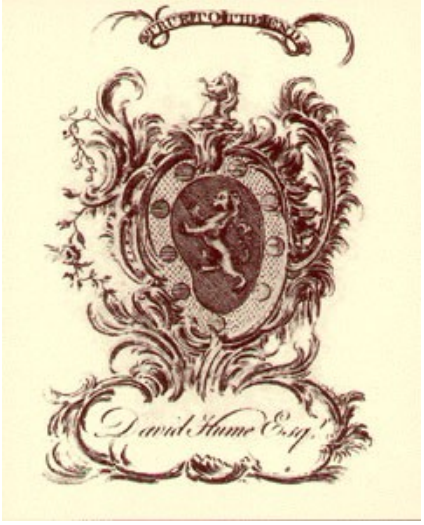

Spencer K. Wertz. ***Between Hume's Philosophy and History: Historical Theory and Practice***

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Hume Studies Volume 30, Number 1, April (2004) 198-200.

Hume Studies
Volume 30, Number 1, April 2004, pp. 198–200

SPENCER K. WERTZ. *Between Hume's Philosophy and History: Historical Theory and Practice*. Lanham and Oxford: University Press of America, 2000. Pp. xvi + 157. ISBN 0761815430.

This brief book aims to "show an alliance between history and philosophy in Hume's thought"(xii). Six of its eight chapters are revised essays, published originally in academic journals from 1975 to 1996. These essays are sometimes insightful on the links between Hume's philosophical and historical thought. But the book's episodic and disparate origins remain discernible in the finished text, producing uneven results.

Wertz says that his "inquiry occupies a space between Hume's philosophy and history; it is not philosophy of history or history of philosophy . . . but a precursor to both"(xi). An analysis of this preparatory middle-ground begins with Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. There, says Wertz, Hume put forward a single "set of principles" (8) or a "system," which "grows, changes, and undergoes development and expansion" (5). While the book's opening pages are unduly vague about the details of Hume's "system," chapter 2 begins to flesh it out with an intriguing discussion of Hume's "missing shade of blue" experiment. In his analysis of that problem, says Wertz, Hume looked "beyond simple sensible qualities and the ideas annexed to them" (17). For Wertz, Hume the historian, like the agent in the "missing shade of blue" experiment, "knows certain things and facts and on the basis of them he reasons or conjectures about others" (16).

Chapter 3 takes as its point of departure what Wertz identifies as "the standard interpretation" (21) of another aspect of Hume's system, his thoughts on human nature. That many scholars have followed J. B. Black's assessment of 1965, and incorrectly assumed that Hume held human nature to be constant in such a way that "history is simply a repeating decimal," is an accurate observation. However, there have been significant exceptions to that reading and the most important of these Wertz does not note. Indeed, what Wertz identifies as "the standard interpretation" was much more standard before 1975 (the year in which Wertz's essay, on which his chapter is based, was first published), than it is now. Overlooked entirely in Wertz's discussion is a well-known and important chapter on "Social Experience and the Uniformity of Human Nature" in Duncan Forbes's *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1975). Forbes argued convincingly that if "Hume gives the impression of being a psychological uniformitarian, a historian with an 'unhistorical' conception of human nature, it may be because he was, for a number of reasons, especially attracted to the study of politics, in which, he thinks, the regularity of human nature is strikingly obvious"(120). While Forbes's

perceptive argument may not have been available to Wertz when the latter published his essay in 1975, it should not have been ignored in his book published in 2000, especially given the centrality of Hume's thoughts on human nature to Wertz's remaining chapters. Related aspects of Forbes's argument would equally have been useful to key arguments put forward by Wertz in other places.

David Fate Norton's 1965 essay on "History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought," (in *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*, ed. David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965]) provides the foundation for Wertz's historiographical argument in chapter 4. "Norton's labeling of Hume's constant interjection of himself into the account or narrative as mere subjectivism," writes Wertz, "is simply wrong"(42). While Norton's argument is more subtle and supported by more textual evidence than Wertz's rendition admits; nevertheless, Wertz supports his claim that Hume thought, as he wrote, that "history . . . *extends our experience* to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute as much to our improvement in wisdom, *as if they had actually lain under our observation*"(37–38). One of Wertz's strongest and most original arguments was that Hume, in the course of his career as a philosopher, expanded the domains of experience. When Hume talks of experience, he "means more than personal, individual experience; collective, social experience or history is the paradigm for that term"(xv). "Written history and lived history are essentially the same for Hume"(116). By the time he came to write the *History of England*, Hume seems clearly to admit a social dimension to experience.

Wertz states that "a key part of Hume's historical methodology consists of the concepts of narration, taste, and moral judgments" (xiii). Chapter 5 focuses on Hume's idea of historical narrative; chapter 6 on his theory of taste. Chapter 7, "Moral Judgments in History," argues that when Hume based his "historical understanding" on "common experience, sympathy, and presentation," he "anticipates the Butterfield-Collingwood theory of historical imaginative reconstruction" (67). While in this chapter and elsewhere, Wertz tends to consider Hume's thought "in light of later theories" (67), it would have been useful to have seen Hume more often through the eyes of his contemporaries who, of course, were all making moral judgments. Not because those living closer to Hume were more apt than modern scholars to interpret Hume's historical/philosophical thought correctly, but because their contemporary readings help us to understand the contexts in which Hume wrote. While Wertz may be right that "we learn more" about Hume's historical thought by "comparing [Hume] to Dilthey and Collingwood than to positivistic thinkers or those under the sway of positivism like Butterfield," we may learn more yet by looking to Hume's eighteenth-century readers. One of Hume's eighteenth-century American readers, William Bradford, for instance, wrote to another, James Madison, putting Hume's thoughts on a constant human nature

in context: "Human nature is the same in every age if we make allowance for the differing customs & Education, so that we learn to know ourselves by studying the opinions & passions of others."

In chapter 8, "The Historiography of Science," Wertz provides a useful summary of the character sketches of Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, William Harvey, and other scientists found in Hume's *History*. However, Wertz's conclusion that "When it comes to the 'history of learning and science,' Hume appears to have been an advocate of presentism—the view that the past is judged in terms of the present," ought to be tempered with the nuanced discussion of Hume's "distanciation" found in Mark S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Wertz's book concludes with a short "Epilogue." There, Wertz comments on the "shift in audience or readers of Hume's *History*" (113), but he would have done well to refer to Philip Hicks's discussion of that topic in *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (Houndsmill: Macmillan, 1996). In "a brief word on the politics of the *History*" (114), Wertz writes that "Hume worried about how to balance stability with liberty" (115), but he makes no attempt to incorporate the essays on this subject found in Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston's edited collection, *Liberty in Hume's History of England* (Boston and Dordrecht: Kluwer/Nijhoff, 1990). Finally, although Wertz's subtitle is "Historical Theory and Practice," the focus of his chapters is "theory." This book contains very little akin to an examination of the nuts-and-bolts investigation of Hume as historian in "practice."

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