

## The Inertness of Reason & Hume's Legacy

Hume argues against the seventeenth-century rationalists that reason is impotent to motivate action and to originate morality. Hume's arguments have standardly been considered the foundation for the Humean theory of motivation in contemporary philosophy. The Humean theory alleges that beliefs require independent desires to motivate action. Recently, however, Hume's legacy to motivational psychology has been questioned. New commentaries allege that Hume's argument concerning the inertness of reason has no bearing on belief. This is because Hume's argument about motivation centers on the practical impotence of reason apart from passion or desire, but does not make explicit reference to the role of belief. So, belief on its own may very well be a motive to action, even though reason is not. This reading appears contrary to the belief/desire model espoused in twenty-first-century philosophy. I consider textual, philosophical, and historical grounds to offer an interpretation of Hume's argument for the inertness of reason and argue that the new line on Hume is mistaken. It concentrates almost exclusively on texts in Hume's Treatise and fails to account for later texts in the Dissertation on the Passions and the second Enquiry that also give an important perspective to Hume's discussion. I argue that contemporary Humeans can rest assured in their claim to Hume's arguments as ground for their theory.

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**Friday, November 4th 2011**

**2:15 p.m.**

**Alumni Center, School of EHHP**

*A reception will follow at 14 Glebe Street*