Another way to generate references of this sort is to do a title search—that is, a search for books whose titles contain phrases like "Arab-Israeli" or "Sino-Soviet" and words like "bibliography," "guide," or "handbook." Or you can go to the part of the stacks in the reference section of the library containing books with call numbers corresponding to your area of interest—that is, the call numbers where works dealing with your subject tend to cluster—and you will often find bibliographies there. Let me also mention here the single most important published bibliography for people working on twentieth-century international politics: the *Bibliographie zur Zeitgeschichte*, which is published as a kind of supplement to the main German journal for scholarly research in this area, the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*. This is a very well-organized list, put out now on an annual basis, with works basically in English, German, and French. It is easy to use even for people who do not know much German.

You may at some point in a research project want to find out as much as you can about what's been written on a particular subject. In appendix I, I'll talk about how detailed bibliographical work can be done and I'll also tell you about some specific bibliographies you might want to use when the time comes. But as a general rule exhaustive bibliographical work should *not* be done at the beginning of a project. When you're starting out, all you want to do is develop a certain sense for what a particular area of scholarship is like—for what the important works are and, if possible, for what arguments they make.

Textual Analysis: The Method Explained

After identifying the major works in a given area of scholarship, what do you do next? Should you just read those works cover to cover, trying to absorb as much factual information as you can? If your goal is to develop your own understanding of a particular subject, it's important to approach those texts in a very different way. You need a more active method, a method that allows you to react to arguments and weigh them against each other. That method will not only help you make up your own mind up about these historical issues but also enables you to absorb the evidence presented in those texts more effectively. A piece of evidence will register in your mind when you understand what it means. And you're better able to understand what it means when you see it in the context of an argument.

The first thing you want to do, therefore, is to develop some sense for the overall argument of a particular historical text. "What's the point here?" you ask. "What's the author driving at?" If the work in question is any good at all, the core argument should not be hard to find. An author, after all, has an interest in displaying it prominently. If the reader is to be convinced, he or she has to see what the author is driving at. So the heart of the argument is

summed up in those places in the text which the reader is most likely to read attentively: the title or subtitle of the work, the titles of particular chapters or sections, the introduction, the conclusion, the first and last paragraphs in the book or article, and the first and last paragraphs (or even sentences) in each chapter or section. So these are the first things you should read when you pick up a particular work. Your first goal is simply to find an answer to the question: what is the basic argument—the central thesis—of this particular book or article? What is the author trying to get me to believe?

The next step is to get some sense for the structure or "architecture" of the argument. The core argument rests on a number of key specific claims. Those claims in turn rest on empirical evidence—on documents and other historical sources, generally cited in footnotes. Your goal now is to understand something about how these different elements in the text relate to each other—about what those specific claims are and about the sort of evidence that supports them. You begin by looking at the table of contents or by skimming through the work to see how it is broken down into sections. Do the various parts of the work fit into some overarching structure? Is there a logic that pulls the different elements in the text together? Many works have a "road map" passage, often located toward the end of the introduction, that can be quite useful in this context.

Once you have some sense for the structure of an argument, you can begin to read the text in a relatively active way—that is, with specific questions in mind. As you go through it, you ask yourself how the various passages you read and the main claims made in those passages relate to the larger argument. Is a specific passage really crucial for the purposes of that argument? Or are you wading through a lot of extraneous material, of no particular importance from the point of view of the argument as a whole? It is generally not hard to see what the point of a passage is, although sometimes you have to think a bit before you understand how it relates (or fails to relate) to the overarching argument of the work as a whole.

Because your main goal at this point is to assess the central argument of the book or article in question, passages of marginal relevance can be read quite quickly. But passages that are of fundamental importance in that context need to be read with great care and again with a view toward answering certain very specific questions.

Those questions fall into two categories. The first has to do with the *logic* of the argument. Even if the specific claim made in a particular passage is valid, does it really support the general argument made in that book or article, even if the author suggests it does? Do the various claims the author is making all fit neatly into one broader argument, or do they seem to pull in different directions? Is the argument internally consistent, or does the author say different things—things at odds with each other—in different places?

The second set of questions has to do with the nature and adequacy of the *evidence* supporting the various specific claims that are made. Does the evidence, assuming the author is reading it properly, really prove what the author wants you to think it proves? Is enough evidence given to support the point being made? Is that point perhaps contradicted by other evidence you have seen elsewhere, including evidence presented in other sections of the same book or article? To answer some of these questions, you naturally want to pay special attention to the footnotes. Weak documentation is always a bad sign. When points are supported by a good deal of direct evidence, especially archival evidence and other documentary evidence, your opinion of a work generally goes up.

