J. G. DROYSEN AND THE AESCHYLEAN HERO

JAMES F. MCGLEW

JOHANN GUSTAV DROYSEN, along with his great contemporary, Leopold von Ranke, belonged to the second generation of the critical historical tradition of Barthold Niebuhr and August Boeckh. And like Ranke, Droysen so developed the nascent critical methods of his teachers that his works came to entail a new image of the claims and scope of historical research. But while Ranke believed that the objectives of historical research were largely self-evident, Droysen became convinced, as his experience and interests widened, that any agreement on the task of the historian and the meaning of historical argument demanded a secure and explicit theoretical foundation.[1] In the hope of offering such a foundation, Droysen inaugurated in 1857, and repeated numerous times, a lecture course on historical methodology which came to be known as the *Historik*.

Droysen's *Historik* maintains a pivotal position in the historiography of the nineteenth century.[2] Emerging from the critical historical school, it clearly anticipated many of the problems concerning the nature of historical knowledge which later became prominent in the works of Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Meinecke. In Droysen's own career, the role of the *Historik* is equally central. It marks a clear divergence from his earlier interests in the history and literature of antiquity and introduces his later concerns for historical theory and Prussian national history. The turn in Droysen's career which the *Historik* signals is the general subject of this paper. In particular, I propose to consider this change in terms of his interpretation of Aeschylus, whom he translated as a young man and to whom he returned at crucial points of his career.[3] In Aeschylus, I will maintain, Droysen discovered a sense of the dramatic hero which the *Historik* elaborated and which dominated in the historical works of his final years.

1. L. Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 3–6; J. G. Droysen, "Vorwort zur Geschichte des Hellenismus," *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. E. Hübner (Leipzig, 1893), pp. 98–314.

2. See the account presented by G. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middletown, Conn., 1968), pp. 103–15.

3. Droysen's translation of Aeschylus has long been regarded as the most significant of the nineteenth century, with the possible exception of W. von Humboldt's *Agamemnon* (1816). Its importance for his later works has been suggested, however, by only two recent studies: see A. Momigliano, "J. G. Droysen between Greeks and Jews," in *Essays in Modern and Ancient Historiography* (Middletown, Conn., 1977), pp. 312–14; and J. Rüsen, *Begriffene Geschichte: Genesis und Begründung der Geschichtstheorie J. G. Droysens* (Paderborn, 1969), pp. 25–28.

0009-837X/84/7901-0001$01.00

I. EMPIRICISM AND IDEALISM, THEORY AND PRACTICE

In its acknowledged purpose and perspective, the *Historik* follows a precedent set by the two early methodological statements of the critical historical school, Boeckh's lectures, *Enzyklopädie der philologischen Wissenschaften,* which Droysen heard in his first semesters as a student in Berlin,[4] and K. O. Müller's *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (1825). Like these works, the *Historik* seeks a definition of its theme through an analysis of the subjective conditions of gathering and interpreting evidence and reconstructing past ages. But this subjective—indeed, Kantian—perspective, while only implicit in the methodological works of Boeckh and Müller, becomes predominant in the *Historik*. To answer the leading question of the work, "How is history possible as a science?," Droysen begins with the fact of historical perception and the phenomena which that perception has as its object. Within this subject-object complex, Droysen attempts to demarcate a true knowledge of history. "The science of history," Droysen writes in the published synopsis of his lectures, *Grundriß der Historik,* "is the result of empirical perception, experience, and research"; these, in turn, "are arranged in accordance with the phenomena [*Gegebenheiten*] . . . which are immediately present for material perception . . . [as] recollections of what was and what took place or as remainders from the past."[5] In his search for a scientific knowledge of history, Droysen does not claim the strict necessity of the Kantian categories. But even without the pretensions to a strict transcendental logic, the *Historik* implicitly links the critical historical school and the critical philosophy of Kant closely enough to achieve the work's first goal: the defense of the empirical turn in historical research against both the dialectic of Hegel and the idealists and the naturalistic a priori reduction of the Comtean school, with which Droysen and his German colleagues became acquainted in the 1850s.

Yet the *Historik* is more an interpretation than a simple defense of the critical historical method. Droysen was deeply dissatisfied with the research of many of his contemporaries, including Ranke and Müller, in whose work Droysen saw an excessive interest in the merely technical problems of source criticism.[6] This judgment was clearly mistaken. Ranke's works are permeated with reflections on the nature of history, though of a very different kind from Droysen's, and Müller is now regarded as among the most farsighted of his generation in his treatment of mythology and literature.[7] In fact, the basis of Droysen's censure of Ranke and Müller was his own difficult, seemingly contradictory attitude toward the He-

4. Boeckh began his lectures in 1808; Droysen heard them in the summer semester of 1827. See B. Bravo, *Philologie, histoire, philosophie de l'histoire. Étude sur J. G. Droysen, historien de l'antiquité* (Wrocław, 1968), p. 170.

