

Voigt presents David Hume the historian and David Hume the philosopher under the heading of *David Hume and the Problem of History*: Hume is seen as a man trying to understand and to solve a fundamental problem. Consequently the historian David Hume is only considered in so far as he is thinking about problems concerning history as such, that is to say, he is only considered in so far as he is more than just a historian in any ordinary sense. The thinking man who worked as a professional philosopher and as a professional historian is the object of Voigt's study and not two separate bodies of written works. Indeed, a re-enactment of this Humean thinking experience is used and demanded throughout this book, and without losing many words about the matter, Voigt obviously claims that this can be accomplished.

Hume is seen exploring into a new field of experience, namely the historical, trying to succeed by using principles already found solid. Now, Hume had started his philosophical life with an experimental research into human nature, conceived in a definitely non-historical sense. No wonder that he ran into difficulties when he tried to understand history with this equipment at hand. But what precisely was the nature of these difficulties? To what extent did Hume succeed in developing new and more appropriate ideas? The author argues that Hume, who was no dogmatic, but a keen observer and an enthusiastic experimenter, perceived, that his old formulas are not really apt to cover the historical, but still he could not achieve at consistent philosophical solutions. Here Hume is set in comparison to Giambattista Vico.

“A new field of experience”: The author argues that for Hume history was a world of absurdities, the task of the Humean historian thus being to explain absurdities. “Absurdity” is defined as “a phenomenon which is in contradiction to reason and therefore to all natural expectation.” This means that history is centred around the unpredictable and the historian has the task to explain, how it is based in human nature. Absurdities crystallize into “institutions” and so history gets a strong basis of well established structures. Once these institutions are taken for granted (as explained, though still absurd, matters of fact) there is probability and necessity. Humean reason

now teaches not to fight institutions but to accommodate with them, to smoothe them, to try and make them less dangerous. Macchiavelli had taught how to live in a devilish world, Hume teaches how to live in an absurd world. Here Hume is set in contrast to Voltaire on the one hand and to Edmund Burke on the other.

The world cannot be only a world of absurdities because if it were, no human being would be able to notice an absurdity. No, there are values of timeless significance: reason, refinement of taste and sentiment. Despite of all the absurdities, there does exist progress, and this constitutes the essence of what should be. Thus the task of the Humean historian is to strengthen the progress of mankind. David Hume, the historian, ranking in the army of enlightenment! Adam Potkay (*The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, Ithaca and London 1994, p. 159 ff.) described Hume very aptly as a man who to his end demonstratively stuck to the idea that in our human life there can be nothing more important than refinement of taste and sentiment. In consequence, David Hume took the artistic side of historical narration very serious. Indeed, it overlapped with his scientific aims. Here, Hume's "dissertation-style" is described in contrast to Lawrence Sterne's "digression-style".

"History as re-enactment of past experience": Here we are at Collingwood's famous dictum, and, indeed, Voigt should be regarded as a historian shaped by Collingwood's *Idea of History*. This means, that he constantly tries to overcome and transpass scissors-and-paste methods, aiming at scientific history. And, look, how interesting this note No.44 on page 155, where Voigt argues against Collingwood, that "authority" cannot be completely eliminated, that is, scissors and paste still are and always will be a necessary part of the historians equipment. But this means, that Voigt, contrary to Collingwood, still has doubts as to the scientific character of history. With this in mind, Voigt's presentation of Hume's thoughts about the scissors-and-paste method appears to be central.

No doubt, Voigt's book is a book about Collingwood and not just a book shaped by Collingwood. This is not confined to method, but concerns his conception of European historiography. The title "David Hume and the Problem of History" suggests the obvious, that this

problem of history is more than a problem of Mr. David Hume. Thus Hume is imbedded into a wider context, and here Voigt comes to conclusions which differ from those Collingwood proposed in *The Idea of History*, making Hume appear a much more important and independent link between Giambattista Vico and 19<sup>th</sup> century historicism than Collingwood had it.

Donald W. Livingston's *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, published in 1984, made the guiding theme of our book, namely, that the two sets of Hume's activities are mutually interdependent and mutually illuminating, a common place among historians and philosophers. It might be interesting to consider, how Voigt's emphasize on "understanding" (that is "Collingwood") matches with Livingston's emphasize on "narration" (that is "Arthur Danto").

In fact, the aspect of "narration" finds a proper place in *David Hume und das Problem der Geschichte*, Kap. VI B ("Eine neue Geschichtsschreibung") that considers the relevance of Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* for Hume's historical style, while the aspect of "historical understanding" is not in the focus of *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*.

When Adam Potkay (Selected Bibliography: David Hume, 4 July 2000 on <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/C18/biblio/hume.html>) wrote about Livingston's *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*:

The first systematic study of the relation between Hume's philosophical and historical work. Livingston has done more than any other twentieth-century philosopher to address Hume's body of writings as a coherent whole;

he certainly was not aware of *David Hume und das Problem der Geschichte*.