

LEONARD KRIEGER
(28 August 1918–12 October 1990)



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The death of Leonard Krieger on 12 October 1990 deprived the historical profession of a master of modern intellectual history. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1918 and educated at Rutgers and Yale universities, Krieger belonged to the generation of American historians shaped by the experience of the depression and the rise of Nazism. Both his graduate study under Hajo Holborn at Yale and his research for the Office of Strategic Services on the German system of domination in Eastern Europe crystallized his resolve to study the problem of liberalism in its German context.

In his pioneering work, *The German Idea of Freedom* (1957), Krieger combined the internalistic, analytic method in the history of ideas, as refined by A. O. Lovejoy, with the social contextual approach to political culture. Thus he produced a new understanding of liberalism that linked German political thought conceptually to the Western European intellectual realm even as it explained the exceptional characteristics that liberalism acquired from its German environment.

The larger issue first articulated in *The German Idea of Freedom* became a central theme of Krieger's subsequent work: the tension between the transcendent claims of thought to coherence and the insistent pressures of history's discordant reality. Krieger explored this problem in depth in early modern political thought in *The Politics of Discretion* (1965). There he examined Samuel Pufendorf's role as mediator between the authoritarian natural law theory of Grotius and Hobbes and the later liberal theories of Locke and Rousseau. Once again Krieger showed, this time with precise and detailed conceptual analysis, the adaptation of Western European thought to Central European historical conditions.

Under the impact of the dehistoricization of both the American social sciences and the humanities in the 1950s, Krieger turned his sharp gaze upon historical thought, past and present. Beginning with his article, "Horizons of History" (*American Historical Review* 63 [1957]) analyzing the ambiguous but critical place of history in the increasingly polarized spectrum of the human sciences, Krieger pro-

duced a series of studies in the difficult marchlands where those two great unlikes, history and philosophy, meet and mate and fight. In two major monographs, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (1977) and *Time's Reasons* (1989), Krieger presented the results of his explorations of the historian's attempts to order the dissonance of collective temporal life in fidelity to its complexity yet with a recognition of the moral implications of the limits of history as a mode of comprehension. *Time's Reasons* was completed when its author was virtually paralyzed and speechless; and though tintured with an uncharacteristic pessimism concerning new trends in contemporary thought, it offers his most seasoned and original analysis of nineteenth-century historicism.

The work must also stand as a monument to the *wissenschaftlicher Eros* that lent Leonard Krieger the heroic will to complete his life-long mission: the elucidation of historical experience through man's intellectual products, and of the function of ideas—including the historian's—in the shaping of history.

Elected 1981

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