5. *Historik* (including a reconstruction of the lectures and the first and final versions of the *Grundriß der Historik*), ed. P. Leyh (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1977), pp. 421–22.

6. Ibid., p. 51.

7. See Karl Kerényi's introduction to Müller's *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (Darmstadt, 1970), pp. iii–xx.

gelian conception of history: he was equally attracted by the unequivocal direction and meaning which Hegel had found in history and repelled by the transcendent posture and relentless logic of his dialectic.[8] Moreover, from his days as a student, and especially after his involvement with the Frankfurter Parliament of 1848, Droysen was acutely concerned with the political and educational influence of historical argument.[9] These two very different sides of Droysen's thought, his pragmatic-political understanding of history and his vision of a dynamic movement within history, meet in the second, more encompassing goal of the *Historik:* the reconciliation of empirical research—now invested with the claims and rigor of a science—with a sense of history which encouraged the discovery of fundamental and accessible truths. The point, Droysen wrote in the introduction of the *Historik,* is "to find the particular method which, although empirical, moves within the sphere of ideas, and which, although theoretically certain of the presence of ideal powers, nonetheless seeks them only in empirical reality and in an empirical manner."[10]

This second goal of the *Historik* suggests an affinity between Droysen's philosophy of history and his youthful translation of and commentary on Aeschylus, *Des Aischylos Werke.* Droysen believed that the primary task of Aeschylean tragedy, as well as that of historiography in his own time, consisted in uniting the polymorphic character of human action and the vision of a divine purpose in history. To pursue this affinity between *Des Aischylos Werke* and the *Historik,* it will be necessary to begin with the first and second editions of Droysen's translation of Aeschylus,[11] along with several articles which his constant revision of his translation and commentary occasioned.[12]

II. THE AESCHYLEAN TRILOGY AS HISTORICAL THEORY

In the concluding sections, or *Didaskalien,* of each of the two volumes of the original *Des Aischylos Werke,* Droysen situated his interpretation of Athenian tragedy within a general view of archaic and early classical Athens. The great achievement of Athens, Droysen wrote in very broad

8. Droysen's criticisms are ubiquitous in his writings: for a more complex example, see *Historik,* p. 256; cf. also "Zur Geschichte des Hellenismus," *Kleine Schriften,* 1:307. On the complex relation to Hegel that is fundamental to Droysen's conception of Hellenism, see B. Bravo, *Philologie, histoire, philosophie de l'histoire,* pp. 317–93, and "Hégélianisme et recherche historique dans l'oeuvre de J. G. Droysen," in *Antiquitas Graeco-Romana ac Tempora Nostra,* ed. J. Burian and L. Vidman (Prag, 1968), pp. 151–59.

9. As a student, Droysen attempted to establish a journal of politics and history: see Droysen, *Briefwechsel,* vol. 1, ed. R. Hübner (Berlin and Leipzig, 1929), pp. 33–34. In the Frankfurter Parliament, Droysen almost certainly heard Jacob Grimm's politically influential but historically dubious address on the Schleswig-Holstein question, which was typical of the merger of scholarship and advocacy in the first period of the assembly's tenure. See J. Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften,* vol. 8, ed. E. Ippel (Gütersloh, 1890), pp. 437–38.

10. *Historik,* p. 5.

11. *Des Aischylos Werke,* 2 vols. (Berlin, 1832), and *Aischylos* (Berlin, 1842).

12. "Phrynichos, Aischylos und die Trilogie," *Kleine Schriften,* 2:75–104; "Kritische Notizen zum Aischylos," *Kleine Schriften,* 2:104–17; "Die Tetralogie," *Kleine Schriften,* 2:118–45; and "Die Aufführung der *Antigone* des Sophokles in Berlin," *Kleine Schriften,* 2:146–52.

terms, was "to have attained and set in motion a consciousness of freedom."[13] To this one principle and its historical course, Droysen attributed both the flowering of the Athenian democracy in the early fifth century, when science and politics were freed from the constraints of myth and religion, and its fall in the wake of the Peloponnesian War. In Droysen's account of Athenian history, Solon plays the leading role. By dismissing the debts of the lowest classes and reorganizing the society according to levels of wealth, he reeducated the great mass of Athenians to political self-determination. The periods of both tyranny and reform which followed Solon's tenure as lawmaker seemed to the young Droysen to be the natural consequences of the political beginning he associated with Solon. Hence he recognized less a distortion than a protection of the young democracy in the reign of the Pisistratids, and a correction rather than a confutation in the return of Cleisthenes and the Alcmeonidae.[14]