When a particular claim plays a key role in the general argument, it might make sense to check the references given to back up that point. You normally do this only rarely, when you have some doubt about a particular claim. But checking sources nowadays is generally not hard to do. Even many archival sources are readily available on microfilm or in some electronic format. But checking references can be very eye-opening. It not only helps you form an opinion on the substantive issue at hand but also gives you some sense for the quality of the work as a whole.

The method is thus fairly straightforward. You identify the heart of the argument, you try to understand its structure, and you then try to see what is to be made of the argument in terms both of its internal logic and of the adequacy of the evidence supporting key specific claims. But getting a general sense for how the method works is just a beginning. To understand how to use it, you need to see how in practice specific historical arguments can be analyzed.

A.J.P. Taylor and the Origins of the Second World War

A.J.P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* is one of the most famous works of history ever written. Even today, more than forty years after it was originally published, it still looms large in the scholarly literature on the origins of the war of 1939. If you are interested in understanding what led to that conflict, this book is certainly one you would want to analyze.

Taylor's goal is implicit in the book's title—to explain the origins of the Second World War or, more precisely, as he himself points out, the origins of the war that broke out in September 1939. So what, according to Taylor, caused that war? You find the answer (or at least something that points to the answer) at the very end of the book. Summing up his argument, Taylor says in that concluding passage: "Such were the origins of the second World war, or rather of the war between the three Western Powers over the settlement of

Versailles; a war which had been implicit since the moment when the first war ended."[11]

What does he mean, you wonder, when he says that the war was over Versailles? Is he implying that it came about as the result of an attempt by Germany to throw off the constraints on German power contained in the Treaty of Versailles, the peace treaty imposed on Germany following its defeat in World War I? You look at the table of contents. You note that chapter 4, dealing with the 1933–35 period, is called "The End of Versailles." You also note, using the technique of paying special attention to first and last sentences, that the very next chapter, the one that deals with 1935–36, begins with the sentence: "Versailles was dead." How then can the war be said to have broken out "over . . . Versailles" when the Versailles system, by Taylor's own account, had been dead for four years?

You might be puzzled, but to try to understand what he had in mind, it occurs to you that it would probably make sense to see what he meant by the final phrase in that passage at the end of the book, a phrase that might help shed some light on the part of the sentence that preceded it. What does Taylor mean there about a new war being "implicit since the moment when the first war ended"? To get the answer, you naturally turn to the first chapter in the book, the chapter called "The Legacy of the First World War." What Taylor says in that chapter allows you to answer that question. "The decision which ultimately led to the second World war was taken," he writes, "a few days before the first war ended" in 1918.[12] This was the decision to leave Germany intact. "The armistice settled the question of German unity," he says, "so far as the first World war is concerned."[13] It was not the (alleged) harshness of the Versailles peace treaty of 1919 that was important. "The most important thing" about that treaty was that "it was concluded with a united Germany."[14] This, he says, "was the decisive, fateful, outcome of the armistice and the peace treaty"—hence the reference to the war being over Versailles. It was important because it made the German problem "more acute":

> This problem was not German aggressiveness or militarism, or the wickedness of her rulers. These, even if they existed, merely aggravated the problem; or perhaps actually made it less menacing by provoking moral resistance in other countries. The essential problem was political, not moral. However democratic and pacific Germany might become, she remained by far the greatest Power on the continent of Europe; with the disappearance of Russia, more so than before. She was greatest

[11] A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 278.
[12] Ibid., p. 21.
[13] Ibid., p. 23.
[14] Ibid., p. 24.

> in population—65 million against 40 million in France, the only other substantial Power. Her preponderance was greater still in the economic resources of coal and steel which in modern times together made up power.[15]

So there it is, the core argument of the book. "The essential problem was political, not moral": political realities, *power* realities, played the key role in shaping the course of events. Taylor's basic idea here was that Germany was basically such a strong country that, if things developed in the normal way, "nothing could prevent the Germans from overshadowing Europe, *even if they did not plan to do so*."[16]

If you've been exposed to any international relations theory at all, that argument might have a familiar ring. The type of regime Germany had, according to Taylor, was not particularly important. Nor did German political culture count for much. The structure of power was by far the most important factor at work in international politics. You've probably heard these kinds of arguments before. If so, you would probably have little trouble picking up the fact that Taylor's interpretation is rooted in a certain theory of international politics. And that implies that an analysis of his argument is bound to have certain theoretical implications. Taylor's interpretation, it seems, with its emphasis on power and its minimizing of everything else, is rooted in a realist understanding of international politics. An analysis of his argument might therefore shed some light on the sorts of issues associated with that general approach to international politics.

