

Sam Schweber – From Physics to the History of Science

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Schweber was an accomplished historian of science, with seminal contributions to the 20th-century history of science. Before, he had been a great physicist for more than 20 years. While he was not the single case of such a transition from science to humanities (Abraham Pais, Léon Rosenfeld and Ernst Mayr are the names to be evoked, as well as other cases from physics to philosophy, and vice-versa, such as Abner Shimony, Bernard d'Espagnat, Mario Bunge, Jeffrey Bub, and Michel Paty), he was outstanding in the sense of the excellence in both fields. Thus, I want to ask, what kind of skills and values he brought from physics to history and how these features shaped his trajectory as a historian of physics. I conjecture Schweber's later career was constrained, among other factors, by his concerns with ethical issues, which included research with military implications, and his long attachment to the role of theories in science, which was related to his training in quantum field theories. In order to do this, I first make a summary of his contributions to the history of science, then I review his training and contributions to physics to, finally, discuss how the latter contributed to the former career.

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