

Philosophy Department Colloquium

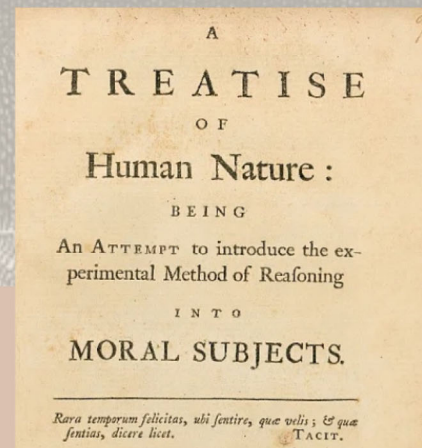
K. Whittingslow Prize Presentation



Hume's Separability Principle & the Distinction of Reason: A Contradiction?

In Book One of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), David Hume lays down a few foundational principles for his system. These principles are then invoked and employed consistently in the following two books on the passions and the morals, incising and untangling knotty disputes in the Humean way as if unfailing razors. The separability principle is one of them. This principle states that, in its simplest form, “all ideas, which are different, are separable.”

Scholars have suspected, however, a contradiction between this principle and Hume's “distinction of reason.” In response to this alleged contradiction, I argue a more nuanced understanding of “difference,” “resemblance,” and the relation between the two is needed.



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