Historical Perspectives on the Fact/Value Distinction

The intention of this panel is to present and discuss various historical perspectives on the fact/value distinction, on the role of epistemic and non-epistemic values in science as well as on the relation between the sciences and their cultural, social and political environment in general. Thus, panel 2 should be seen as supplementing the preceding philosophical analysis of the fact/value distinction with a complementary historical approach. As the adjectives used in the first sentence indicate, the talks in this section put forward a specific stance toward science as an object of study. It is here not seen as a solely cognitive enterprise but as a cultural practice, not as completely isolated from its environment but as integral part and structurally related to society and politics. Consequently, historical accounts of the fact/value distinction might focus on the question, where, when and under what particular circumstances a distinction between fact and value was made and in what form? Who were the people advocating this distinction? Which different roles did it play in its different historical contexts? And finally, which underlying political and cultural strategies might be associated with its advocating as well as its criticism? Additionally, talks may focus on the history of specific epistemic or non-epistemic values in the history of modern science in its respective historical contexts.