One of Taylor's basic assumptions is that regime type was not of fundamental importance. Indeed, as you read the book, you are struck by the fact that Taylor argues explicitly that it did not matter, in terms of foreign policy, that Germany was being run by the Nazis. You're struck by this argument because you had earlier absorbed the conventional view that the fact that Hitler was in control of German policy from 1933 on mattered a great deal. But in Taylor's view foreign policy was the one sphere in which Hitler "changed nothing." Hitler's foreign policy, Taylor writes, "was that of his predecessors, of the professional diplomats at the foreign ministry, and indeed of virtually all Germans. Hitler, too, wanted to free Germany from the restrictions of the peace treaty; to restore a great German army; and then to make Germany the greatest power in Europe from her natural weight."[17] And as you think about it—as you think about how these claims relate to his overall argument—you quickly come to see how that specific view about Hitler is linked to a certain theory of how international politics works, a theory that takes the structure of power as fundamental. When Germany was weak, German policy was

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid. (emphasis added).
[17] Ibid., p. 68.

restrained. Even Fascist dictators, Taylor points out, would not go to war unless they saw "a chance of winning."[18] But as Germany recovered its strength, opportunities were bound to appear. There was no need for Hitler to make plans, and he did not "make plans—for world conquest or for anything else."[19] As the fruit ripened on the tree, it would basically just fall into his lap, with only the most minimal effort on his part. Hitler himself, in Taylor's view, was simply a medium through which basic structural changes—fundamental shifts in the structure of power—produced their effects. Hitler did not even have to be aware of what was going on. "The greatest masters of statecraft," he writes, "are those who do not know what they are doing."[20] And Taylor repeatedly insists that Hitler was not actually driving the course of events. "Despite his bluster and violent talk," Hitler was "a master in the game of waiting." He did not "make precise demands," he simply "announced that he was dissatisfied; and then waited for the concessions to pour into his lap, merely holding out his hand for more."[21] "It was never Hitler's method," he says, "to take the initiative. He liked others to do his work for him; and he waited for the inner weakening of the European system, just as he had waited for the peace settlement to crumble of itself."[22]

You thus come to see how the different levels of Taylor's argument hang together—that is, how his interpretation has a certain "architecture." Not only is there a direct connection between his view of Hitler's role and his general theory of how international politics works, but that view is in turn linked to his interpretation of a series of specific episodes in the run-up to the war: the Austrian and Czech crises in 1938, and the German seizure of Prague and the Polish crisis in 1939. In the chapter on the Austrian crisis, Taylor says that Hitler was not forcing the pace, that the Austrian Nazis were acting on their own, and that "even Hitler's orders could not stop" Nazi agitation in Austria.[23] In the chapter on the Czech crisis, Taylor says that the ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia, the Sudeten Nazis, generated the problem on their own. "Even more than in the case of Austria," he says, "Hitler did not need to act. Others would do his work for him. The crisis over Czechoslovakia was provided for Hitler. He merely took advantage of it."[24] And he reiterated the point, in perhaps even more extreme form, at the very start of the final chapter: "The Sudeten Nazis, like the Austrians before them, built up the tension gradually without guidance from Hitler."[25]

[18] Ibid., p. 103.
[19] Ibid., p. 134.
[20] Ibid., p. 72.
[21] Ibid., p. 71.
[22] Ibid., p. 108.
[23] Ibid., p. 139.
[24] Ibid., p. 152.
[25] Ibid., p. 248.

So you see the architecture of the argument. Taylor's basic interpretation of the origins of the war is supported by a particular view of Hitler's policy. That view rests in turn on a series of specific claims about German policy in the crises of the late 1930s. But those specific arguments need to be backed up by empirical evidence. By examining how well the evidence Taylor gives supports his specific claims, you're thus not just assessing the validity of those claims. Because you understand the structure of the argument, you're also assessing the validity of the general interpretation they support—and, indeed, you're also, to a certain extent, taking your measure of the general theory of international politics with which that general interpretation of the origins of the war is associated.