Droysen's desire to reach a popular audience accounts in large part for the simplicity with which he portrayed the historical background of tragedy. The *Didaskalien,* he wrote in the introduction of the first edition, were meant to appeal more to an "educated and receptive sensibility than [to] a philological erudition steeped in the study of antiquity."[15] To a large extent, the young Droysen's popularization of Athenian history voices the general assumptions of the humanistic tradition which pervaded his philological training. Thus, in his account, the early history of Athens appears as a movement toward unity in the city-state; and Droysen understands this form of social organization to be the unique embodiment of the ancient ideal of liberty.[16]

The conception of Athenian history as the manifestation of the idea of liberty is the basis of Droysen's interpretation of Athenian tragedy. Droysen read tragedy as the truest representation—indeed, as the fundamental arena—of the battle from which the consciousness of freedom—the great achievement of Athens—emerged. In the first edition of *Des Aischylos Werke,* the link between tragedy in its earliest stages and the political history of Athens is secured by the figure of Dionysus, the god in whose cult tragedy originated. For Droysen, Dionysus is the "all-liberating, all-freeing" god.[17] He represents the claims of the particular as opposed to

13. *Des Aischylos Werke,* 1:163–64. Droysen's account is influenced by Hegel: see the latter's *Vorlesungen über die Weltgeschichte* (which Droysen heard in Berlin), vol. 1, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg, 1955), p. 63.

14. *Des Aischylos Werke,* 1:164–67.

15. Ibid., 1:iii.

16. In his article of 1847, "Die attische Communalverfassung" (*Kleine Schriften,* 1:328–85), Droysen presented a far more complex interpretation of Athenian history in which Cleisthenes, rather than Solon, assumes a dominant role, and the communal organization of the Cleisthenic demes, rather than the central administration of the city-state, figures as the great achievement of Athens. The change in Droysen's view of Athens must be understood in terms of his new interest in world history and his conviction that the appearance of Christianity—and not the classical ages of Greece or Rome—was the great turning point. The programmatic statement of Droysen's new vision of world history can be found in his "Vorwort zur Geschichte des Hellenismus," *Kleine Schriften,* 1:298–314. The significance of this shift in Droysen's conception of world history for his philosophy of history is elaborated by Rüsen, *Begriffene Geschichte,* pp. 51–60.

17. *Des Aischylos Werke,* 2:280. Droysen's image of Dionysus, and in particular his emphasis of the Dionysiac bynames, *Lusios* and *Eleutherios,* is taken over from F. G. Welcker's *Nachtrag zur Schrift über die Aeschylische Trilogie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1826), pp. 186–211, and esp. 195–96 (with note).

the general: through the spirit of his cult, the individual is shorn of all connections and is made to stand in an immediate relation with the great historical forces of his time. In the political world of archaic Athens, Droysen located the Dionysiac individual at the foundation of Solon's reorganization of the city's social structure;[18] and he found a vivid portrayal of this notion in the juxtaposition of the tragic hero's dynamism with the passivity of the tragic chorus. Taking the cult of Dionysus, the god of freedom, as his point of departure, Droysen had little difficulty establishing a close correlation between tragedy and the course of Athenian history throughout the fifth century. In Aeschylus Droysen found the truest representative of the rise of the Athenian democracy, and in Sophocles, its greatest triumph. Euripides, finally, Droysen read as the prophet of the "late autumn,"[19] when the "Medusa-like distortion of freedom,"[20] the Sophistic movement, plunged the city into political and cultural ruin.

This correlation between history and art is most pronounced in the case of Aeschylus; for, in Droysen's view, the first major tragedian does not merely reflect the character of the period, but reflects it consciously and fundamentally. Indeed, the conflict, which the age of the "Greek wars of freedom . . . entrusted to the profound spirit of one great poet,"[21] appears in *Des Aischylos Werke* as a process of political enlightenment. It consists in the disintegration of the mythical-cosmological understanding of the world, and the rise, in its place, of a political and ethical *Weltanschauung*. As Droysen wrote in the conclusion of his first volume:

> Aeschylus is, in fact, the last Greek poet in whom poetry appears as the highest form of spiritual life and activity, the context in which the divinity descends to mortals, and the perfect expression of all human writing and thought; he stands in the break between epochs in which art, the first and most immediate form of perception, in its more comprehensive form as epic, lyric, and tragedy, had lifted perception itself to a height and power beyond that point at which art was still able to hold and form this content, this perception of spirit, as myth. Consequently, art was forced to concede this higher work to reflection and to the two-fold strength of conscious thought.[22]

