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# Moral Judgments in History: Hume's Position

S. K. WERTZ

"History is but the shadow of ethics."  
Anonymous

## Introduction

This essay consists of four sections and a conclusion. The first section is a brief description of the problem of moral judgments in history from the standpoint of contemporary analytic philosophy of history. With this context, Hume is introduced into the debate and it is asked where he would stand on this issue. In this second section, his notion of history and conception of moral judgment are examined with an eye on illustrations (such as Hume's account of the fate of Montrose) from the *History of England*. As Hume's position emerges, it is compared and contrasted with Butterfield's and Collingwood's. Common experience, sympathy, and presensation appear to be the Humean basis of historical understanding. Hume anticipates the Butterfield-Collingwood theory of historical imaginative reconstruction. Section three continues this argument with a look at various accounts of Cardinal Wolsey—including Hume's and Lord Acton's. The fourth and final section attempts to analyze Hume's crucial concepts of common experience, sympathy, and presensation in light of later theories (Smith, Burke, Dilthey, Freud, Livingston, and Capaldi). My conclusion points to concerns other than those I have dealt with and how the subject could be further developed.

## 1.

One of the long-standing and important issues in the philosophy of history is the permissibility or desirability of moral judgments in written history. The contributions of R. F. Atkinson,<sup>1</sup> Herbert Butterfield,<sup>2</sup> and Adrian Oldfield<sup>3</sup> supply the context for a discussion of David Hume on this issue. What is at stake, of course, is whether or not historians should make such judgments in their narratives. Butterfield (127) thinks that if they do, the narratives lose objectivity and transform the historical enterprise into a new and different one. This sounds very much like a positivistic doctrine, and Butterfield (103) goes on to amend this argument: "the historical realm emerges as a moral one in what we may regard as a higher sense of the word altogether." Unfortunately he does not tell us what that sense is, so we have to try to determine what he means from the clues he provides. The question is not whether or not moral judgments are made, but how they are made—are they either implicit or explicit in the historian's story? Either way their presence demands explanation and argument.

Butterfield's argument is primarily directed against Lord Acton's view that pronouncing moral verdicts is central to the task of history.<sup>4</sup> Butterfield denies that moral judgments make their appearance in narratives as pronouncements. Rather, he adds:

There is one way in which the historian may reinforce the initial moral judgment and thereby assist the cause of morality in general; and that way lies directly within his province, for it entails *merely describing*, say, the massacre or the persecution, laying it out in concrete detail, and giving the specification of what it means in actuality. It is possible to say that one of the causes of moral indifference is precisely the failure to realise in an objective manner and make vivid to oneself the terrible nature of crime and suffering; but those who are unmoved by the historical description will not be stirred by any pontifical commentary that may be superadded. (Butterfield, 123; emphasis added)

So it is by description that the historian communicates or invites moral judgments on the part of the reader. Moral judgments are embedded in narrated actions that *move* the audience to interpret them. Sounding very much like R. G. Collingwood,<sup>5</sup> Butterfield (120) says: "Working upon a given historical event, then, the historian knits around it a web of historical explanation" by way of description.<sup>6</sup> Moral judgments are woven into the very fabric of human life, and if history is to adequately reflect that fabric, history will have to possess them. You and I as human beings recognize them in the historian's portrayal of human actions and deeds. Pronouncements or verdicts are unnecessary and indeed unwarranted. Moral judgments, according to

Butterfield, can be conveyed in another way—by description.<sup>7</sup> Butterfield (who is a Christian historian) holds that moral judgments emerge upon reflecting on the whole of narrative—a view that (as we shall see) is attributable to Hume.

How moral judgments are “conveyed” by description is not clear from Butterfield’s account. However, Atkinson gives us an idea of how this might be carried out: “A somewhat sophisticated moral attitude is here required, involving stepping aside from one’s own standards [‘the historian’s own substantive standards should be kept out of history’], in recognising that the agent has and is guided by his own” (Atkinson, 204). Moreover, “it is a central feature of historical activity that it should tend to [fill]...in the sort of context that enables the people of the past to be seen as exercising moral agency.” Atkinson (205) concludes that “moral merit is manifested in an agent’s living up to his *own* standards.” And, “The historian, operating in a characteristic manner, may thus enable past people to be seen as moral agents; but not in a way which involves his passing moral judgements of his own on them.” It takes moral sensitivity on the part of the historian to be able to do this. “In morals,” Atkinson (207) reminds us, “we are all practitioners,” so the historian has firsthand experience to assist in his reconstruction of past people as moral agents. We all know what it is to live up to our moral expectations and to fall short of them. The understanding of our moral psychology is reflected in the historian’s portrayal of individuals, events, institutions, and policies of the past.

Adrian Oldfield extends this line of argument by introducing the concept of the contemporary:

If sympathetic understanding of the man of the past is required, then this can be conveyed with much more subtlety, and ultimately more effect, if the historian, instead of pronouncing his own moral judgments, speaks through the mouths of contemporaries, using their recorded thoughts and opinions as pieces of evidence much like any other. If he is skillful, the historian can still make us aware of his own moral reasoning. But, because he is using contemporary utterances, he can also make us aware of the views and opinions of those whose moral positions diverge from his own. Contemporary moral judgments enable us to enter the lives of the men of the past. We begin to see “heroes” and “villains” in their terms, and thus to appreciate more fully not just their circumstances, but the moral choices and judgments that they themselves made. (Oldfield, 271)

It goes without saying that with any narrative technique, the use of contemporary voices can be abused just like anything else in the historian’s craft. Oldfield is talking about sensitive, skillful historians. He adds: “The

advantage which the historian possesses over the contemporary is hindsight—he does know what followed the actions of his subjects” (Oldfield, 275). This hindsight enables the historian to create a coherence that is not present in lived experience. The historian is able to look at an agent’s experience and events and see them as a series. This series is normally an assessment of meaning and significance that lies beyond mere temporal ordering within a narrative. Here Oldfield borrows Louis Mink’s term, “synoptic judgments,” to describe the kind of considerations that are held together in those kinds of judgments. Oldfield (277) concludes that “the historian cannot avoid acting, from time to time, as moral educator.” The premises in the argument are:

When historians write about individual actions, they are likely to find that the language they use in describing and assessing such action has moral connotations. To describe and assess action is, in the broadest sense, to educate; and part of this is moral education. As much as any educative effort, this is an issue which requires handling with clarity and sensitivity. (Oldfield, 276)

At this point we have sufficient context of the philosophical issue of moral judgments in history to introduce Hume. We shall now turn to his writings;<sup>8</sup> however, the context just described shall be brought into the discussion from time to time.

## 2.

Let us first look briefly at Hume’s conceptions of history and of moral judgments before we examine what his position would be on this issue. Concerning the nature of history we need to peruse the withdrawn essay “Of the Study of History” (1741). The fact that it was withdrawn does not diminish the importance of the theoretical statements that follow. Hence I take these propositions to be central to Hume’s theory of history. To start with, he says that: “the advantages found in history seem to be of three kinds, as it amuses the fancy, as it improves the understanding, and as it strengthens virtue” (E 565). How does history strengthen virtue? The answer is by the examples it affords. The examples do two things. First, “experience...is acquired by history” (E 567), and that would include moral experience of the virtues and vices. Second, “[t]he virtues...contributed to their [the past empires’] greatness, and the vices...drew on their ruin” (E 566). So the subject matter of history—the revolutions of past empires—necessarily has this moral dimension. Hume continues: “the historians have been...the true friends of virtue, and have always represented it in its proper colours, however they may have erred in their judgments of particular persons” (E 567). Hume gives Machiavelli’s

*History of Florence* (1523) as an illustration of a history that represents virtue "in its proper colours"—not Machiavelli the politician, but Machiavelli the historian.<sup>9</sup> Virtue can be properly represented apart from a historian's judgments of particular people. The crucial query is, How is this representation accomplished in history? Notice that Hume separates the representation of virtue and judgments. This is no accident on his part.