How then can key specific claims be examined? Taylor's claim about how even "Hitler's orders" could not stop the Austrian Nazis is not supported by any reference, and the absence of a footnote raises doubts in your mind. You realize you could check this by doing some very targeted work using scholarly studies of the Austrian crisis and maybe also by doing some highly targeted research in the published documents. But with regard to the Czech crisis, you can draw conclusions without having to look at outside sources. Taylor, for example, as I just noted, says explicitly that the Sudeten Nazis "built up the tension gradually *without guidance from Hitler*." And yet Taylor himself shows—to be sure, in another part of the book—that Hitler played a very active role. On March 28, Taylor writes, Hitler "received the Sudeten representatives and appointed Henlein, their leader, his 'viceroy.' They were to negotiate with the Czechoslovak government; and, in Henlein's words, 'we must always demand so much that we can never be satisfied.'" So by Taylor's own account, Hitler was giving the Sudeten Nazis very clear guidance. Indeed, Taylor himself notes at this point that Hitler "screwed up the tension in the hope that something would give somewhere."[26]

When you notice contradictions of this sort, alarm bells go off. There's a basic problem with the argument. It seems that the author is trying to square a circle. The argument and the evidence pull in opposite directions. And because of the way the analysis has developed, to point out such a contradiction is not just to take a potshot at the book. Taylor's claim about Hitler's relative passivity, a fundamental element in his interpretation of the origins of the war, turns on his account of just a few historical episodes. His claims about those episodes are the pillars on which his larger argument rests. If those pillars collapse—if those claims are discredited by evidence Taylor himself presents in the book—the core argument of the book as a whole also collapses.

And you can hardly help noticing how Taylor contradicts himself on some very fundamental issues. What, for example, does Taylor have to say about

[26] Ibid., p. 153.

Hitler's basic goals? This is obviously an important issue and bears directly on the central question the book is concerned with. Did the Nazi leader, according to Taylor, seriously intend to carve out a great empire in the east and thus to conduct a great war of conquest against Russia? The main thrust of Taylor's argument is to play down the idea that such goals really mattered in terms of effective policy. Goals of that sort are dismissed as "day-dreams."[27] Policy, in Taylor's view, is shaped by the immediate problems of the present, not by grandiose ambitions of that sort. Hitler, he says flatly, "did not plan" a war against the USSR, and he talks as though the Germans were caught by surprise when a war with that country actually broke out: "the Germans had to improvise furiously when they went to war against Soviet Russia in June 1941."[28] To be sure, there was violent talk, but it was all bluster, not to be taken at face value.[29] Evidence of Hitler's warlike goals is generally written off with one argument or another.[30] In every crisis Hitler was simply aiming at victory in a war of nerves.[31] His ultimate goal was merely to "make Germany the greatest power in Europe from her natural weight."[32]

On the other hand, Taylor often does seem to admit that there was more to German policy than that—that Hitler *was* pursuing a warlike policy and that he *did* take the goal of creating a great empire in the east quite seriously. Hitler, Taylor says, "probably intended a great war of conquest against Soviet Russia so far as he had any conscious design."[33] "Eastern expansion," he writes, "was the primary purpose of his policy, if not the only one."[34] Sometimes Taylor seems to think that the German demand for *Lebensraum*, for "living space," needs to be taken seriously. He says that the argument about *Lebensraum* was "plausible enough to convince Hitler himself."[35] But he then goes on to dismiss the idea that the demand for *Lebensraum* helped bring on the war by arguing that it made little economic sense. *Lebensraum*, he concludes, "did not drive Germany to war. Rather war, or a warlike policy, produced the demand for *Lebensraum*."[36] So now he's admitting that Germany was pursuing a "warlike policy"?

As you try to get a handle on this issue, you read particular passages with special care, passages that relate directly to the question of how warlike Germany's policy actually was. At one point, for example, Taylor is trying to refute a particular argument that purported to explain why Germany

[27] Ibid., pp. 69, 132.
[28] Ibid., p. 219.
[29] Ibid., pp. 71, 131–32.
[30] Ibid., pp. 166, 170–71, 192–93.
[31] Ibid., pp. 153, 216.
[32] Ibid., p. 68.
[33] Ibid., p. 103.
[34] Ibid., p. 70.
[35] Ibid., p. 105.
[36] Ibid., p. 106.