Drawing upon research he had undertaken in the preceding years, Droysen devoted a large portion of the second edition of his translation to Aeschylus' political applications of his art. To two works, the *Persians* and the *Oresteia* trilogy, Droysen paid special attention. In the conflict between East and West that is the subject of the *Persians,* Droysen saw

---

Welcker, in turn, seems to have been inspired by a Romantic image of Dionysus, in which the destructive rages of the god were the first step in the creation of a new order. For this image of Dionysus as an instigator of change both Hölderlin and Goethe provide clear examples: see Hölderlin's "Dichterberuf" and "Wie wenn am Feiertag," *Werke,* vol. 2, ed. F. Beissner (Stuttgart, 1951), pp. 42, 118; and Goethe's *Faust,* vv. 10,030–38, *Werke,* vol. 5, ed. E. Beutler (Zurich, 1977), p. 459.

18. *Des Aischylos Werke,* 2:283.
19. Ibid., 2:286.
20. Ibid., 1:63.
21. Ibid., 1:170.
22. Ibid., 1:229–30.

an attempt to demonstrate that the victory of the Greeks over the Persians was not the achievement of a single man, but the work of "eternal laws," which determined that the principle of Greek freedom was inherently superior to the slavery of the Persian empire.[23] Thereby Aeschylus calmed those who, in the wake of the recent exile and betrayal of Themistocles, feared a new attack on Athens from the East. In the *Oresteia,* Droysen found a statement of the historical position of the Aeschylean age expressed in terms of the domestic situation of Athens. This last work of Aeschylus Droysen read as a vehement attack on Pericles, then the young leader of the democratic faction.[24] But, according to Droysen, the ultimate message of the trilogy was conciliatory rather than antagonistic. In his view, the outcome of Orestes' trial was intended by Aeschylus to represent a settlement between the democratic faction and the older nobility, by which the Areopagus would regain a measure of its old dominion within an essentially democratic constitution.

But the enterprise of political interpretation that is evident in Droysen's second edition is balanced by his abiding interest in the structural and technical aspects of Aeschylean tragedy. Indeed, like many of his contemporaries, Droysen implicitly subordinated the specifically political dimensions of tragedy to its broader cultural message, which—in his view—could be discovered only through an analysis of tragic form.

A few years before Droysen entered upon his studies in Berlin, F. G. Welcker published his imaginative and controversial work, *Die Aeschylische Trilogie Prometheus und die Kabirenweihe zu Lemnos nebst Winken über die Trilogie des Aeschylus überhaupt* (1824). In it, Welcker maintained that the *Prometheus Bound* was performed as the middle piece of a trilogy which included the *Prometheus Firebringer* and the *Prometheus Unbound.* Going further, he claimed for the first time that all extant tragedies of Aeschylus belonged to thematically coherent trilogies, which he believed he could reconstruct on the basis of the remaining titles and fragments of lost plays. Welcker saw that the principle of the trilogy was a discovery with important consequences for an interpretation of Aeschylean tragedy in general. According to his own interpretation, which he based primarily on the poet's version of the Promethean saga, the trilogy of Aeschylus constituted a complex whole, which, much like the visual arts of the time, was structured symmetrically around its center, the second of the three tragedies.

Until 1848, when the basic elements of his reconstructions were confirmed by the publication of a scholiast's commentary on Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes,* Welcker found few supporters among his peers. Gottfried Hermann, the leading Aeschylean scholar of the day, rejected the notion of the thematically coherent trilogy outright, and A. Boeckh, although amenable to Welcker's methods, considered his results at best specula-

23. *Aischylos,* p. 563.

24. Droysen was in fact convinced that the *Oresteia* contained veiled references to Pericles as the real murderer of Ephialtes, the reformer of the Areopagus. Droysen argued for this unique interpretation in his "Kritische Notizen zum Aischylos" of 1841 (*Kleine Schriften,* 2:104–10) and in the second edition of his translation, *Aischylos,* p. 32.

tive.[25] The young Droysen, however, was persuaded by many of Welcker's arguments. In the first edition of his translation, he drew upon the concept of the trilogy in arranging the extant plays and fragments; in his second edition, and, with more precision, in his article of 1841, "Phrynichos, Aischylos und die Trilogie," Droysen developed Welcker's idea in order to describe a specific image of history in Aeschylus.