Hume makes the following claim: "The writers of history, as well as the readers, are sufficiently interested in the characters and events, to have a lively sentiment of blame or praise; and, at the same time, have no particular interest or concern to pervert their judgments" (E 568). The key terms here in the argument are "sentiment" and "judgment." Let us quickly look at Hume's use of them. In Appendix I of the second *Enquiry*, "Concerning Moral Sentiment," Hume addresses the issue of "how far either *reason* [judgment as 'cool approbation' (EPM 230)] or *sentiment* enters into all decisions of praise or censure" (EPM 285). His argument runs like this:

Premise 1: "The approbation or blame which then ensues cannot be the work of judgment but of the heart; and it is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment" (EPM 290).

Premise 2: "In moral decisions, all the circumstances and relations must be previously known; and the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame" (EPM 290).

After dealing with some historical illustrations to establish the plausibility of these premises, he concludes that: "Nothing remains but to feel, on our part, some sentiment of blame or approbation, whence we pronounce the action criminal or virtuous" (EPM 291).

Given this line of reasoning, the task of the historian is to describe all the circumstances and relations known about some event, so that the reader may from the contemplation of the whole, i.e., the event and its context, feel some *new* impression of a passion (a double relation). As Hume tells us earlier in the second *Enquiry*: "The perusal of a history seems a calm entertainment, but would be no entertainment at all did not our hearts beat with correspondent movements to those which are *described* by the historian" (EPM 223; emphasis added). What I take Hume to be suggesting here is that it is just the presenting of the information in context and with significant relationships depicted, including temporal relationships such as patterns and evolutions or responses to earlier events, which presentation itself so informs the understanding of the readers that because of that understanding the readers are able to grasp those relationships and "map" them to what they know and feel of their being in the world, that then the moral sentiment arises as an impression within them, directly felt (because of the double relation). This sounds very similar to Butterfield's procedure: the one way for the historian to assist the cause of morality is merely by describing some event—

not by giving any "pontifical commentary" or judgment. But at times, Hume does pronounce judgments as well as describe them. So Hume goes beyond Butterfield's positivistic description of historical practices.

Hume's argument above offers us some explanation as to why he thought that history strengthens virtue. Every reader has the capacity for moral feelings or sentiments. These sentiments may be awakened or strengthened by the historian's narrative. The narrative description excites or enlivens the reader to feel some new impression of a passion. The "mechanics" of this psychological process (i.e., the double relation) are unclear, but as well as I can make it out, it is as follows. Virtues and vices are moral sentiments. "What each man feels within himself," Hume proclaims, "is the standard of sentiment" (EPM 171). Yet, "he must observe that others are susceptible of like impressions" (EPM 170). In other words, you cannot tell other persons how it feels or how it *should* feel (this would be a moral pronouncement). All you can do is to describe the situation in such a way that they may have the occasion to feel or experience it for themselves. This points to a difference between moral and aesthetic judgments. Someone can merely describe a situation and he or she can make moral assessments of it, but not so with aesthetic judgments. You have to see it for yourself in order to pronounce it as beautiful or ugly. I can describe a car in great detail, but you cannot deduce its beauty—you have to see it; then and only then you might infer that. (Hume was aware of this difference in evaluations; see EPM 171.) The observations or ideas that lie before the reader are converted by sympathy into internal impressions, and are "lived" again in those readers. The "conversion" is best explained in *Treatise* Book Two, "Of the Passions," where Hume announces that:

No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (T 316)

His conception of sympathy is a species of communication:

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and *by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it.* This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection (T 317; emphasis added).

So given the nature and situations of events in human history, they turn out to be emotionally charged by the very language the historian uses to describe them, and we in turn as readers interpret these through sympathy.

James Farr<sup>10</sup> has fortunately given an excellent analysis of Hume's use of the principle of sympathy in his theory of history, so I need not dwell on this point, except to amend Farr's account. I focus on it here because Hume anticipates the Butterfield-Collingwood theory of historical imaginative reconstruction. Butterfield gives this account of that process:

The historian can never quite know men from the inside—never quite learn the last secret of the workings of inspiration in a poet or of piety in a devout religious leader. For the same reason he can never quite carry his enquiries to that innermost region where the final play of motive and the point of responsibility can be decided. The historian fails to pierce the most inward recesses and the essential parts of a man; and all he can depend on is a general feeling for human nature, based ultimately on self-analysis, but further enlarged in a general experience of life. Much can be achieved by a constant practice of that kind of imaginative sympathy which works on all types and varieties of men and acquires a certain feeling for personality. But the only understanding we ever reach in history is but a refinement, more or less subtle and sensitive, of the difficult—and sometimes deceptive—process of imagining oneself in another person's place. (Butterfield, 116-117)

Hume would probably be more forceful and less cautious about the historian knowing people from the inside because of the extraordinary powers he attributes to sympathy: "expect a correspondence in the sentiments of every other person, with those themselves have entertain'd" (T 332). He then goes on to make this remarkable statement:

[W]e are not subject to many mistakes in this particular, but are sufficiently guided by common experience, as well as by a kind of *presensation*; which tells us what will operate on others, by what we feel immediately in ourselves (T 332; Hume's emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

So he would add to Butterfield's "general experience of life" (which Hume himself affirms), "a kind of presensation," by which he means an introspection that reveals universal principles of human nature and which serves as the basis for a feeling of something before it happens, i.e., an anticipation of what will occur, or in this case what did occur if we are examining the past. In this respect, Hume is closer to Collingwood than to Butterfield, for Collingwood, too, thinks that:

The gulf of time between the historian and his object must be bridged, as I have said, from both ends. The object must be of such a kind that it can revive itself in the historian's mind; the historian's

mind must be such as to offer a home for that revival. This does not mean that his mind must be of a certain kind, possessed of an historical temperament; nor that he must be trained in special rules of historical technique. It means that he must be the right man to study that object. What he is studying is a certain thought: to study it involves re-enacting it in himself; and in order that it may take its place in the immediacy of his own thought, his thought must be, as it were, pre-adapted to become its host. (Collingwood, 304)

The process of preadaptation and reenactment of object and thought<sup>12</sup> is analogous to Hume's notion of presensation, although the latter is clearly not as sophisticated as Collingwood's description of human appropriation. Where Collingwood talks about the right kind of person and object, Hume says "the force of the passion depends as much on the temper of the person, as on the nature and situation of the object" (DP 108). Surely Hume would have thought that this holds for presensation in individuals. Presensation is another way for Hume to depict the human agent as active rather than passive in his or her mental operations: it is *how* we know the sentiments of others, just as we know external objects by our sensations. A historian's presensation becomes the bridge for the gap between him or her and the historical personage. In other words, a historian's presensation is his or her reenactment of the agent's experience from whatever documents or evidence have been left for posterity. What more we can say of "presensation" is speculation, since he does not discuss it anywhere except in that one place (T 332). We can probably assume that "[i]t is a constitution of nature of which we can give no farther explication" (DP 103). Presensation is an odd item for Hume to include in his inventory of human nature, given his empirical leanings in the opening of Book One of the *Treatise*, but then his whole treatment of sympathy is most unusual. Since he denies reason any significant role in human conduct, he must have other faculties and abilities performing that role, and presensation and sympathy are among them.