supposedly pursued a warlike policy in 1939. The argument is that the Germans pursued an aggressive policy in 1939 because they knew that for them it was a question of now or never. The Germans knew, the argument runs, that as the western powers rearmed, Germany's lead in armaments would waste away. Hitler, Taylor notes, "himself used this argument, but only in the summer of 1939 *when already committed to war*," but this he says is not to be taken seriously. Hitler, in fact, Taylor goes on to say, did not care about the military balance, because "he was intending to succeed without war, *or at any rate only with a war so nominal as hardly to be distinguished from diplomacy*." The claim made in passing at the beginning of the paragraph, about Hitler being "committed to war" in 1939, has thus begun to evolve. By the end of the paragraph the evolution is complete. "The state of German armament in 1939," Taylor writes, "gives the decisive proof that *Hitler was not contemplating general war, and probably not intending war at all*."[37] What is important here is not this particular argument, but rather the series of claims Taylor makes in passing, the claims I just italicized. In the course of a single paragraph, he goes from saying that Hitler was "committed to war" to saying that he was probably "not intending war at all."

Does all this mean that the book is so deeply flawed that it is a waste of time even reading it? By no means: even with all its problems, you can still learn a lot by analyzing it in this way. The fundamental idea that in the interwar period the basic problem was "political, not moral" is worth taking quite seriously, especially since it runs counter to what was for many years the conventional wisdom in this area. Taylor obviously took it too far. He got himself into trouble because he was trying too hard to be clever. The structural theory in that extreme form was simply incapable of carrying the load.

And indeed when you think about it, you realize that a structural argument of the sort Taylor made could not possibly explain the origins of the Second World War. For Taylor, the war of 1939 was implicit in the fact that Germany had been left intact after World War I. The idea that Germany was bound to become "the greatest power in Europe from her natural weight" implied that the western countries had no choice ultimately but to acquiesce in a resurgence of German power. It implied, that is, that they would *not* use the military strength they had at the time to keep German power limited. But if their acquiescence could be taken as given, why then was there a problem? The theory that fundamental power realities shape the course of international politics might account for the collapse of the Versailles system. It might account in large measure for the resurgence of Germany as the strongest country in Europe. But if the western countries were bound to accept those basic power realities, how could that theory possibly explain the coming of the Second World War?

[37] Ibid., pp. 217–18 (emphasis added).

What this means, however, is just that the theory has its limits. It does not mean that it is devoid of value. The basic idea that international life is to be understood in political and not moral terms is in fact a powerful source of insight. As the analysis of the Taylor book shows, it's obviously important to avoid pushing that idea too far, but that of course does not mean that it is to be ignored entirely. The main lesson to draw from the exercise is that in doing historical work in this area, you always need to strike a balance. Power realities are of fundamental importance, but statecraft also has a major impact on the course of events, and in doing history both invariably have to be taken into account.

Fritz Fischer and the Origins of the First World War

In the study of international politics, one of the most basic problems has to do with the relationship between war and aggression. People often talk about wars as being "started" by one side or the other. But do you really need an aggressor to have a war, or can a war break out even if no major power wants one? Can war, that is, result from the clash of essentially defensive, status quo–oriented policies? Those who think that war is not necessarily the product of aggression point above all to the coming of war in 1914, but not everyone agrees that the First World War broke out even though no one really wanted it to. Many scholars, in fact, believe that the war of 1914 was a war of aggression and, in particular, that it was a war of *German* aggression. To support that view, the scholars who argue along those lines generally cite the work of the German historian Fritz Fischer. Fischer is said to have shown that Germany engineered the war.

To get at this very important issue, it thus makes sense to examine Fischer's work closely. Fischer, it turns out, published two long books dealing with the subject, first *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (1961) and then *War of Illusions* (1969). Each of those books had a single chapter that dealt directly with the July crisis of 1914—that is, with the question of the immediate origins of the war. If your goal is to assess the Fischer thesis, those are the key chapters to focus on, because if Germany actually engineered the war, you'd expect that point to be borne out by a close study of German policy in that crisis.

Your first goal then is to see what exactly Fischer was arguing in those chapters. Did he actually claim that the German government deliberately engineered a major European war? If so, how did he support that conclusion? What were the specific claims on which that general conclusion rested? Are those claims adequately supported by the evidence he presents? With those questions in mind, you turn to the texts and begin by focusing on those places in the text where you'd expect the author to lay out his basic argument.