Droysen defined this sense of history by juxtaposing the composition of the Aeschylean trilogy with that of his contemporary rival, Phrynichus. Through a study of the remaining titles and fragments, he came to the conclusion that Phrynichus merely superimposed a threefold structure on the mythical and historical material he employed. The relation of the three parts of his trilogies reproduced the conventional plots of his sources. Aeschylus, on the other hand, demonstrated an artistic vision that extended beyond the particular content of the legends and myths which were the stock material of tragedy. He perceived a profound and essential order in the real, nonmythical world, and this order shaped his poetic cosmos. "[Aeschylus] did not view or compose his material from some external perspective. He allowed the material to develop itself, that is, he let it grow from the living thought of an eternally just and determining dispensation [*Fügung*] and form itself organically, not as an analogy to empirical reality, but in the manner of the ideal eurythmy of a conceptual development [*nach der idealen Eurhythmie gedankenmässiger Entwickelung*]."[26]

The "ideal eurythmy" which Droysen found in the Aeschylean trilogy was itself a theological image of the principle of Greek freedom; it consisted in a dialectical relation of man and gods, in a repeating movement of transgression, punishment, and reconciliation. Through this image, Aeschylus expressed but also extended the religious conceptions of his times; for Droysen, the trilogy located not merely divine forces but also divine laws and a divine necessity on the plane of human activity. Borrowing from the language of contemporary theologians, Droysen wrote: "The principle of unity in these great works [of Aeschylus] does not consist in the fact that the same person or family acts and consequently suffers for its actions; man and family are merely examples of more general and comprehensive—indeed, of the highest—ethical laws. [They exemplify these] in such a way that an attribute of the omnipotent [*weltregierende*] divinity assumes an active role and reveals its truth in them. The deepest understanding of myth consists in taking from it its arbitrariness as mere fact, and representing it as sacred history and as the revelation of an eternal power."[27]

In Droysen's interpretation, the theological and historical message which he found in the structure of Aeschylean tragedy is closely related to the

25. Hermann's view of the trilogy, to which he remained steadfastly committed, is presented in his article of 1819, "De compositione tetralogiarum tragicarum . . . ," *Opuscula* (1827–77), 2:306–18. On Boeckh's view of the controversy, see his "Singulas quoque fabulas a tragicis Graecis doctas esse" (1841–42), *Kleine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1874), 4:504–18.

26. *Kleine Schriften*, 2:89.

27. Ibid., 2:89–90.

dramatic quality of the poet's art.[28] As opposed to Phrynichus, whom Droysen believed to have employed simple techniques which fully maintained in his tragedies the narrative character of epic, Aeschylus appears in his interpreter's works to have been no less innovative in the presentation than in the structure of his tragedies. The elaborate masks and costumes and the second speaking actor, which the scholia have attributed to Aeschylus, signal for Droysen the introduction of a novel dramatic vividness into Greek theater. These techniques, as well as the conviction that the course of action in Aeschylus' plays "begins with anticipation and not with decision,"[29] are taken to prove that tragedy, with Aeschylus, comes to represent rather than merely report the characters and movements of its mythical figures.

According to Droysen's account, the precise form of this representation of movement and character conveyed the historico-theological message of the tragic trilogy to its audience. For Droysen, Aeschylus' dramatic style achieved a general and ideal, rather than a specific, imitation of human character. In his interpretation, the vivid stylization in Aeschylus elevates his characters to the "level of heroes"[30]—to the plane of endeavor, on which human action is joined with the divine plan of history. In turn, this heroic characterization makes the divine plan of tragedy visible to its audience. In the hero of the Aeschylean stage, then, Droysen found a clear reflection of the conception of historical movement that informed the trilogy. And this reflection, Droysen believed, was created with the full force of the poet's talents: as he wrote in a review of a contemporary performance of Sophocles in Berlin, "[tragedy] intends to overpower the individual in his subjective perception, and tear it away from him; he should become fully devoted and forget himself totally."[31]

Droysen's treatment of the trilogy and the dramatic hero in the second period of his work on Aeschylus extends and clarifies his initial description of the poet's place in Greek art in *Des Aischylos Werke*. Rendered in the enlightened and theologically refined form of the trilogy, the myths of Aeschylean tragedy are kept alive in the age to which Droysen assigns the surrender of myth to reflective thought. Through the mediation of the hero, moreover, the aura and authority of myth are extended to the center of the political world. Aeschylus thus forged a bond between the conflicting ages of myth and conscious thought, and, in turn, between art itself and political decision. Droysen could therefore suggest that the tragedy of Aeschylus brought forth not merely a new form of art, but a radically new form of history.[32]

28. *Aischylos*, pp. 552–53; "Phrynichos, Aischylos und die Trilogie," *Kleine Schriften*, 2:80–81. This connection between theology and dramatic execution in Aeschylus, although without direct reference to Droysen, has been made in this century by Karl Reinhardt: see his *Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologe* (Bern, 1949).

29. "Phrynichos, Aischylos und die Trilogie," *Kleine Schriften*, 2:80.