"This is the nature and cause of sympathy," Hume declares, "and 'tis after this manner we enter so deep into the opinions and affections of others, whenever we discover them" (T 319). James Farr supplies us with the following clarification:

In Hume's metaphor, therefore, we 'enter so deep into' all those various states of mind which Hume shows sympathy opens up to us: sentiments, feelings, opinions, principles, and the like. For example, when we sympathize with an agent we first form an idea of, say, his repugnance or horror at some heinous deed, and then through the enlivening process of the association of ideas, *we then share that idea and eventually feel* ('enter so deep into') *that very repugnance and horror* (Farr, 294; emphasis added).

A skillful historian will narrate a past event in ways such that he or she communicates the sympathetic elements which comprise that event to his or her audience. Historians are to recapture the states of mind of the agents they describe in their narratives. Notice that Farr illustrates the enlivening process with a moral judgment in history, i.e., "some heinous deed which moves the reader to feel that very repugnance and horror felt by a historical agent." Numerous examples abound in the *History of England*, but one that particularly stands out in this context is Hume's account of the fate of Montrose—one of Charles I's loyal generals (H VI ch. LX). Hume begins his account of the marquess with the indictment:

When he was carried before the parliament, which was then sitting, Loudon, the chancellor, in a violent declamation, reproached him with the breach of the national covenant, which he had subscribed; his rebellion against God, the king, and the kingdom; and the many horrible murders, treasons, and impieties, for which he was now to be brought to condign punishment. (H VI 22)

Hume then gives an evaluation of Montrose in terms of his own standards—something Atkinson (205) suggests as a way to assess an agent's moral worth: "Montrose in his answer maintained the same superiority above his enemies, to which, by his fame and great action, as well as by the consciousness of a good cause, he was justly entitled" (H VI 22). Following his plea, Hume adds: "That as to himself, they [the covenanters] had in vain endeavoured to vilify and degrade him by all their studied indignities: The justice of his cause, he knew, would ennoble any fortune" (H VI 23). Hume gives us a sense of Montrose's moral strength and depicts him as someone who, in Atkinson's words, is seen as *exercising* moral agency (205). In this instance, it is Montrose's sentence that conveys a sense of repugnance and horror, and Hume gives it to the reader verbatim as it was read in the trial to maximize its impact:

"That he, James Graham" (for this was the only name they vouchsafed to give him) "should next day be carried to Edinburgh cross, and there be hanged on a gibbet, thirty feet high, for the space of three hours: Then be taken down, his head be cut off upon a scaffold, and affixed to the prison: His legs and arms be stuck up on the four chief towns of the kingdom: His body be buried in the place appropriated for common malefactors; except the church, upon his repentance, should take off his excommunication." (H VI 23)

Hume then gives Montrose's own written response which further illustrates the point about moral agency as seen through one living up to, or in this case dying for, his own principles:

"For my part," added he, "I am much prouder to have my head affixed to the place, where it is sentenced to stand, than to have my picture hang in the king's bed-chamber. So far from being sorry, that my quarters are to be sent to four cities of the kingdom; I wish I had limbs now to be dispersed into all the cities of Christendom, there to remain as testimonies in favour of the cause, for which I suffer." This sentiment, that very evening, while in prison, he threw into verse. The poem remains; a signal monument of his heroic spirit, and no despicable proof of his poetical genius. (H VI 24)

To recall the opening remark from the essay "Of the Study of History" (E 565), it is through examples like this one depicting Montrose's fate that history strengthens virtue. Such moral defiance is an important English trait and is captured in the *Montrose Character*.<sup>13</sup> Hume also uses the *Montrose Character* as a way to exhibit tension between the clergy and the people. Concerning the clergy or the covenanters, Hume makes the following narrative statement that shows he thought that description needs the guidance of moral judgments: "The past scene displays in a full light the barbarity of this theological faction: The sequel will sufficiently display their absurdity" (H VI 25). (The sentence on Montrose looks very similar to the severe sentence on William Wallace (H II 135-136); Hume might well have connected the events, since in each case the popular cause was more unified by this "barbarity"). Regarding the people, Hume had this to say:

The populace, more generous and humane, when they saw so mighty a change of fortune in this great man, so lately their dread and terror, into whose hands the magistrates, a few years before, had delivered on their knees the keys of the city, were struck with compassion, and viewed him with silent tears and admiration. The preachers, next Sunday, exclaimed against this movement of rebel nature, as they termed it; and reproached the people with their profane tenderness towards the capital enemy of piety and religion. (H VI 22)

Here Hume uses contemporary information and opinions to make a moral point about Montrose and English life in 1650, thus exercising a technique that Oldfield (271) observes as an important element in the historian's craft. Most of Hume's readers in his day would probably have identified with the populace. Hume's account of the clergy fosters negative feelings in the reader, thereby allowing him or her to identify vice, and his account of the populace builds positive feelings in the reader, thereby enabling her or him to identify virtue. Hume also serves as Oldfield's "moral educator" here in painting the people as humane, more sympathetic and understanding than the clergy. His distrust of the clergy and the sort of evils he thinks they had committed

throughout the history of England is perhaps only second to Shirer's distaste for totalitarian regimes like the Third Reich (see note 7). In most of Hume's accounts, a dialectical tension between virtue and vice is portrayed by the warring factions of his historical personages, and subtle judgments of morality guide the narrative descriptions.

An issue thus far unaddressed in our analysis is the question of the relativity of morals. (Oldfield's analysis of the contemporary raises this question.) We have seen Hume describe historical agents, e.g., Montrose, in terms of their own standards or ideals. Moreover, he is explicit about this; in his discussion of Charles I, he reflects:

But as these [strict legal] limitations were not regularly fixed during the age of Charles, nor at any time before; so was this liberty totally unknown, and was generally deemed, as well as religious toleration, incompatible with all good government. No age or nation, among the moderns, had ever set an example of such an indulgence: and it seems unreasonable to judge of the measures embraced during one period, by the maxims which prevail in another. (H V 240)

At first glance, it sounds as if Hume voices the doctrine of the relativity of morals. In the second *Enquiry*, he makes the following comment on unusual customs of the Romans that were recorded in Tacitus: "a sentiment of the historian which would sound a little oddly in other nations and other ages" (EPM 255). In "Of National Characters," Hume observes: "The manners of a people change very considerably from one age to another, either by great alterations in their government, by the mixtures of new people, or by that inconstancy, to which all human affairs are subject" (E 205-206). And in the first *Enquiry*, Hume says that there are "many general observations concerning the gradual change of our sentiments and inclinations, and the different maxims which prevail in the different ages of human creatures" and "the manners of men [are] different in different ages and countries" (EHU 86,85).

These statements help us cast doubt on the ploy of emphasizing the phrase "it seems" in Hume's last sentence in the first quotation above (H V 240) in order to deemphasize the view it contains. I make a point of this, because Hume as a historian has been accused of lacking a historic sense. What this amounts to is that he

judged the past as if it were the present; [he]...took for granted that the same standards must be apt to past centuries as well.