By looking in those key places, you can see right away what his thesis is. At the very end of the first part of the chapter on the July crisis in the *War of Illusions* book, Fischer, for example, refers to the "war which the German politicians started in July 1914," and says there that that war "was an attempt to defeat the enemy powers before they became too strong, and to realise Germany's political ambitions which may be summed up as German hegemony over Europe."[38] In the first sentence in another section in that chapter, he talks about how "the German government was determined from early July 1914 onwards to use this favourable opportunity"—that is, the opportunity created by the assassination at Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne—"for a war against France and Russia."[39] And in the concluding paragraph of the chapter, talking about the period in early August 1914 when the war had just begin, he refers to "the plan decided on a month previously to use the favourable opportunity of the murder at Sarajevo for the start of the continental war which Germany regarded as necessary," a plan which he says had been "carried out successfully."[40] In an earlier passage, he had also alluded to the "decision taken in early July to start the war at this moment in time."[41]

Fischer's argument here is thus fairly precise. It is therefore testable. He had fleshed out his thesis by making a specific claim: that the German government had actually decided *in early July*—that is, very soon after the archduke's assassination—to start a continental war. To examine the argument supporting that claim, you therefore want to focus on the part of the chapter dealing with that early period when the decision was supposedly made. You thus turn to the section called "The Occasion Is Propitious—The First Week in July." That seven-page section can be examined quite closely. As you read it, you want to approach it with a particular question in mind: does Fischer really show there that the Germans had decided at that point on a plan to start a war?

So what exactly do you find when you examine that passage with some care? Fischer begins by paraphrasing the report of a conversation between a high Austrian Foreign Ministry official and the well-connected German publicist Viktor Naumann. The document is presumably important for Fischer's purposes, since it is the first piece of evidence presented in this key section, is discussed at length, and contains the phrase about the occasion being "propitious," which Fischer had used as the title of the section and which related to a key element of his argument. Naumann happened to be in Vienna when the

[38] Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 470.
[39] Ibid., p. 480.
[40] Ibid., p. 515.
[41] Ibid., p. 494.

archduke was assassinated on June 28, and he met with the Austrian official a couple of days later. Fischer has Naumann picturing the German government as ready, even eager, for war. Naumann was sure, Fischer writes, "that unlike the year before not only the military but also the Foreign Ministry and the Emperor no longer objected to a preventive war against Russia and that public opinion would moreover force the government into a war." "In the Foreign Ministry," his paraphrase continues, "'the moment [was considered] propitious for the great decision.' Naumann warned that if Austria-Hungary failed to use this opportunity Germany would drop Austria as an ally."[42]

Given the role it plays in Fischer's argument, this document might be worth checking out. You can see from a footnote Fischer appends to this passage that the Naumann document was published in a volume of documents on the crisis edited by Imanuel Geiss. When you look up the reference, you quickly discover that a version of the Geiss collection was also published in English translation, and it turns out that the document is included in that collection as well. And when you read it, you are struck by the fact that there is quite a gap between Fischer's paraphrase and the text of the document itself. Fischer, for example, has Naumann saying that the "Foreign Ministry and the Emperor no longer objected to a preventive war against Russia," but all Naumann had actually said was that "not only in army and navy circles but also in the Foreign Ministry the idea of a preventive war against Russia was regarded with less disfavour than a year ago," which is considerably weaker than Fischer's paraphrase. And Naumann had not said anything at all about the *emperor's* feelings about preventive war.

What about Naumann's supposed comment that public opinion would "force the government into a war" against *Russia*? All Naumann had said was that public opinion would force the Foreign Ministry to support Austria in a showdown with *Serbia*, which again was rather different from Fischer's paraphrase. The phrase about this being a propitious time for the "great decision" referred in context to the Serbian issue, and not, as Fischer had implied, to a decision to engineer a great European war. Finally, there is Fischer's claim that Naumann had warned that if Austria did not act, Germany would drop it as an ally. Again, the corresponding passage was much weaker. No threat of that sort was actually made. Naumann had simply remarked that Austria would be "finished as a Monarchy and as a Great Power if she does not take advantage of the moment"—a point his Austrian interlocutor basically agreed with.[43]

That particular document thus scarcely proves that the German leadership had decided in early July to "use the favourable opportunity of the murder at

[42] Ibid., p. 473.

[43] Imanuel Geiss, ed., *July 1914: The First World War, Selected Documents* (New York: Scribner's, 1967), pp. 65–66.