30. See the third edition of the translation of Aeschylus (*Aischylos* [Berlin, 1878], p. 523), where this formulation is most explicit.

31. "Die Aufführung der *Antigone* des Sophokles in Berlin," *Kleine Schriften*, 2:152. A musical score for this performance was composed by Droysen's lifelong friend, Felix Mendelssohn.

32. *Des Aischylos Werke*, 1:230. On Droysen's dual vision of the affirmation and negation of myth brought about in Aeschylus' work, see Rüsen, *Begriffene Geschichte*, pp. 26–27.

III. HISTORY AS THE THEATER OF IDEAS

Droysen voiced the need for a theoretical account of the historical sciences for the first time in his "Vorwort zur Geschichte des Hellenismus." There the theory of history is justified, in the first instance, by the practical exigencies of writing history. Citing his own reevaluation of the Hellenistic centuries as an example, he appeals for a historical perspective, which is "able to recognize the context of historical developments beyond the level of the monograph."[33] But more fundamentally, Droysen justified the project of a theory of history as an attempt to uncover a "categorical imperative" that would critically examine not merely the stuff of history, but also the historian's own "relationship to and in history."[34] This hope can be regarded as the central point of convergence between Droysen's theory of history and his interpretation of Aeschylus. Droysen intended his *Historik* to express a new relation between the historian and his contemporary world and to put forth a method of historical interpretation through which the historian might project his material, as Aeschylus projected his myth, into the center of the political world. The parallel between Droysen's conception of historical theory and his interpretation of Aeschylus extends still further. In the *Historik* Droysen revived the notion of heroic stylization as a basic element of his historical method. In the hero, once again, Droysen found the means to link the abstract historical plan of a work with the quotidian world of its audience.

The *Historik,* as was noted above, expressly attempted to achieve a scientific basis for the empirical turn of historical research in the nineteenth century. Following Kant, Droysen understood the subjective categories of knowledge as the source of authentic knowledge. But like Kant's followers, Humboldt and Schleiermacher, Droysen construed the subject-object relation involved in historical knowledge not as a one-sided process, in which the barest substratum of objective material is transformed in the mind of the knower, but as a hermeneutic movement, in the course of which both the historian and his material are enlightened and transformed. For Droysen, the scientific knowledge of history begins with the traces of the past which an individual experiences in his everyday encounter with the world. Through the manifold procedures of source criticism, these traces are isolated and evaluated. In this form, they are made to yield the first stage of historical knowledge, material evidence.[35]

Yet Droysen viewed source criticism as only a limited first step. For material evidence to be employed in historical argument, an entirely different operation, which Droysen termed "understanding" (*Verstehen*), is required. *Verstehen* lends to the historian the approaches or questions through which material evidence becomes meaningful.[36] In his account

33. *Kleine Schriften,* 1:299.

34. Ibid., 1:307.

35. Droysen's conviction that the historian's material is taken over from the common historical understanding of his world forms the starting point of A. Schmidt's reworking of the *Historik* as an alternative to the historical conceptions of the structuralists: see his *History and Structure,* trans. J. Herf (Boston, 1981), pp. 1–28.

36. In Droysen's words, "historical materials can only speak when they are questioned correctly" (*Historik,* p. 158).

of *Verstehen,* Droysen offered a schema of four distinct approaches to historical explanation. But these modes, "the pragmatic, conditional, psychological, and ideal," are not independent. Rather, each requires the next in a hierarchy of interpretation ranging from a simple explanation of cause and effect to a determination of the "leading ideas" or world-historical forces involved in a specific age. In particular, an interpretation which stresses the intentions and motives of outstanding individuals must ultimately reconcile these psychological elements with the larger currents of history. "Napoleon III," Droysen remarked, by way of example, "did not become so powerful through mere ambition and ruthlessness, but because he correctly perceived the general interests [of his age], and in serving them, knew how to pursue his own personal interests."[37]

Thus Droysen's theory of *Verstehen* attempts to connect the most disparate pieces of physical evidence with the unseen forces underlying history. In effect, the *Historik* also binds the past to the historian's present. In the "leading ideas," or what Droysen calls the "ethical forces,"[38] we find the thread of Ariadne in Droysen's argument, for these forces function both diachronically and synchronically: they express not only the singular quality of a particular age, but also its relation to other ages.[39] Moreover, the ethical forces belong to an entirely different order than historical events. They themselves remain unchanged while their distinct appearances mark the movement in history from one age to the next. "It is a fact of human nature that the ethical organizations of the state, the family, the law, etc., are present in every age, however developed or undeveloped it happens to be."[40] Indeed, in Droysen's theory, the very presence of these forces introduces a profound dynamic into history: "with these institutions, there exists as well an image of them and . . . a realization of the difference between what they are and what they should be; in this juxtaposition, furthermore, there is a need to know to what extent the ideal has been achieved, and an impetus to put the ideal into full effect. As a driving force, therefore, the ideas have a real and not a merely hypostatic character."[41]