The first duty of a historian is not, as Hume declared, to be true and impartial; but to understand. And none can begin to understand a past age unless they intermit their own scales of value. They must view the age from within itself.<sup>14</sup>

No doubt Hume is guilty of partiality throughout the *History*, but such claims as Greig's are totally unsympathetic and in large part unsubstantiated. Hume understood in large measure the periods he was dealing with. He declares these intentions in the opening of chapter LII where he says of the reign of Charles (1629):

We shall endeavour to exhibit a just idea of the events which followed for some years; so far as they regard foreign affairs, the state of the court, and the government of the nation. The incidents are neither numerous nor illustrious, but the knowledge of them is necessary for *understanding* the subsequent transactions, which are so memorable" (H V 217-218; emphasis added).

I doubt whether any of Hume's writings offers evidence of moral relativism, as we speak of it. Rather, they, but especially the *History*, suggest that general moral rules, corrected sentiments, and virtuous qualities evolve throughout history: there are fewer moral strangers than we would expect, at least among our ancestors. The passages cited previously which suggest relativism concern manners and not morals. As Hume writes:

No character can be so remote as to be, in this light, wholly indifferent to me. What is beneficial to society or to the person himself must still be preferred. And every quality or action, of every human being, must, by this means, be ranked under some class or denomination, expressive of general censure or applause. (EPM 273)

To reinforce the point, in the chapter on Oliver Cromwell and his rejection of the Crown, Hume insists that: "Most historians are inclined to blame his choice; but he *must* be allowed the best judge of his own situation" (H VI 97; emphasis added). The reason he gives for this statement is most interesting, given the context above: "And in such complicated subjects, the alteration of a very minute circumstance, unknown to the spectator, will often be sufficient to cast the balance, and render a determination, which, in itself, may be uneligible, very prudent, or even absolutely necessary to the actor" (H VI 97). The use of the actor/spectator distinction here in respect to historical knowledge qualifies Hume's principle of sympathy. This time, Hume agrees more closely with Butterfield than with Collingwood. At this point, Hume, I think, would agree with Butterfield's assessment of the limits of historical knowledge:

It is true that an historian may feel that by imaginative sympathy he has almost completed the gaps in his picture of some historical personage, almost achieved what we might call an internal knowledge of the man. By great insight and by running all his molten

experience into the mould that has been presented to him, he may feel that he has found the essential clue to a character—even to a man who has hitherto baffled the interpreters. Even this degree of knowledge fails, however, in that innermost region of all, which has to be reached before a personality can be assessed in a moral judgment. (Butterfield, 117)

Hume seems to comply with such an account of historical knowledge. For example, when he makes a moral judgment on a historical figure (and he does so frequently), he usually qualifies it by a reference to the agent's own motives or abilities. In his report on Cromwell's protectorship, Hume notes that: "The scheme of foreign politics, adopted by the protector, was highly imprudent, but was suitable to that magnanimity and enterprize, with which he was so signally endowed" (H VI 101). So Hume will label some scheme or event as "prudent" or "imprudent," but will immediately qualify that judgment by its "suitability" from the point of view of the agent. Butterfield does not explain his "mould" for interpreting a historical character, although, as we have seen, Hume does. His mould consists of presensation and sympathy in which the historian builds the internal knowledge of an agent, like that of Montrose.

By focusing on sentiments, so Hume's theory goes, the historian possesses a capacity universally shared by all human beings, and hence something that transcends the actor/spectator distinction. The analogue between history and literature is so close here that Hume's recital of the theatrical experience gives us some clues as to how the principle of sympathy might function in the practice of history:

A man who enters the theatre, is immediately struck with the view of so great a multitude, participating of one common amusement; and experiences, from their very aspect, a *superior sensibility* or disposition of being affected with every sentiment, which he shares with his fellow creatures.

He observes the actors to be animated by the appearance of a full audience, and raised to a degree of enthusiasm, which they cannot command in any solitary or calm moment.

Every movement of the theater, by a skillful poet, is communicated, as it were by magic to the spectators; who weep, tremble, resent, rejoice, and are inflamed with all the variety of passions, which actuate the several personages of the drama. (EPM 221-222; my emphasis).

By analogy, Hume thought that past actions were communicated by a skillful historian. The historian is to "animate" the historical personages in his

or her narrative in ways by which the reader experiences this "superior sensibility." This is how history strengthens virtue. Hume continues: "In our serious occupations [like history], in our careless amusements [like theater], this principle [of sympathy] still exerts its active energy" (EPM 221). He concludes that

the sentiments which arise from humanity [a universal principle along with sympathy; see EPM 231] are not only the same in all human creatures and produce the same approbation or censure, but they also *comprehend* all human creatures; nor is there anyone whose conduct or character is not, by their means, an object, to everyone, of censure or approbation (EPM 273; emphasis added).

So the sentiments are the same for mankind—past, present, or future. It is the influence of reason and custom that accounts for their difference (EPM 202) and affords us with the "natural progress of human sentiments" (EPM 192). This is the stuff of history—both lived and written.

In a penetrating study, J. C. Hilson argues that:

Within the total structural pattern, or non-pattern, of the *History*, one may discern localized movements which might be seen, as I have argued here, as the aesthetic enactment of the ethics of the *Enquiry*. For Hume, the narrative artist's major concern is with 'the images of vice and virtue' and their effect on the reader.<sup>15</sup>

In this section my argument has been that the structural pattern of the *History* is not only the aesthetic enactment of the ethics of the second *Enquiry*, but also can be seen as the epistemological enactment of it. Moreover, the epistemological enactment is not only reflected in the structural pattern of the *History*, but is also an integral part of Hume's theory of history.

### 3.

Thus far we have examined *civil history* (Hume's term [E 97], which probably comes from Francis Bacon [see note 32], but is used more narrowly by Hume) in regard to how the past is evaluated. As we have seen, Hume generally thinks that the past is evaluated on its own terms and by comparisons with one's neighbors (again, a use of contemporaries by Hume). Regarding ancient history, he opens the *History* with this methodological comment: "The only certain means, by which nations can indulge their curiosity in researches concerning their remote origin, is to consider the language, manners, and customs of their ancestors, and to compare them with those of the neighbouring nations" (H I 4). Comparisons form a large subclass

of narrative sentences,<sup>16</sup> and we have witnessed their use with moral judgments in history by Hume; e.g., Charles's indulgence (H V 240) and Cromwell's imprudence (H VI 101). Nevertheless, Hume's comparisons are not all of this type. When it comes to the "history of learning and science" (E 97), Hume appears to have been an advocate of presentism—the view that the past is judged in terms of the present.<sup>17</sup> In his *Character of Francis Bacon*, Hume estimates that: "If we consider him merely as an author and philosopher, the light in which we view him at present, though very estimable, he was yet inferior to his contemporary Galileo, perhaps even to Kepler" (H V 153). Hume tempers the morality of the present with that of the historical agent's time and period, so moral presentism is not dominant in Hume's *History* as it is in Lord Acton's narratives.

