of Indology to trace the humanities' problematic entanglement in the concept of *method* in the past two centuries. It argued that, in making a case for themselves, Indologists wrongly (and here they followed a basic reflex of Western philosophy since Dilthey) placed their bets on *scientificity* (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*), when they

¹⁶ That is *why* the book began with Plato: there was already an awareness of the distinction between a genuine philology (which is concerned with the care of the self and is therefore akin to philanthropy) and another philology (which is the mere pretense of erudition and hence is a form of sophism) in ancient philosophy, as we showed.

should have instead clarified what specifically distinguished their discipline as a humanistic enterprise from the (natural) sciences. Further, since this scientificity was always an *ersatz* scientificity, to sustain the fiction that Indology was a science, the Indologists were forced to constantly identify a scapegoat, that is to say, an alternative tradition that they could cast in the role of “not science.” In practice, this role was always foisted upon the tradition (*NS*, 296–313, 342–46, 349–55, 389–91, 393–97, 436, 441–42, 424–25, and 426 and see also 12, n. 46). Further, although the Indologists portrayed themselves as the epitome of European, enlightened, modern scientific consciousness (especially to Indian audiences), they were surprisingly uninformed about European history, philosophy, and science.¹⁷

Contrary to Nicholson’s perception, *The Nay Science* is not a critique of Indology from the perspective of traditional Indian hermeneutics (though such a book could doubtless be written and still remains to be written). Indian authors are almost never cited (our recollection is that they are *never* cited, but we could be mistaken). The major figures we discussed are Plato (*NS*, xi–xv), Reiner Schürmann (*NS*, 374–411, and see especially 5, n. 16, 374, n. 73, and 355), Wilhelm Dilthey (*NS*, 382–83, 393), and Hans-Georg Gadamer (*NS*, 414–30), with some discussion of Kant interspersed throughout the book (*NS*, 11–12, 345, 397–98, 409–12). Nietzsche was a major influence, perhaps the greatest single source of inspiration for writing the book (see *NS*, 5, n. 16, 412, 418, n. 205, 430, n. 248, 432). We discussed German Indology in relation to contemporary events and intellectual currents within European history, focusing

¹⁷ The following passage perhaps best clarifies *The Nay Science*’s project and the core of our opposition to German Indology: “The parting of ways between philosophy and philology becomes increasingly glaring in Germany. Philosophers in Germany develop from Kant’s *critical* philosophy to *phenomenology*. This coincides with German Idealism: Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Indologists, on the other hand, still call their work ‘critical.’ We raise this point to underscore how German Indology became an isolated, outdated niche in the richer and larger arena of German intellectual life. After Hegel’s lectures on history, philologists no longer developed newer intellectual perspectives and approaches. They affected embarrassment with Schopenhauer’s Romantic encounter with Indian philosophy, and they ignored the criticisms leveled against philology by Nietzsche. Twentieth-century philosophies, which take a rich textual turn (Arendt: narrative, Gadamer: hermeneutics), are completely ignored. German Indology appears stunted *not* from an Indian perspective (indeed, it is our claim here that Indology had surprisingly little to do with India); rather, German Indology is woefully out of step with intellectual currents *within* Germany and, by geographical extension, Europe. That the Enlightenment itself, from which Indology feigns to draw its theoretical ideals, has come under severe criticism either does not bother the Indologist, or he is unaware of it. ‘We philologists are keepers of the torch of Enlightenment, and guardians against dogmatism,’ one hears. In any event, the *practical* aspect of teaching Indians how to read their own texts takes on a tragic note when German Indologists refuse to read contemporary German texts in philosophy and philosophy of science. These texts have, unbeknownst to them, completely eroded their theoretical foundations” (*NS*, 412–13).

especially on Comte, whose positivism we identified as being the major influence upon the Indologists' ideas of scientificity (*NS*, 373–81, 382–91, 405–406). Other authors who featured prominently are J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Ernst Mach (*NS*, 397–402).