Sarajevo" to start a European war. The German government, it was clear, was being made to appear more bellicose than that first piece of evidence really warranted. Did Fischer then give any other evidence in that section to show that the Germans had decided at that specific time to provoke a European war? The general staff, according to one report he cites, thought "it would not be too bad if there was a war now"; according to another report, the military authorities were pressing for "a war now while Russia is not yet ready."[44] But the political leadership, according to one of those reports, did not agree: the emperor was said to be "in favour of preserving the peace," meaning, in Fischer's context, peace with France and Russia. But Fischer says that that account of the emperor's views was incorrect, and the proof, he says, was the emperor's handwritten comment on a report from the German ambassador in Vienna: "now or never . . . we must make a clean sweep of the Serbs and soon." The emperor's comment, however, scarcely proves (as Fischer had implied both here and in his use of the phrase in the subtitle of the chapter) that the emperor wanted a *European* war. The "now or never" referred simply to a showdown between Austria and Serbia, which was not the same thing at all. And there is in fact very little evidence in this section to support the view that the German government, and especially the German political leadership, had consciously decided at this point to provoke a European war.

Does Fischer, you then wonder, present compelling evidence to the effect that Germany wanted to engineer a general war anywhere in either of his two chapters on the July crisis? You read those chapters with that question in mind. In *Germany's Aims*, he does cite one document which makes the German leadership appear quite bellicose—a letter of July 18 from the German foreign secretary, Jagow, to the German ambassador in London, Lichnowsky. That letter, Fischer says, sums up the German attitude in the crisis "in a nutshell."[45] According to Jagow (as Fischer paraphrases the document):

> The struggle between Teuton and Slav was bound to come (a thought which often reappeared in Jagow's utterances at critical junctures during the war); which being so, the present was the best moment for Germany, for "in a few years Russia . . . will be ready. Then she will crush us on land by weight of numbers, and she will have her Baltic fleet and strategic railways ready. Our group meanwhile is getting steadily weaker."[46]

This is a key piece of evidence. The letter, as Fischer paraphrases it, clearly suggests that the German political leadership wanted to engineer a war with Russia. It's thus important enough to make you want to read the text of the

[44] Fischer, *War of Illusions*, p. 475. For the emperor's comment, see his note on the margin of Tschirschky to Bethmann Hollweg, June 30, 1914, in Geiss, *July 1914*, pp. 64–65.

[45] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 60.

[46] Ibid., p. 59.

letter itself. But when you read it in the Geiss collection, what you find is a little shocking. It turns out that Jagow had said nothing here about a war between "Teuton and Slav" being unavoidable. He had merely noted that "the feeling of the Slavic element [in Russia] is becoming more and more hostile to Germany," which again was a much weaker point.[47] Indeed, Jagow's point in talking about how the military balance was shifting was not that this would be the "best moment" to provoke a general war. He was making exactly the opposite point that because Germany was still relatively strong, Russia and its allies would probably back off and thus that the Serbian problem could be brought to a head without provoking a general war. Fischer's paraphrase had thus turned the Jagow argument upside-down.

As you do this kind of analysis, you reach the conclusion that there is very little direct evidence to support the view that the German government had consciously decided to provoke a European war. The fact that Fischer had to twist the evidence the way he did is in itself a strong indicator of the weakness of that argument. But you don't want to just leave it at that, because you sense that something else is going on here. Fischer repeatedly interpreted the strong evidence that Germany wanted Austria to move militarily against Serbia as evidence that what Germany really wanted was a European war, a war with France and Russia. The "now or never" about a showdown with Serbia became a "now or never" about a European war, but why, you wonder, did he conflate these two very different things? What assumption would allow him to go from what the evidence showed—namely, that the Germans wanted Austria to bring matters to a head in the Balkans—to the much less well-established point that Germany was really trying to engineer a general European war?

As you think about what it takes to bridge that gap between evidence and conclusion, you realize that there is only one answer. The implicit assumption had to be that the Germans realized that there was no way Austria could crush Serbia without Russian intervening. All you have to do is make that assumption for evidence that the Germans wanted a showdown in the Balkans to become evidence that what they really wanted was a European war. So you ask yourself whether Fischer ever explicitly makes this assumption. If you can find that claim expressed directly, you would expect the evidence and argument supporting it to be in that same passage. You would then be able to examine it closely to see whether you find it convincing.