To put the previous section in perspective, I shall focus on various accounts of Cardinal Wolsey—including Acton's—and compare them to Hume's. In a review of J. S. Brewer's monumental work, Acton announces that Brewer "excuses him [Wolsey] by the examples of his age, and by the greater cruelty of [Sir Thomas] More" (SW II 309). Conversely, Acton says: "Nor can we admit that the intolerance of Wolsey is excused by comparison with the greater intolerance of More" (SW II 310-311). Acton's use of "excuse" here is made clearer by an earlier passage: "The argument which excuses Wolsey by the times he lived in, is a serious fallacy. Christians must be judged by a moral code which is not an invention of the eighteenth century, but is as old as the Apostles" (SW II 309). The Christian moral code transcends history and remains unaffected by it. Relativism of morals, as espoused by Atkinson and Oldfield is fallacious for Acton because he believed there is a Universal History that is imminent in human history. He makes this clear in the *Lectures on Modern History*, where he asserts that: "Their story [the combined history of all countries or nations] will be told, not for their own sake, but in reference and subordination to a higher series [Universal History], according to the time and the degree in which they contribute to the common fortunes of mankind" (SW II 317). Hume obviously did not have a "higher series" or Universal History as Acton and von Ranke did, especially one that had moral and religious overtones. But Hume did think that standards, rules (e.g., moral ones), and laws developed over a period of time, a "progress of human sentiments" (EPM 192). He gives them a historical interpretation rather than a religious one as Acton did.

These, no doubt, motivated Acton to argue against the relativity of morals,<sup>18</sup> and to call such appeals fallacious. The disagreement there is between Hume and Acton is evident in their handling of Wolsey. Acton writes: "That which distinguishes the whole reign of Henry VIII, both in Wolsey's happier days and during the riotous tyranny of later years, is the idea of treating ecclesiastical authority not as an obstruction, but as a convenient auxiliary to the Crown..." (SW II 260). And, "the intimate alliance with the

Papacy through every vicissitude of political fortune which is characteristic of Wolsey's administration, actually prepared the way for separation after his disgrace" (SW II 261). This is just a sample of what Acton has to say about Wolsey; he also labels him as a "Minister of tyranny," a "priest of immoral life," and a man of "an extreme indulgence" (SW II 308).

Hume on the other hand attempts to give a balanced portrait of Wolsey, attempting to bring out his good qualities as well as his bad ones, but Hume makes it abundantly clear which ones predominate. He writes: "Whoever was distinguished by any art or science paid court to the cardinal; and none paid court in vain. Literature, which was then in its infancy, found in him a generous patron; and both by his public institutions and private bounty, he gave encouragement to every branch of erudition" (H III 114). But Hume continues, "he strove to dazzle the eyes of the populace, by the splendor of his equipage and furniture, the costly embroidery of his liveries, the lustre of his apparel." After a description of the legatine court that Wolsey erected, Hume places moral judgments in the populace of the period: "the people were the more disgusted, when they saw a man, who indulged himself in pomp and pleasure, so severe in repressing the least appearance of licentiousness in others" (H III 125). At the end of his account of Wolsey, Hume adds this footnote to one of his sources: "This whole narrative has been copied by all the historians from the author here cited [Polydore Virgil]: There are many circumstances, however, very suspicious, both because of the obvious partiality of the historian, and because the parliament, when they afterwards examined Wolsey's conduct, could find no proof of any material offence he had ever committed" (H III 125n).

So Hume is careful here in assessing the moral character of the cardinal. But Wolsey's Character is perhaps the most revealing in this respect:

By the rapid advancement and uncontrolled authority, the character and genius of Wolsey had full opportunity to display itself. Insatiable in his acquisitions, but still more magnificent in his expense: Of extensive capacity, but still more unbounded enterprize: Ambitious of power, but still more desirous of glory: Insinuating, engaging, persuasive; and, by turns, lofty, elevated, commanding: Haughty to his equals, but affable to his dependents; oppressive to the people, but liberal to his friends; more generous than grateful; less moved by injuries than by contempt; he framed to take the ascendant in every intercourse with others, but exerted this superiority of *nature* with such ostentation as exposed him to envy, and made every one willing to recall the original inferiority or rather meanness of his *fortune*. (H III 100)

"Haughty" is a word frequently used to describe Wolsey's moral character. Trevelyan employs a contemporary to make a moral judgment: "He was

haughty and ostentatious to a degree that would hardly have been tolerated in a Prince of the Blood. He 'is the proudest prelate that ever breathed' reported a foreign observer, and such was the general opinion."<sup>19</sup> Charles M. Gray defends Wolsey on the grounds of moral relativism:

He [Wolsey] has been accused of turning England into a Papal satellite partly because he had hopes of becoming Pope himself. That charge is exaggerated and unfair if it implies betrayal of English interests. As the world goes and his age went, Wolsey's diplomacy was not ignoble. He was not insensitive to the humanists' critique of contemporary politics nor to their dream of a united Christendom.

Wolsey's life...is emblematic of the good and bad in a passing era.<sup>20</sup>

Gray follows more closely in Hume's footsteps, but the latter does take delight in citing episodes of Wolsey's excessive pride:

Warham, the primate, having written him a letter, in which he subscribed himself, *your loving brother*, Wolsey complained of his presumption, in thus challenging an equality with him. When Warham was told what offence he had give, he made light of the matter. 'Know ye not,' said he, 'that this man is drunk with too much prosperity' (H III 124).

Hume continues much in the same vein: the cardinal represents the vices that draw on an empire's ruin (E 566).

#### 4.

I now return to the positivistic doctrine (echoed by Butterfield at the beginning) that moral judgments are to be eliminated in order for history to be objective or scientific. As we have seen, Atkinson, Oldfield, and Hume have argued that moral judgments are an integral part of the historian's narrative. Their model for history, especially Hume's, is literature rather than science. At the close of section IV of "Historical Inevitability," Sir Isaiah Berlin spells out the mishaps of the positivistic doctrine:

The invocation to historians to suppress even that minimal degree of moral or psychological evaluation which is necessarily involved in viewing human beings as creatures with purposes and motives (and not merely as causal factors in the procession of events), seems to me to rest upon a confusion of the aims and methods of the humane studies with those of natural science. It is one of the greatest and most destructive fallacies of the last hundred years.<sup>21</sup>

Hume would have agreed with Berlin because the subject matter of history is human actions and they are understood in ways (sentiment, for instance) in which physical phenomena are not. For Hume, the aims and methods of the humane studies include presentation and sympathy. Indeed these ways are "law-like," but their regularities are a symptom of human nature. Hume's view of history as a branch of literature was repudiated in the nineteenth century by people like Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), who argued against moral judgments in history.<sup>22</sup> This argument appeared persuasive then because of historicism and later because of positivism. Hume was not under siege by either of these movements; consequently, his position on this issue, especially since these doctrines have been generally repudiated, should contribute to the debate in ways that were not possible before.

Hume did not hold that history is identical to imaginative literature. One of the things that differentiates the two is that "truth...is the basis of history" (E 564). Once the truth of some account is known, then the moral dimension of history emerges. One way this is accomplished is suggested in the *History*: "History, the great mistress of wisdom, furnishes examples of all kinds; and every prudential, as well as moral precept, may be authorized by those events, which her enlarged mirror is able to present to us" (H V 545). A historical narrative becomes a mirror of some moral precept through eloquence. (Eloquence does the "enlarging.") Hume mentions a generous action barely cited in an old history and then follows up with this remark:

Virtue, placed at such a distance, is like a fixed star, which, though to the eye of reason it may appear as luminous as the sun in his meridian, is so infinitely removed as to affect the senses, neither with light nor heat. *Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons, or even by an eloquent recital of the case; our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard.* (EPM 230; emphases added)

"An eloquent recital of the case" would presuppose the requirements of Premise 2: "In moral decisions, all the circumstances and relations must be previously known; and the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame" (EPM 290). What is it that eloquence adds to a recital of a case that enables it to enliven our sympathy and convert our sentiments?