Droysen's theory of *Verstehen* and his notion of ethical forces are thus conceived in the framework of an epistemology of history. But they have a clear significance for the second goal of the *Historik,* the arbitration of the conflicting claims of idealists and realists. For the historian who believes that a coherent set of ideas underlies all history, an empirical knowledge of the past can provide the tools for confirming or correcting his understanding of his own age. The limitations of this solution are formidable: Droysen's argument hardly seems intended to persuade anyone who does not accept its assumptions. But in fact, the conception of un-

37. *Historik,* p. 200.

38. Droysen employs the term "sittlich" in the Kantian sense. Droysen's "sittliche Mächte" are the forces of history which become evident through human wills: see H. Schnädelbach, *Geschichtsphilosophie nach Hegel* (Freiburg and Munich, 1974), p. 97.

39. *Historik,* pp. 211–12.

40. Ibid., p. 203.

41. Ibid., p. 204.

derstanding elaborated in the *Historik* and the theoretical solution which it offers are only preliminary to the more central discussion of historical proof (*Apodeixis*). In this section, Droysen turns from the epistemological framework with which the *Historik* begins and addresses the problem of historical proof in terms of a rhetorical analysis of the historian's craft.[42] By this change of perspective, Droysen reveals his conviction that a historian's success can never be separated from his ability to persuade others, and that the rift between the pure and the practical dimensions of historical reason, which his work seeks to bridge, presents more than a merely theoretical problem.[43]

In Droysen's discussion of historical proof, the historian appears as the intermediary between the layman and the material evidence which the procedures of source criticism yield. Like the poet or the writer of fiction, whose use of metaphor brings forth universals from among particular observations, the historian's treatment of the material available to him is fundamentally subjective.[44] To be sure, the *Historik* sets very definite limits on its comparison of art and history. While the subjectivity of art springs from the personal vision and judgment of the individual artist, the historian, if he is to be successful, must overcome an extreme particularism in his outlook and a fascination with details. In effect, the task of the historian is to unite his personal perspective with that of the nation or religion to which he belongs.[45]

In the context of this relation between the historian and his reader, Droysen develops a classification of the genres of historical discourse. These genres, he insists, must be understood in conjunction with the aims of the author and the scope and expectations of his audience, rather than the character of his subject matter.[46] Droysen offers a fourfold classification. The "investigative" mode of discourse is the most limited in its scope and aims. It appeals to a scholarly audience and restricts itself to one particular historical question. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the form of historical representation that Droysen entitles "historical discussion." The historian who writes in this genre intends to reach a large audience and presents his subject as a clear antecedent of immediate problems in his contemporary society.[47] The historical discussion and the investigative mode are therefore the forms of discourse which address, respectively, the most and least immediate concerns of their readership. Between these two genres, Droysen places universal and specific history—in his terms, the "didactic" and "narrative" modes. Like the historical discussion, these forms appeal to a large and varied audience. But since

42. Here Droysen is clearly following the lead of W. von Humboldt's "Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers" (1821), which equates the epistemological distinction between idea and event with the distinction in rhetorical analysis between form and matter.

43. Cf. Hayden White's assertion that Droysen "saw that it was impossible to write history without having recourse to the techniques of the orator and the poet," *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978), p. 124; see also *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 270–73.

44. In Droysen's account, both history and art must be understood as *mimesis: Historik*, p. 232.

45. Ibid., p. 238.

46. See his *Grundriß der Historik*, p. 445 (Leyh).

47. *Historik*, pp. 222–29, 265–80.

they employ historical material to enlighten the general conditions, rather than the specific problems, of their readership's world, the *Historik* presents them as the historian's greatest challenge.

The *Historik* portrays universal ("didactic") and specific ("narrative") history as undertakings with different but complementary ends. In narrative discourse, which Droysen defines as the account of a particular man or age, the historian seeks to invest his topic with an appropriate historical stature. He looks for some fundamental idea or "historical truth," which he represents as the "goal or *arete* of [his subject's] existence."[48] The story which he tells is "the biography of this one thought":[49] in the successive stages of a man's career, or in the rise and fall of a particular epoch, the narrator discerns the gradual emergence, triumph, and eventual decline of this one historical idea. Thus the historian, although he relates specific facts, draws the attention of his readers beyond facts to the realm of ideas operative in history. In this association of facts and ideas, the historian exerts a clear influence upon his readers. Thinking specifically of national history, Droysen wrote: "It is clear how important it is for a people or nation to view its own essence in a historical setting. History performs a great patriotic duty in offering a people or nation an image of itself. . . ."[50]

