

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
North Carolina State University

Philosophy Colloquium Series

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**Do Passions Seek to Justify Themselves by
Misrepresenting their Objects? Hume's reply
to Malebranche and Hutcheson at T 2.3.3.5**

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Thursday, March 26, 2020, 4:30 p.m.
Withers Hall, Room 331

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All are welcome

Abstract: A short passage in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (T 2.3.3.5) has confounded interpreters. On a common interpretation, Hume's assertion that "A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification" amounts to the claim that a passion can have no "cognitive" content, and thus no intentional object, and should be treated as a mere feeling or sensation. This allegedly explains Hume's anti-rationalist conclusion "'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason." I offer a new interpretation of this passage that characterizes Hume as responding to the claim that passions tend to misrepresent their objects in a way that seems to justify them: anger, for example, tends to misrepresent the person it is directed at as motivated by malice. Nicolas Malebranche and Francis Hutcheson make such claims. I argue that they are Hume's likely opponents throughout this section of the *Treatise*.

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