Eloquence inflames an audience, "so as to make them accompany the speaker in such violent passions, and such elevated conceptions," Hume says in "Of Eloquence" (E 101).<sup>23</sup> Then in a passage that clearly anticipates the expressionist theory of art, Hume contends that: "The orator, by the force of his own genius and eloquence, first inflamed himself with anger, indignation,

pity, sorrow; and then communicated those impetuous movements to his audience" (E 104). The paradigm of such practice is Cicero. The orators in Hume's own day lacked eloquence. "Yet, whenever the true genius arises, he draws to him the attention of everyone, and immediately appears superior to his rival" (E 107). This occurs because "even a person, unacquainted with the noble remains of ancient orators, may judge, from a few strokes, that the stile or species of their eloquence was infinitely more sublime than that which modern orators aspire to" (E 100). Hume thinks that men of science and history are those who should be great orators (E 107). He speaks out against indifference (and this could be directed against Burckhardt's argument):

And though an indifferent speaker may triumph for a long time, and be esteemed altogether perfect by the vulgar, who are satisfied with his accomplishments, and know not in what he is defective.... (E 107).

From the above line of argument, we can see that Hume indeed anticipates the expressionist theory of art, i.e., the theory that the function of art is to express or communicate the artist's emotions. The audience or observer feels certain emotions because the artist embedded those emotions in his or her creation. A good example of this theory is given by Sigmund Freud, who in "The Moses of Michelangelo" claims that:

In my opinion, what grips us so powerfully can only be the artist's *intention*, in so far as he has succeeded in expressing it in his work and in getting us to understand it. I realize that this cannot be merely a matter of *intellectual* comprehension; what he aims at is to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create.<sup>24</sup>

Hume apparently thought this psychic process was true of history; he wants to connect the motivating force of moral sentiment with the enlightening understanding of reasoned interpretations of events, which Bacon had argued as the way to do history—to do both the truthful and the good (see note 32 for details).

The theory has its problems. It is obviously possible for a historian to write effectively and even eloquently about a given emotional episode (like the trial of Montrose) without undergoing those same emotions, and in fact he or she may be feeling other emotions at the time—some emotion perhaps even contrary to the ones written about. History, for Hume, is to convey ultimately the feelings of the historical personage. This sounds more like a theory of history of the nineteenth century than one of the eighteenth. Though one might find Hume similar to later expressionists because of the part played by the moral sentiment felt within the historian in order to write, on closer

inspection he looks more like a proto-Dilthey. Here is how Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) describes the nature of historical knowing:

The comprehension of the system of interactions of history grows first of all from individual points at which remnants of the past belonging together are linked in understanding by their relation to experience; what is near and around us becomes a means of understanding what is distant and past. The condition for this interpretation of historical remnants is that what we put into them must be constant and universally valid. On the basis of the connections which the historian has experienced within himself he transfers his knowledge of customs, habits, political circumstances and religious processes to these remnants.<sup>25</sup>

Dilthey's account of historical knowing is similar to Hume's, especially the latter's notion of presentation—the telling what others will probably feel on the basis of what we feel. Dilthey (116) puts it this way: “On the basis of experience and self-understanding and the constant interaction between them, understanding of other people and their expressions of life is developed.” This is remarkably close to Hume's position. And Dilthey (76) writes: “Now they [people's deeds or actions and the institutions they forge, like the law] stand as signs of a mental content which once existed, as the remnant which survives.” Whereas Hume fashions it this way:

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection. (T 317)

It is descriptions of sympathy like this that lead me to take issue with Farr's account. This passage and others suggest that Hume's understanding of sympathy was in line with those of his eighteenth-century contemporaries, notably Adam Smith and Edmund Burke whom Farr cites (306), which were ones of empathetic projection.<sup>26</sup> I think Hume's notion of sympathy is *both* one of empathetic projection, as the above passage and his employment of Shaftesbury's presentation testify, *and* a principle of communication of signs (and/or effects).<sup>27</sup> So it is a much stronger view of sympathy than the others. I would like to believe Farr's anachronistic account of Hume, but I do not think Hume conceived sympathy along the lines of contemporary *Verstehen* theory—maybe Dilthey's version of it, but none of the later versions. The new problem of *Verstehen* focuses on questions of linguistic communication (Farr, 308f). Dilthey, like Hume, claims more than communication. He states that:

"It is only possible to grasp it [the past] through the reconstruction of the course of events in a memory which *reproduces* not the particular event but the system of connections and the stages of its development" (Dilthey, 73; emphasis added). Furthermore, Hume was interested in larger units of communication, and Farr is right about this.

Hume wanted to account for how government "*spreads* a national character" and "communicates...a similarity of manners" (E 204: emphasis added). In "the annals of history," Hume continues reference to larger units of communication or what Dilthey called "systems," by which the latter meant things like government, economic life, education, etc.: "These systems have sprung from the same human nature as I experience in myself and understand in others" (Dilthey, 66); compare Hume's "we shall discover everywhere signs of a sympathy or contagion of manners, none of the influence of air or climate" (E 204). The focus of history is on larger units of communication or the phenomena of contagion, or what Hume elsewhere called "a superior sensibility" (EPM 221). The historian must inflame himself or herself, then communicate those "impetuous movements" (E 104) to his or her audience: Hume probably did this with his Montrose Character.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, this process is very similar to Collingwood's enactment idea or Dilthey's notion of empathy. Since Hume downplayed reason in so many human activities, like moral decisions and situations, he needed something to function in a similar fashion, and what he arrived at was sympathy. It had to play the roles of projection and communication in Hume's theories of history and social life. Good written history, like his *History of England*, was literally to transform the reader—to distill or spread the British national character, in addition to strengthening the moral character of its audience. Hume's use and account of sympathy in history has a distinctively *a priori* flair about it, as Farr points out (289ff.). This is perhaps a reason why Hume has been labeled as a rationalist historian. Donald Livingston was one of the first philosophers of history to appreciate this dimension of his thought and to see that "moral accounts are the main form of explanation used in Hume's *History of England*."<sup>29</sup> Livingston illustrates this with Hume's explanation of why Henry VII did not assume the title of conqueror after violently seizing the throne (H III 6): "These views of Henry are not exposed to much blame, because founded on good policy, and even on a species of necessity." Livingston explains:

What Hume tried to show is that given Henry VII's intention, his conception of his situation, and the policy he was determined to follow, the act performed was the rational thing to have done. The 'species of necessity' under which Henry VII found himself is the sort framed in moral accounts, the rational necessity of not doing what, given the reasons he had, would have been patently foolish or absurd. (Livingston, 59)

Historical explanations, like Hume's explanation of Henry VII's decision about the kind of title he would assume to the crown or any of the other accounts above, are rational explanations rather than causal ones. "Rational explanations," Farr reminds us, "rely for their force, not on general laws [as in causal explanations], but on actors' reasons for acting, whether in situations which are regular and uniform, or irregular and extraordinary" (Farr, 57). Farr goes on to demonstrate that these two models of explanation are indeed operative in Hume's writings—models primarily developed in the *Essays* and put into practice in the *History*. I have tried to show here that Hume's rational explanations of human actions and decisions usually involve moral "judgments" or sentiments that are activated by sympathy and "tested" (and sometimes presented) by presentation. Hume uses this psychological apparatus, Farr rightly concludes, "not so much as an empirical theory, but as a rough-and-ready test or criterion for acceptable evidence in history and the moral sciences. In this way we can distinguish fact from fantasy, moral reality from miracles, and still appreciate the diversity of history amidst the uniformity of human nature" (Farr, 76).<sup>30</sup>