So you search these two chapters for a passage where that argument is laid out, and sure enough you find Fischer saying at one point that "as innumerable documents show, Germany knew that Russia would never allow Austria-Hungary to act in the Balkans unopposed."[48] A claim of that sort, asserted at

[47] Jagow to Lichnowsky, July 18, 1914, in Geiss, *July 1914*, p. 123.
[48] Fischer, *Germany's Aims*, p. 63.

the beginning of a paragraph, is in effect a promise to the reader that at least one or two of these "innumerable documents" will be summarized in the passage that follows. So you look to see what does follow. What the evidence there shows, however, was that the Germans realized European complications were possible, not that they thought escalation would be inevitable. Indeed, the main document cited in this passage—a document Fischer presumably considers important, since he gives an extract from it as a block quotation—begins with Jagow saying that "we want to localise the conflict between Austria and Serbia," which scarcely supports the view that the German government understood that "localization" was a political impossibility. And, indeed, Jagow (you might remember) had made the argument that localization was possible in his July 18 letter to Lichnowsky, the letter that Fischer a few pages earlier had said summed up Germany's attitude "in a nutshell."

But are those remarks about the desirability of localization to be taken at face value? You might wonder about that, and you might therefore want to dig more deeply into this particular issue. The Germans might have pretended, even among themselves, to believe that localization was possible while at the same time realizing that it was not. The pretense might have served a certain political or psychological purpose. It therefore makes sense to consider whether it was a simple political reality that Russia was bound to intervene. If that was the case, and if the situation was obvious to anyone with any political sense, then, regardless of what the Germans were saying even among themselves at the time, one might reasonably conclude that a bellicose policy vis-à-vis Serbia could therefore be taken as proof of Germany's desire to provoke a general war.

Your focus thus shifts to the question of whether Fischer gives any evidence bearing on the issue of Russian intervention. With that question in mind, you pay special attention to what Fischer has to say about Russian policy, and you note that he has a section in the *War of Illusions* chapter dealing with Russia. It turns out that Fischer in that section says in passing that as late as July 24, the Russians thought that Serbia should be advised that "if Austrian troops entered Serb territory it should to begin with offer no resistance but withdraw its troops."[49] The Russians were thus not absolutely determined to go to war as soon as Serbia was invaded. You might want to explore this subject further by consulting other accounts of the crisis. But, for your present purposes, what it means is that there was still a bit of softness in the Russian position even late in the crisis, and that it consequently might have made sense for the Germans to think that a localized war was not out of the question. Evidence that the Germans were pressing for a war in the Balkans thus cannot be taken as evidence that the Germans were really trying to engineer a European war.

[49] Fischer, *War of Illusions*, p. 489.

So that's how the method of critical analysis works. You first identify the author's general thesis. You then try to understand the structure of the argument that supports that thesis. In particular, you try to see how general conclusions rest on more specific claims. You then evaluate those specific claims in terms of the evidence that the author gives to support them. It is all very straightforward. Along the way, you are taking your measure of the intellectual quality of the work as a whole, and when you find someone twisting the evidence, your opinion of the work plummets.

But note that you're not just evaluating a particular historical work. You're also learning something about the subject itself. In this case, you've assessed a particular interpretation of the coming of the First World War. A conclusion that that interpretation is quite weak is bound to have a certain bearing on your understanding of the origins of the war. If even the most famous exponent of a particular interpretation is not able to make an effective case, then you have to wonder whether a compelling case is to be made at all. Beyond that, you have begun to reach certain substantive conclusions in specific areas. You might conclude, for example, that the Germans probably did take "localization" seriously, and that there was some basis for the hope that Austria could crush Serbia without Russia and France intervening. But you also note that the Germans were willing to run the risk of a European war—an attitude that was rooted in their understanding of the military balance, both what it was and the way it was changing over time. Conclusions of that sort affect your understanding of the war-origins question as a whole. Because of the way you've framed the analysis—because you understand how the big questions turn on relatively narrow issues—the conclusions you reach on those specific issues are bound to have a certain broader significance. They may even shed some light on the most basic problem in the study of international politics, the problem of what makes for war or for a stable international order.

Richard Neustadt and the Skybolt Affair

As you do historical work, you have to deal with a whole series of relatively minor problems. You might, for example, be interested in the post–Cuban missile crisis period. You read various historical accounts and you get a sense for what the major events of that period were. The missile crisis was settled in late October 1962. It was followed by the Skybolt-Nassau affair of December 1962, and then by de Gaulle's veto of British admission to the European Common Market the following month and by an important Franco-German treaty signed a week after that. President Kennedy's famous trip to Germany followed in June 1963, and the nuclear test ban treaty was signed in July. When you do history, you try to figure out how things fit together. So if you are studying this