Finally, Nicholson is also wrong when he attempts to set up an equivalence between Continental and North American traditions of study, for the simple reason that there is no comparable phenomenon to Indology in North America. There exist programs of Indian Studies, South Asian Studies, and Sanskrit Studies at American universities. But the form these studies took in the United States is quite different from the form they took in Germany. Indology, as we understand the term, specifically refers to the nexus between Protestant theology, German anti-Semitism, an erastian state invested in the Reformation narrative (indeed, in exporting it to the rest of the world), and a professoriate that is both dependent on the state and willing to actively pursue the goals assigned by it—the whole undergirded by a *Wissenschaftsideologie*. Without these features, Indology cannot exist. Whatever term one ultimately chooses for the study of Indian texts in the United States, one will have to concede that there is little interest in developing an Indology along German lines on this side of the Atlantic.¹⁸

At a time when the very existence of humanistic studies is in jeopardy in Japan and elsewhere, I would encourage philologists of all persuasions to look beyond their intramural differences and defend their discipline against what truly threatens it: a technocratic worldview that denies there is any place for the study of literature, philosophy, and religion within the walls of the 21st century university. (6)

Nicholson's desire to come to the humanities' defense is laudable. But he misrecognizes the true source of the humanities' problems. The example of Japan to make the point about the humanities is spectacularly ill chosen. As this *Times Higher Education* article reported in

¹⁸ The few scholars who actively tried to import German methods and ideological currents into the United States were a minority phenomenon, as we showed. Many did so because the prestige of German scholarship offered a means to advance their own careers. Yet their impact on the field was marginal and American scholars often struggled to assimilate the methods of German colleagues.

September of 2015, the proposed closures in Japan are “likely to be connected with ongoing financial pressures on Japanese universities, linked to a low birth rate and falling numbers of students, which have led to many institutions running at less than 50 per cent of capacity.”¹⁹ A second, longer article commissioned by *Times Higher Education* was especially critical of the attempt by some news organizations (and academics) to present events in dramatic terms:

Recent news coverage paints an alarming picture of the higher education scene in Japan. According to reports, “many” social sciences and humanities faculties are set to close at the behest of Japan’s government following a letter from the minister of education. It has variously been referred to as an “order”, a “decree”, a “directive” and a “request”. The reality is that not one of the universities in question is currently contemplating such closures. The article linked to above refers only to social science and humanities faculties, but the main target of reform is the 10 national teacher training universities, for reasons to do with demographic change, academic standards and perceived societal needs. Social science and humanities faculties are also decreasing their student intake, and some will see lower levels of staffing. The coverage also misrepresents the relationship between the government and universities. Japanese ministers of education do not have unchecked power to shut down entire faculties by decree from one academic year to the next. As in most other countries, the reality of education and research policy is more plural, fragmented and dialogical. . . . [R]esearch funding allocations by the Japan Society for Promotion of Science over the past decade do not show any radical shift in distribution between the different fields of knowledge. This may change in future, but the social sciences and humanities have received a growing share of overall research funding since 2004. The general funding environment and policy priorities do not pose as grave a threat to social scientific and humanities

¹⁹ Jack Grove, “Social sciences and humanities faculties ‘to close’ in Japan after ministerial intervention: Universities to scale back liberal arts and social science courses,” *Times Higher Education*, September 14, 2015, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/social-sciences-and-humanities-faculties-close-japan-after-ministerial-intervention> (accessed November 12, 2015).

education and research as suggested by *THE*, but other aspects of the second Abe premiership may.”²⁰

Nicholson’s warning against the dangers of technocratic thinking in higher education is well taken. But the cause of the humanities is not helped by knee-jerk reactions, framing of the issue as a standoff between the humanities and their detractors, and overlooking the real reasons for the decline of the humanities. For, while it is true that humanities programs are under pressure even in countries where the demographic deficit is not as dramatic as in Japan, the fault lies, at least partly, with the humanities themselves.