Farr claims that Hume's use of the expression "we enter so deep into" is a misleading metaphor (308). Given my account of sympathy, I think the metaphor is appropriate, and that it does raise serious questions about its status in Hume's overall philosophy.<sup>31</sup> To answer these claims, I think we need to follow Nicholas Capaldi's lead in "Hume as Social Scientist" and argue for an "interpretationism" being present in Hume's thought; "[t]hat is, all explanations must make reference to the conscious interpretation which social participants give of their behavior." (Capaldi, 113) This is evident from the Montrose and Wolsey Characters in addition to the other passages from the *History* that I have assembled here. My claim is that we learn more from Hume on this issue by comparing him to Dilthey and Collingwood than to positivistic thinkers or those under the sway of positivism like Butterfield.

## Conclusion

I conclude with a few disclaimers. After having read "A Dialogue" (EPM 324-343), I was initially convinced that Hume is a moral relativist and that the passages in section 2 should be interpreted that way. But as we have seen, for Hume a moral judgment is founded on one's sentiment of blame or approbation, given knowledge of the relations and circumstances surrounding an action. And "the sentiments which arise from humanity," Hume declares (EPM 273), "are not only the same in all human creatures and produce the

same approbation or censure, but they also comprehend all human creatures; nor is there anyone whose conduct or character is not, by their means, an object, to everyone, of censure or approbation." Given Hume's account of moral judgment, this statement is decidedly anti-relativist. Indeed, Hume believes that manners are different in different times and places, but those manners may not have any moral import. In the essay "Of National Characters" he provides a climatological explanation of the tendency to indulge in strong drink in northern Europe, as opposed to the preference for sexual excess in the south, but he does not conclude that this difference in manners corresponds to a difference in moral principle. Hume makes this clear in his description of the concept:

The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. It also implies some sentiment, so universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind, and render the actions and conduct, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure, according as they agree or disagree with that rule of right which is established. (EPM 272)

The account of moral judgments in history I have given, I realize, is only one plausible account. It has been shaped by the contemporary debate in the philosophy of history and the crucial passage at EPM 223. The second *Enquiry* picture of moral judgments is consistent with a view that the historian, by contemplating circumstances and relations, puts herself in a position to experience a further sentiment or feeling, and then directly communicates such a sentiment or feeling by descriptions or statements which express *it*. We frequently find such episodes in the *History*, especially the Appendices. For example, in his account of the Anglo-Norman period Hume writes:

But the most barefaced acts of tyranny and oppression were practiced against the Jews, who were entirely out of the protection of the law, were extremely odious from the bigotry of the people, and were abandoned to the immeasurable rapacity, of the king [Henry II] and his ministers. (H I 483)

And some of the passages I have cited above can be read in this fashion; for instance, this remark from Hume's account of the judgment of Montrose: "The past scene displays in a full light the barbarity of this theological faction: The sequel will sufficiently display their absurdity" (H VI 25). Because of this situation, it is possible to find more than one position on moral judgments in history in the *History* due to its complicated structure. I do not deny this—I have provided only one account and I see that there may be others that can be developed and hopefully this essay will prompt some alternative accounts.

For example, another plausible view is that as historian, Hume aims not primarily to convey the feelings of the historical personage (which I suggested above), but rather to communicate a moral sentiment about historical circumstances, which no historical personage of note need have felt. Indeed, Hume does attempt to convey Montrose's feelings, but his end or purpose as historian is to elicit in the reader a sentiment of disapprobation for the Puritan clerics. Whether or not Montrose felt this disapprobation, Hume intends that we, his audience, feel it (see note 28). The same is true of his account of Druidical religion. In writing that "No species of superstition was ever more terrible than that of the Druids" (H I 6) Hume means us to feel the Druidical clergy morally reprehensible, and not primarily to enter into the mind of any historical personage. Perhaps we are meant to connect with the feelings of those who were subjected to the clergy of the Druids, but that is not Hume's final aim as historian. These people may or may not have felt disapprobation, but Hume nevertheless intends us to have this feeling.

Hume's position regarding moral judgments in history as I developed it above is based on the notion of Character in his *History*, especially as I found it in the Characters of Montrose, Cromwell, and Wolsey. This approach admittedly leaves out other considerations like those I just suggested. If one focuses on periods or groups, one will come up with a different philosophical description of the historian's activities. If my work here will encourage others to explore these other facets of Hume's great narrative, I will feel that this essay has accomplished what it set out to do, i.e., to direct attention to dimensions of Hume's philosophy of history which have been little explored if at all. Furthermore Oldfield's conception of historian as "moral educator" fits Hume perhaps better than the other recent conceptions that have been examined here, and consequently it adds a new dimension to his moral philosophy. In Hume moral philosophy and history intersect and gives us his version of "philosophical history"—history at its best.<sup>32</sup> Our reading of the *History* can now more clearly be seen, not as positivistic, nor as emotivist, but as something perhaps in ways similar to Dilthey, in some consonance with Atkinson and Oldfield, and still needing even more work, in view of the achievements to date.

## NOTES

The first half of this paper was presented at the 18th International Hume Conference held at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon, on August 12-15, 1991. The Conference Directors, William Davie and James King, and my commentator, Jeanne Schuler, were particularly helpful with their criticism. The second half of the paper was read at a session (27) entitled "Hume and History" at a conference on the *Uses of the Past*, Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Northeast American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies held in Burlington, Vermont, on October 31-November 2, 1991. My respondent, Derk Pereboom, gave me ample, insightful comments to think

about in the revision of this paper. Also the reviewers and editors of *Hume Studies* have been helpful with their reports and suggestions. I thank all of these individuals plus those who were present at the meetings who provided spirited discussion, especially David Raynor. The shortcomings that remain are of my own making.

1 R. F. Atkinson, *Knowledge and Explanation in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), ch. VI, sec. 3. Cited parenthetically in text as "Atkinson."

2 Herbert Butterfield, "Moral Judgments in History," in his *History and Human Relations* (New York: Macmillan, 1951/52), 101-130; reprinted in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology*, edited by Hans Meyerhoff (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 228-249. Cited parenthetically in text as "Butterfield."

3 Adrian Oldfield, "Moral Judgments in History," *History and Theory* 20.3 (1981): 260-277. Cited parenthetically in text as "Oldfield."

4 Lord Acton, *Lectures on Modern History* (London: Macmillan, 1906, 1960), and *Historical Essays and Studies* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1907, 1967), *inter alia*. My references, wherever possible, will be to the *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, edited by J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985), abbreviated as "SW," followed parenthetically by volume and page numbers.

5 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), Part V, esp. 244: "The web of imaginative construction [of the historian] is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So far from relying for its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine." Cited parenthetically as "Collingwood."

