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*Hume, Passion, and Action*, by  
Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (review)

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Radcliffe, Elizabeth. *Hume, Passion, and Action*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 230. ISBN 9780199573295. Hardback, \$60.00.

It is a challenge to write a book on a topic that has received extensive treatment in philosophical discourse—especially when said treatment has been varied in purpose, angle, and aim. Hume’s work on the relationship between passion and action is one such topic. Scholarship on this theme has ranged from historically situated interpretive work, to theoretical work that assumes a Kantian foil, to the robust discourse of contemporary Humean views (which themselves vary widely in their resemblance to the historical Hume). In her book, *Hume, Passion, and Action*, Elizabeth Radcliffe has taken on the complex task of writing on motivation in Hume with many of these perspectives in her sights, and it has resulted in a book that clearly and helpfully walks us through the complexities and interrelations of these discourses, while simultaneously making a case for her own interpretive take on Hume’s theory of motivation. Such a labor is not for the faint of heart, and Radcliffe does an exceptional job of carefully and systematically presenting the various discussions. But the real pay-off comes as one engages Radcliffe’s own arguments. She provides the reader with several important innovations in approaching the topic of Humean motivation, including a new defense of Hume’s commitment to the motivational impotence of belief and a careful analysis of what Hume requires for the motivational efficacy of a passion. Radcliffe’s interpretive arguments will surely advance the discourse on Hume’s account of passion and action. Given their presentation alongside an incredibly helpful overview of the relevant debates, this text should be treated as essential reading to anyone looking to further contribute to these discussions.

Radcliffe positions herself as arguing for the “traditional reading” of Hume’s thesis concerning the impotence of reason to motivate: the assumption that neither reason considered as a process, nor its products, that is, beliefs, generate impulses to action. She starts by offering an analysis of which passions count as motives, and then offers an answer as to why only some passions motivate, arguing that a mental state that motivates must include a desire. This means, contrary to some interpretations, Hume finds his categories of direct and indirect passions to each include both motivating and non-motivating passions. She also emphasizes a third category of passion, “original” or natural instincts, which Hume identifies as kinds of general desires and “active principles.” Radcliffe describes these as dispositions “to acquire passions for particular objects” and “contribute to the formation of motivating passions” (55).

She then moves to consider Hume's arguments for the motivational impotence of reason, considering both a variety of recent interpretations and placing Hume's arguments in their historical context. She concludes that this argument is meant to apply to both reason and belief. This conclusion is further supported by a close treatment of Hume's account of belief, where she takes seriously Hume's identification of belief as an idea set apart from non-believed ideas phenomenologically, but not itself an impression, and carrying no impulse. Passions, on the other hand, are non-representative "original existences," and can generate impulses. She points to Hume's emphasis on the inability of reason to provide a contrary impulse to the passions, meaning that (contrary to many early modern rationalist theorists) it is in no position to act as counsel to the will or moderator of the passions. She then uses Hume's Book 3 argument against moral rationalism to further illustrate that Hume takes only passions to be potential motives. She makes the case that Hume must be read as a moral internalist, meaning that he finds "morality *on its own* motivates" (115). She argues that our passions-based moral distinctions can provide impulse for action even "when we lack the appropriate natural virtue" that would otherwise lead us to act morally (11). This treatment also includes an interesting argument for a Humean account in which it is possible for reason to help us form beliefs about the content of morality, even though the ultimate source of our moral distinctions and (importantly) moral motives is nevertheless grounded exclusively in the passions.

The richness and variety in Radcliffe's discussion to this point should be apparent, but all of it works together towards a unified account of what constitutes a motivating mental state for Hume. Radcliffe's second to last chapter takes on the task of tracking the motivational dynamics found in the Humean mind once we accept her account of what a motivating mental state looks like for Hume. This is also where she considers practical application of this picture of passion and action, by considering the potential for, but also limitations of, self-regulation of passions via other passions. She concludes the book with an argument for the centrality of Hume's account of motivation for his philosophy as a whole, and emphasizes how this puts his treatment of the passions at the heart of his work.

Radcliffe's treatment is careful and systematic, and she has done a great service for those wishing for a comprehensive overview of the discourse on motivation in Hume all in one place. She aligns her own interpretive contributions closely with the text, and they are skillfully historically situated. And much to her credit, reading this book provided me with the pleasant experience of having my mind changed about something: I found myself convinced of the motivational impotency of belief for Hume. I had previously sympathized with the general sense that while reasoning did not provide motive, surely Hume's feeling-infused account of belief meant that the story was not as straightforward for the motivational efficacy of beliefs themselves. This is not a unique take in contemporary Hume scholarship,

and in fact there are multiple variations in arguments for the motivational potency of belief on Hume's picture (and Radcliffe does an excellent job of canvassing these in her book). In responding to such views, Radcliffe takes great care in tracking the source of motivation in Hume not just to feeling, nor even to the passions generally, but rather to passionate responses that include in their nature a desire for a particular end, born of either a perception of particular pains or pleasures, or the triggering of a natural instinct (often the general appetite for good and aversion to evil). Without the desire for a particular end, even the most violent feeling is just a jumble of affectivity, without direction and impulse. It is only with the experience of passions which include "active principles," not mere passive responses to our perceptions, that we find feeling works towards impulse and action. Motivation for Hume is not the same as the passive process of the mental accumulation of force and vivacity, which results in belief and rich affectivity in thought. Rather, it depends on our perceptions of available pleasures and pains, in combination with mental dispositions that constitute active principles of mind.

I am left with some questions concerning applications of her theory, and what I take to be some necessary (though I do not think damning) complications that still need to be worked out in her approach. But rather than diminishing the success of her book, I found the opportunity to further question and work with her ideas exciting and, well, motivating! For instance, whether intentionally or not, Radcliffe's treatment of Hume highlights the significant role that individual mental dispositions of various kinds must play in structuring and determining the complex mental content that ultimately shapes feeling into action. Chapter 6 of her book, "Motivational Dynamics and the Regulation of the Passions," considers applying this account of individual motives to Hume's broader (and quite complex) picture of mind, with an eye towards the possibility of actively cultivating and regulating our motivating passions. Reason may not oppose passions, but passionate impulses certainly oppose each other. If motivation is a matter of the strongest passion prevailing, this "raises questions about which principles determine the motivational strength of individual passions, whether and why their strengths vary from person to person, and whether there are means at an agent's disposal to alter the causal efficacy of their own passions" (146).

Hume has argued against the possibility of reason counselling the passions—Radcliffe now asks, "what can he offer, if anything, in its place?" Radcliffe covers significant ground in starting to answer this question: the phenomenal features of passions that affect motivational strength and influence belief; distinctions between the strength and violence of passions; the effects of conflicting passions on each other and action; the effects of others' passions on us; the virtue of strength of mind as motivational balance of calm over violent passions. In the end she argues that there are resources in Hume "for establishing some degree of order, harmony, and psychological health" (147). There is clearly much more to say on this

topic. For instance, I think a discussion of how we might give a Humean account of mental disposition is essential in exploring motivational dynamic in Hume. Radcliffe's book has thereby set up scholarship to move forward in a very familiar debate, refreshed, renewed, and with new angles to make fresh progress. Given the continuing importance of Humean theories of motivation to contemporary debate, this is an accomplishment worth being excited about.

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