Since the decline of *Neuhumanismus* into a mindless scholasticism, a decline that was already apparent to most observers at the beginning of the twentieth century, the humanities have failed to make a compelling case for themselves. As several scholars have noted, even at the peak of the *neuhumanistische* movement, it was characterized more by its rhetoric than anything else. Most professors merely paid token respect to the value of a humanistic education and continued in their narrow disciplinary specializations. In actual fact, the new curriculum fell drastically short of the bold pronouncements made of it. The idealistic associations of neo-humanistic education devolved primarily into increased employment opportunities for professional philologists—as Nietzsche recognized (*We Philologists* §§ 7, 26, 30, 46). There is some evidence that, as the new research ideal spread, knowledge of classical authors actually declined. What remained was a professoriate that served primarily itself, only occasionally its students, and almost never the grand ideals of public education originally associated with it.

The Nay Science was informed by this research. It undertook to show that, for all the grand ideals associated with Indology, which can be read in the countless hagiographies produced of the discipline, Indology was actually destructive of classical learning. The Protestant bias against traditional scholarship skewed its interpretations. In contrast to the expectation of a second humanistic renaissance, which would result from the vital impulses for European learning

²⁰ Kenn Nakata Steffensen, “Japan and the social sciences: behind the headlines,” *Times Higher Education*, September 30, 2015, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/japan-and-social-sciences-behind-headlines> (accessed November 12, 2015).

emanating from the discovery of Indian texts,²¹ Indologists concentrated their attention on a small circle of specialist problems. They now affected embarrassment with the idealist expectations of their predecessors (*NS*, 176, especially n. 83 and 362–63). As with classical studies, which forgot the more important lessons of F. A. Wolf (the revival of humanistic learning through a return to classical antiquity; the creation of a new spiritual and artistic culture, as reflected in the literary output of Goethe; a knowledge of human nature in its essence) for an arid technicalism,²² after the early nineteenth century Indology also turned in the direction of a narrow positivist philology. Indologists now boast, “Indology does not provide therapy, it does not heal, and it does not prognosticate.” They confuse the autotelic aspect of the humanities (that is, having their goal within themselves) with having no goal at all, and glory that Indology belongs to “the *purposeless* [*zweckfreie*] world of the human sciences.” As with other fields of classical learning, where scholarship became oriented entirely toward specialist publication, Indian studies also became the preserve of a miniscule circle, whose members wrote for each other, were incapable of a dialogue with other traditions, and jealously guarded their privileges by brandishing their “European” credentials.

The Nay Science is a book about what remains of scholarship once the grand ideals associated with it have evaporated. It is a book about how, by ignoring Nietzsche, philologists missed the opportunity to remain relevant to the academic curriculum. And it is a book about how to re-found the humanities after the debacle of academic Indology.

The Nay Science will be perceived by some as a negative book. Some may even call it “anti-German.” But it is a book about how to save the German research university. For all its awareness of the contemporary crisis of the humanities, *The Nay Science* is a deeply optimistic book. It believes in the ability of the enduring models of classical antiquity to renew the present. It believes in the ability of Indian texts such as the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavadgītā to enter into a productive dialogue with Western philosophy, if only the absurd barriers Indologists erected between the two traditions, in the interests of their own authority, were removed.

²¹ These expectations can still be observed in the writings of Schlegel and Humboldt.

²² We thank John Lenz for discussions concerning F. A. Wolf.

It remains for us to thank Nicholson for taking the time to read our book and for the opportunity for this conversation. *The Nay Science* is not an easy book to review. It can easily be caricatured in a number of ways (for instance, as anti-Indologist, anti-German, anti-Western, nationalist, and so on). That Nicholson has avoided all of these pitfalls is to his credit. That he has missed the central point of the book is perhaps an indication of how much more work remains to be done.