6 In "Explanatory Narrative in History," *Philosophical Quarterly* 4.4 (January 1954): 15-27, William Dray comments that the Hanoverian settlement (1714) actually emerged during the last fifteen years of Elizabeth's reign (1588-1603). This raises a temporal problem in English history "a problem which can only be solved by a description of the transition in all its detail" (26). And, "an historical explanation may thus amount to *telling the story of what actually happened*, and telling it in such a way...[that] answers to likely objections are *built into the narrative*" (27; Dray's emphases). Historical explanation is a certain kind of narrative description, for Dray, as it is for Butterfield and Hume.

7 I am reminded of William L. Shirer, who says in the "Foreword" of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1959/1960): "No doubt my own prejudices, which inevitably spring from my experience and make-up, creep through the pages of this book from time to time. I detest totalitarian dictatorships in principle and came to loathe this one the more I lived through it and watched its ugly assault upon the human spirit. Nevertheless, in this book I have tried to be severely objective, *letting the facts speak for themselves* and noting the source for each" (xii; emphasis added).

8 Below is a list of abbreviations of Hume's works used in the remainder of this essay:

- DP *A Dissertation on the Passions*, in *Essays and Treatises on Various Subjects*, Stereotype Ed. (Boston: J. P. Mendum, n.d.), references to sections and page numbers.
- E *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1987), references to page numbers.
- EHU *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
- EPM
- H *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James the Second, 1688*, edited by William B. Todd, 6 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1983-85), references to page numbers and volume.
- T *A Treatise of Human Nature*, analytical index by L. A. Selby-Bigge, with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); contains the Abstract of the *Treatise*; references to Book, Part, and Section.

9 For Hume's Italian historiographical connections (Francesco Guiccardini and Paolo Sarpi), see David Wootten, "David Hume, 'the historian,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 281-312, esp. 283ff.

10 James Farr, "Hume, Hermeneutics, and History: A 'Sympathetic' Account," *History and Theory* 17.3 (1978): 285-310; and his companion piece, "Humean Explanations in the Moral Sciences," *Inquiry* 25.1 (March 1982): 57-80.

11 Hume adopted this term from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* (London, 1711), II, 307, 412, in "The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recital of certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects" (1709), II, 4, and III, 2. But the term goes back as far as Henry More's *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653). John Laird, in *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1932/1967), 197, is one of the few commentators to mention presentation in Hume's account of sympathy (in ch. VII).

12 Thought is founded on feeling in Collingwood's theory of imagination; see *The Principles of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938/1958), Book Two.

13 Whenever I refer to Hume's historiographical category of Character, the word is capitalized. By "Character," Hume means an account of eminent persons or groups wherein he reduces them to types associated with their profession, their station in life, and their relation to the government or reign. Characters form an integral part of his historical narrative by supplying the needed periodization besides the usual, temporal chronology. The historiographical category of Character was probably suggested to Hume from his reading of *Ancient History* (4 Vols.) by French historian Charles Rollin (1661-1741) who divided narrative order into Religion, People, War, Arts and Sciences, and the Character, Manners, and Qualities of nations, like the Carthaginians. Hume's narrative structure is essentially Rollin's. See Donald C. Ainslie's important study, especially his discussion of National Character, in

"The Problems of the National Self in Hume's Theory of Justice," *Hume Studies* 21.2 (November 1995): 289-313, esp. 295ff, in the context of recent political philosophy.

14 J.Y.T. Greig, *David Hume* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 268-269.

15 J. C. Hilson, "Hume: The Historian as Man of Feeling," in *Augustan Worlds: New Essays in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, edited by J. C. Hilson, M.M.B. Jones, and J. R. Watson (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), 205-222; 218-19.

16 The term "narrative sentences" is Arthur Danto's, who in *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), ch. VIII, gives this characterization: "Commonly they take the past tense, and...they refer to at least two time-separated events though they only describe (are only about) the earliest event to which they refer" (143).

17 For a spirited discussion of this view, see David L. Hull, "In Defense of Presentism," *History and Theory* 17.1 (1979): 1-15. John Dewey, too, argued that history must be written from the standpoint of the present; see his "Historical Judgments," from *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 230-239; reprinted in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, 163-172.

18 For an excellent account of Lord Acton's position on moral judgments in history, see Terrence Murphy's study, "Lord Acton and the Question of Moral Judgments in History: The Development of His Position," *The Catholic Historical Review* 70.2 (April 1984): 225-250.

19 G. M. Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1942/1959), 213.

20 Charles M. Gray, *Renaissance and Reformation England: 1509-1714* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 30.

21 Sir Isaiah Berlin, "Historical Inevitability" (1954), reprinted in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, 271.

22 For a brief selection of Jacob Burckhardt's argument against moral judgments in history, see "On Fortune and Misfortune in History," reprinted in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, 273-290.

23 Recently Hume's "Of Eloquence" has been of interest among eighteenth century scholars; see Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); M. A. Box's review in *Hume Studies* 21.2 (November 1995): 333-339; and Potkay's reply, 340-343.

24 Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo" (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), XIII, 212.

25 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society*, edited by H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 139-140. Cited parenthetically as "Dilthey."

26 In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), Adam Smith gives a more conservative description of sympathy than Hume:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them (9).

This description sounds more like Butterfield's than Hume's. Edmund Burke's description is much closer to Hume's. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, edited by Adam Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Burke writes:

It is by the first of these passions [sympathy, imitation, and ambition] that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected; so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which regard self-preservation, and turning upon pain may be a source of the sublime; or it may turn upon the ideas of pleasure; and then, whatever has been said of the social affections, whether they regard society in general, or only some particular modes of it, may be applicable here. It is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another... (41).

Evidently Hume thought that it is by this principle that history transfuses agents' passions from one breast to another twice: from the agent to the historian, and then from the historian to the reader.

27 I am not alone in reading this passage and the others this way: Nicholas Capaldi, in "Hume as Social Scientist," *Review of Metaphysics* 32 (1978): 99-123, says that: "Sympathy is defined by Hume as the process in which our idea of someone else's inner mental state is enlivened to become the very same mental state in ourselves" (117), and Capaldi refers specifically to T II i 11.

28 David Wootton gives us an interesting example of this "communication": "Hume deliberately sought to move his audience to tears by his account of the execution of Charles I (L I 210, 222, also 344; "My Own Life"). He was certainly successful: indeed, we have letters from female admirers testifying to how his history had moved their passions. One of them told him that she had never

had such a good opinion of herself as when reading his history: evidently Hume had inspired virtuous sentiments in her, and thereby made her feel virtuous and admirable (L II 347, 366-367)" (282).

29 Donald W. Livingston, "Hume on the Problem of Historical and Scientific Explanation," *The New Scholasticism* 47.1 (Winter 1973): 38-67, see 59; his account is updated and greatly enhanced in *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chs. 4, 7, 8, and 9. Cited parenthetically as "Livingston."

30 For a recent discussion of this topic, see Simon Evnine's study, "Hume, Conjectural History, and the Uniformity of Human Nature," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31(1993): 589-606.

31 For a critical discussion of some of these problems, see John J. Jenkins, "Hume's Account of Sympathy—Some Difficulties," in *Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by Vincent Hope (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 91-104.

32 A recent study which develops a portrait of Hume along the lines of the intersection between moral philosophy and history, "natural history," is Craig Walton's contribution, "Hume's 'England' as a Natural History of Morals," in *Liberty in Hume's History of England*, edited by Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), 25-52. Francis Bacon made a distinction within "natural history" as having two parts, natural and civil—nature's work being natural history and "nature with man's help" being civil history. See my remarks at the beginning of section 3.

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