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Hume's Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Psychology by Philip A. Reed and Rico Vitz, eds. (review)

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Philip A. Reed and Rico Vitz, eds. *Hume's Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Psychology*. Routledge, 2018. Pp. 386. Hardback ISBN 978-1-138-74475-2, \$ 140.

Hume's Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Psychology, edited by Philip A. Reed and Rico Vitz, is a collection of 14 essays intended to explore fruitful connections between David Hume's theory of the passions and ethics and contemporary experimental and cognitive psychology. Although recent moral philosophers have become interested in psychological discoveries in order to refine their normative approach to morality by means of a better empirical understanding of the workings of the mind, this trend has been typically developed by Aristotelian scholarship. Hence, the purpose of this volume is to "fill a gap in the literature" by (i) introducing Hume as a powerful interlocutor in the field of moral psychology, and (ii) showing how Hume's science of man remains valid for contemporary debates on topics such as emotions, virtues, sympathy, empathy, and motivation.

The essays focus on a wide range of topics within Hume's moral psychology, but they can be grouped into four central categories as follows: (i) the challenges of the so-called "situationists" to virtue ethics and how Hume's moral theory can respond to them; (ii) the crucial role of sympathy in Hume's ethics and its relationship with empathy; (iii) Hume's account of the passions and contemporary insights on human motivation; (iv) the possibility of the refinement or cultivation of the passions, connected with Hume's suggested therapies. I will first describe the central claim of each essay and then I will turn to a general assessment of the insights and limits of the book taken as a whole.

In the opening essay, "Beyond the 'Disease of the Learned'. Hume on Passional Disorders," Margaret Watkins uses Hume's personal experience with the disease of the learned to explore the relationship between mental illness and vice. Her claim is twofold: first, it is difficult on Humean principles to "make a firm distinction" between mental illness and vice. Margaret holds that since both concepts involve a disorder in the passions they should be understood as "lying among a wide continuum" (9). Secondly, Hume suggests a therapy of the passions that can be applied in both situations: the movement from delicacy of passion towards delicacy of taste. Although Watkins does not explore the plausibility of Hume's therapeutic suggestion, it might be promising to connect it with the development of art therapy in contemporary clinical psychology.

The next three essays focus on some of the challenges posed by the situationists to normative virtue ethics, and show how Hume's moral psychology can successfully respond to them. Philip Reed, in "Hume on the Rarity of Virtue," addresses the implication for Hume's virtue ethics of recent experimental studies

in social psychology demonstrating that, in general, people do not possess the virtues. Reed's claim, based on a detailed analysis of Hume's texts, is that he is not committed "to the diffusion of virtue" (41). Erin Frykholm's essay, "Spontaneity, Intuition and Humean Virtue" examines the impact on a Humean account of virtue of empirical data indicating that "people do not act reliably virtuously" and that, in our immediate responses to situations, affects and non-conscious workings of the mind play a crucial motivational role (63). Rico Vitz, in "Character, Culture, and Humean Virtue Ethics: Insights from Situationism and Confucianism," takes on the situationist's sceptical view about character traits conceived as "constant, stable, and evaluatively integrated"—called globalism (99)—and persuasively argues that this criticism does not reach Hume's moral philosophy, since Hume is not committed to globalism.

The next 6 essays reflect on Hume's sympathy, its relationship with empathy and its reliability as the foundation of morality. In "Empathy, Altruism and Hume," Katharina Paxman, after a conscientious exploration of the moral limitations typical of people suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorders, suggests that Hume's sympathy, understood as affective empathy, can explain how, lacking cognitive empathy, autists are competent to make sound moral judgements. "Cultivating Empathic Concern and Altruistic Motivation," by Annette Pierdziwol, relates Daniel Bateson's hypothesis about the causal link between empathy and altruistic motivation with Hume's account of how benevolence and pity arise from extensive sympathy. The essay is focused "on the practical question about how to cultivate increased empathy-induced altruism" (143), and maintains that Hume's strategy for correcting sympathy remains valuable. Lorenzo Greco's essay, "Preserving Practicality. In Defense of Hume's Sympathy-Based Ethics," provides a powerful vindication of Hume's sympathy, both as the foundation of moral judgements from the common point of view, and as motivation to act according to them. His account persuasively responds to J. Prinz's and P. Bloom's suspicions about the narrowness and partiality of sympathy.

Anne Japp Jacobson, in "Hume, Bloom, and Moral Inclusion," tackles a pressing issue in ethics: how to develop an inclusive moral theory. She examines Hume's sympathy-based approach and Bloom's dismissive assessment of the moral effect of empathy, to conclude that both are very limited to promote real inclusiveness. In "Empathy, Interdependency, and Morality," Lorraine L. Besser picks up the thread of Prinz's dialogue with Hume that Greco also discusses in his essay, defending against Prinz the importance of empathy or sympathy in morality, due to its role in creating an intersubjective base "that shapes the nature of morality itself" (209). Readers will benefit by comparing both essays and noticing two different paths to accomplish the same end. The last essay on sympathy, Christine Swanton's "The Philosophical Power of Hume's Notion of Love," aims to give virtuous love a significant place in Hume's moral theory, stemming from its capacity to correct

the distortions caused by sympathy in moral judgements. In general, she says “Hume’s notion of love enriches the resources of sentimentalist psychology and moral philosophy” (240). From this group of essays, an attentive reader will learn that, after many studies on Hume’s sympathy, its nature and the role it plays in morality are still controversial topics.

The last four essays are more difficult to group into a single category. Saul Traiger, in “Hume on the Methods and Limits of the Science of Human Nature” shows, by means of an impressive and minute analysis of the changes in Hume’s methodology from Book 1 to Book 2 of the *Treatise*, how Hume’s insights about the complementary role of reason and affect in cognition, and the consequent shift from introspection to observation of other minds in Hume’s science of man are very close to contemporary cognitive science. Michael B. Gill’s “Hume on Moral Motivation,” provides a novel understanding of Hume’s assessment about reason’s lack of motivational force in morality, by distinguishing three different types of moral motivation in his work: virtuous-trait motivation, approval-of-another motivation and approval-of self-motivation, a distinction that contemporary moral psychology supports. In her thoughtful and illuminating essay, “Passionate Regulation and the Practicality of Reason,” Elizabeth Radcliffe’s claim is twofold: first, to provide an original interpretation of Hume’s reason, which allows its practicality and hence emphasizes its role in passionate regulation, and secondly, to show how Hume’s suggested paths for cultivating our passionate self are validated in contemporary psychology. The last essay, “Hume on Affective Leadership,” written by Eric Schliesser, focuses on Hume’s account of the adequate political emotions, that is, those which contribute to socio-political unity.

Considering the book as a whole, I find it successful in opening a promising dialogue between contemporary moral psychology and Hume’s moral theory. The ample bibliography included will be very helpful for pursuing it. Hopefully, this conversation will promote interdisciplinary studies, addressing some of the suggestive questions Vitz proposes in the “Conclusion.” Also of value is the inclusion of young voices, along with recognized senior Hume scholars. However, I find some limitations in the volume: the unbalanced treatment of the different topics; the scarce critical assessment of the different psychological experiments and the conclusions drawn from them from Hume’s theory of the passions and ethics; finally, the reduced spectrum of interlocutors, which excludes significant perspectives in developmental psychology, such as object-relations psychoanalysis.

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