

in the manner of great epic poets. The pantheistic element in Ranke was responsible for the claim to a universal and immediate sharing, a co-knowledge, of the universe. Droysen, on the other hand, thinks of the intermediaries in which understanding moves. The moral powers are not only the actual reality of history, to the level of which the individual rises in his acts; they are also that to the level of which the historian, transcending his own particularity, rises. The historian is defined and limited by his participation in particular moral spheres, his native land and his political and religious persuasions. But participation depends precisely on this oneness. Within the concrete conditions of his own historical existence—not from some eminence apart from things—he sets himself the task of impartiality. 'This is his impartiality, namely, that he tries to understand'. (§ 91)

Hence Droysen's formula for historical knowledge is 'understanding through research' (§ 8). In this there lies both an infinite mediation as well as an ultimate immediacy. The concept of study, which Droysen links here so significantly with that of understanding, is intended to mask the infinite nature of the task which distinguishes the historian from the perfections of artistic creation just as fundamentally as from the perfect harmony produced by the sympathy and love between two people. Only in 'restless' examination of the tradition, in the opening up of new sources and in ever new interpretations of them, does the study of history move progressively towards the 'idea'. This sounds as if it were based on the procedure of the natural sciences and were an anticipation of the neokantian interpretation of the 'thing-in-itself' as the 'infinite task'. But on closer examination we see that there is something else involved also. Droysen's formulation distinguishes the activity of the historian not only from the perfect ideality of art and the intense communion of souls but, it seems, from the procedure of the natural sciences.

At the end of the lecture of 1882⁷³ we find the words 'that we cannot, unlike the natural sciences, make use of experiment, that we only do research and can do nothing but research'. Thus there must be another element in the concept of research that is important for Droysen, and not just the infinite nature of the task which, as the characteristic of an infinite progress, the study of history has in common with the study of nature and which, in contrast with the 'science' of the eighteenth century and the doctrina of earlier centuries, contributed to the rise of the concept of research in the nineteenth century. Starting probably from the image of a studious traveller penetrating into

unknown regions, this idea of research embraces both the knowledge of nature and of the historical world. The more this theological and philosophical background of the knowledge of the world fades away, the more science is conceived, as an advance into unknown regions and hence is called 'research'.

But this is not enough to explain how Droysen is able to distinguish historical method in the way mentioned from the experimental method of the natural sciences in saying that historical work is 'research, nothing but research'. There must be another infinity different from that of the unknown world, which makes historical knowledge research in Droysen's eyes.

His thought seems as follows: research possesses a different, as it were qualitative infiniteness, if what is studied can never itself come into view. This is, in fact, the case with the historical past, in contrast to the self-givenness of experiment in the study of nature. In order to know, historical research always consults something else, namely tradition, ever afresh and ever fresh tradition. Its answer never has, like the experiment, the clear unambiguity of what has been seen with one's own eyes.

If we now ask what is the origin of this element in the concept of research, which Droysen follows in the surprising antithesis of experiment and research, then we are brought, it seems to me, to the idea of the study of conscience. The world of history depends on freedom, and this remains an ultimately unplumbable mystery of the person. Only the study of one's own conscience can approach it, and only God can know the truth here.

For this reason historical study will not seek knowledge of laws and cannot call upon experiment. For the historian is separated from his object by the infinite intermediacy of tradition.

But on the other hand this distance is also proximity. Although he does not see his object, as in the clear establishment of the facts by experiment, the historian is connected with it, through the intelligible and familiar nature of the moral world, in a way that is quite different from the way the student of nature is with his. 'Hearsay' is here not bad evidence, but the only evidence possible.

'Every ego shut within itself, each one revealing itself to every other one in its utterances' (§ 91). What is known is, accordingly, totally different in both cases: what laws are to the study of nature, moral powers are to the historian (§ 16). In them he finds his truth.

In the indefatigable investigation of the historical tradition understanding is, in the end, always possible. Despite all intermediaries, the concept of understanding retains for Droysen the

! In effect, "exactly because experiment brackets history, it cannot be of meaningful use in humanistic endeavor"

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