In the plan of Droysen's discussion of *Apodeixis,* the narrative mode constitutes a dramatic proof of the historical existence of particular ideas. Universal history, in turn, attempts to incorporate these ideas in the whole of history. For Droysen, a true account of world history must represent each historical idea as a part of a necessary and coherent process, which itself advances as the realization of the historical ideas of successive ages.[51] The didactic nature of universal history lies in this abstract relation of part and whole: above all, universal history seeks to convey the impression of a necessary movement through time. The individual who reads it, or more properly, the student who continually hears it, gradually apprehends the fundamentally ethical message, that the highest goal to which a man can attain is to unite his own existence with the underlying impetus of history. In Droysen's words, "the elevated ethical trait of history should inspire and sweep us away; the image of what is essential, decisive, and authoritative, and the power of a superior vantage point with its considerable motives and extensive energy—that is what history communicates to a soul in an educational process. In this way the soul raises itself above its own small and petty eccentricities and learns to think and feel in terms of the ego of mankind."[52]

In this practical synthesis of events and historical ideas, and in turn,

48. Ibid., pp. 246, 231.

49. Ibid., p. 235.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., pp. 253–55. Droysen frequently described this process, in Aristotle's terminology, as an ἐπίδοσις εἰς αὑτό; see, e.g., *Historik,* p. 255, and the essay "Natur und Geschichte," which Droysen appended to the final version of his *Grundriß* (*Historik,* p. 475).

52. *Historik,* pp. 251–52.

of ideas and a world-historical plan, Droysen revives his conception of heroic characterization from his commentaries on Aeschylus. Specific and universal history, Droysen wrote, best convey the urgency and power of historical ideas through the prophetic inspiration and achievements of world-historical figures.[53] For this reason, the portrayal of these "visible conveyors of ideas"[54] is presented in the *Historik* as a major task of the historian. Against Macaulay, Carlyle, and Ranke, whose representations of historical individuals Droysen viewed as excessively detailed and static, Droysen advocated a stark and rigorous equation of personality and action. "The historian should not develop, like Shakespeare, the deeds and sufferings [of his heroes] from a psychological perspective; he must follow the course and development of a historical thought, which employs the personality as medium of its realization."[55]

The significance of heroic characterization for Droysen's philosophy of history is confirmed by his own later historical writing. One of the greatest contributions that Droysen made to the historiography of the nineteenth century consists in his revival of the political biography. With his work of 1851, *Das Leben des Feldmarschalls York von Wartenburg,* Droysen began the project, which continued for two generations, of retelling the history of Prussia through the lives of its most important leaders.[56] In this work, Droysen constructs a hero of Aeschylean proportion from the legacy of the victor of Wartenburg. And in his hands, the personality of Yorck blends fully with the idea of Prussian sovereignty: his every movement seems to realize the commands of some great world-historical force. Indeed, under the influence of Droysen's vivid characterization, his reader is scarcely inclined to doubt Yorck's unique historical stature, or to question the destiny of the land he served.

But the success of Droysen's characterization of Yorck von Wartenburg discloses a fundamental problem underlying the merger of history and politics that his biography, like his theory, attempts to bring about. Like the specter of Aeschylus that his own interpretation resurrected, Droysen himself measures the political value of his presentation by the power it wields over its reader and the effect it produces on his political beliefs. In turn, the dramatization of history works through a strict assignment of very different roles to historian and reader: as the historian becomes a dramatist, the reader is reduced to the role of silent and awed spectator. Droysen's attempt to politicize history according to an Aeschylean model creates, finally, a wide gulf between the writers and readers of history. In this, his work anticipates the great dilemma of the historiography of the next generation, which sought to manipulate the political influence

53. Ibid., pp. 208–9, 239, 242–45.

54. Ibid., p. 208.

55. Ibid., p. 239.

56. The biography of Yorck was certainly Droysen's most popular work. It appeared in nine editions during his lifetime, and continued to be republished through the first decades of this century. Meinecke's early work, *Das Leben des Generalfeldmarschalls Hermann von Boyen* (1895), still belongs to this tradition.

of its large audience but was not strongly committed to developing that audience's critical faculties.[57] From a later perspective, then, Droysen's revival of the Aeschylean hero entails a radical disjunction between the role he creates for his reader and the political battlefield for which he girds him.[58]

The University of Chicago

57. See Iggers, *The German Conception of History,* pp. 3–28.

58. I am indebted to the suggestions and encouragement of Professor Arnaldo Momigliano and the Editor.