**David Hume 1711-1776**

**http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\_Hume**

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**David Hume** (7 May 1711 [26 April [O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style)] – 25 August 1776) was a Scottish [philosopher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosopher), [economist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economist), [historian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historian), and an important figure in the history of [Western philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_philosophy) and the [Scottish Enlightenment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Enlightenment). Hume is often grouped with [John Locke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke), [George Berkeley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Berkeley), and a handful of others as a [British Empiricist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empiricism).[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-0)

During his lifetime, Hume was more famous as a historian. His six-volume [*History of England*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_England) was a bestseller well into the nineteenth century and the standard work on [English history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_history) for many years, while his works in philosophy to which he owes his current reputation were less widely read in his day.

Hume was heavily influenced by [empiricists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricists) [John Locke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke) and [George Berkeley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Berkeley), along with various French-speaking writers such as [Pierre Bayle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bayle), and various figures on the English-speaking intellectual landscape such as [Isaac Newton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton), [Samuel Clarke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Clarke), [Francis Hutcheson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Hutcheson_%28philosopher%29), and [Joseph Butler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Butler) (to whom he sent his first work for feedback).[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-1)

In the twentieth century, Hume has increasingly become a source of inspiration for those in political philosophy and [economics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics) as an early and subtle thinker in the [liberal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism) tradition, as well as an early innovator in the [genre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre) of the [essay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essay) in his *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-2)

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## Life

David Hume, originally David Home, son of Joseph Home of [Chirnside](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chirnside), advocate, and Katherine Falconer, was born on 26 April 1711 ([Old Style](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates)) in a [tenement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenement) on the north side of the Lawnmarket in [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh). He changed his name in 1734 because the [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_people) had difficulty pronouncing 'Home' in the Scottish manner. Throughout his life Hume, who never married, spent time occasionally at his family home at Ninewells by [Chirnside](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chirnside), [Berwickshire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwickshire). Hume was politically a [Whig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_%28British_political_faction%29).[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-3)

### [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=2)] Education



An engraving of Hume from his *The History of England Vol. I* (1754)

Hume attended the [University of Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Edinburgh) at the unusually early age of twelve (possibly as young as ten) at a time when fourteen was normal. At first he considered a career in [law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scots_law), but came to have, in his words, "an insurmountable aversion to everything but the pursuits of [Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) and general Learning; and while [my family] fanceyed I was poring over [Voet](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Johannes_Voet_%28jurist%29&action=edit&redlink=1) and [Vinnius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Vinnius), [Cicero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicero) and [Virgil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil) were the Authors which I was secretly devouring".[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-4) He had little respect for the professors of his time, telling a friend in 1735, "there is nothing to be learnt from a [Professor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professor), which is not to be met with in Books".[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-5)

Hume made a philosophical discovery that opened up to him "a new Scene of Thought", which inspired him "to throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it".[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-6) He did not recount what this "Scene" was, and commentators have offered a variety of speculations.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-7) Due to this inspiration, Hume set out to spend a minimum of ten years reading and writing. He came to the verge of [nervous breakdown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nervous_breakdown), after which he decided to have a more active life to better continue his learning.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-ogcpkr-8)

### [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=3)] Career

As Hume's options lay between a traveling tutorship and a stool in a merchant's office, he chose the latter. In 1734, after a few months occupied with commerce in [Bristol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol), he went to [La Flèche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Fl%C3%A8che) in [Anjou](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anjou), France. There he had frequent discourse with the [Jesuits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesuits) of the [College of La Flèche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_of_La_Fl%C3%A8che). As he had spent most of his savings during his four years there while writing [*A Treatise of Human Nature*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Treatise_of_Human_Nature),[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-ogcpkr-8) he resolved "to make a very rigid frugality supply my deficiency of fortune, to maintain unimpaired my independency, and to regard every object as contemptible except the improvements of my talents in literature".[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-9) He completed the *Treatise* at the age of 26.

Although many scholars today consider the *Treatise* to be Hume's most important work and one of the most important books in Western philosophy, the critics in [Great Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Great_Britain) at the time did not agree, describing it as "abstract and unintelligible".[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-10) Despite the disappointment, Hume later wrote, "Being naturally of a cheerful and [sanguine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humorism) temper, I soon recovered from the blow and prosecuted with great ardour my studies in the country".[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-11) There, he wrote the [*Abstract*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Treatise_of_Human_Nature_%28Abstract%29)[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-12) Without revealing his authorship, he aimed to make his larger work more intelligible.

After the publication of *Essays Moral and Political* in 1744, Hume applied for the Chair of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy at the [University of Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Edinburgh). However, the position was given to [William Cleghorn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Cleghorn), after Edinburgh ministers petitioned the town council not to appoint Hume because he was seen as an [atheist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism).[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-13)

During the 1745 [Jacobite Rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobite_Rebellion), Hume tutored the [Marquis of Annandale](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=George_Vanden-Bempde,_3rd_Marquess_of_Annandale&action=edit&redlink=1) (1720–92), who was officially described as a "lunatic".[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-14) This engagement ended in disarray after about a year. But it was then that Hume started his great historical work [*The History of Great Britain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_Great_Britain), which took fifteen years and ran over a million words, to be published in six volumes in the period between 1754 and 1762, while also involved with the Canongate Theatre. In this context, he associated with [Lord Monboddo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Monboddo) and other [Scottish Enlightenment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Enlightenment) luminaries in Edinburgh. From 1746, Hume served for three years as Secretary to [Lieutenant-General St Clair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_St_Clair), and wrote *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, later published as [*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Enquiry_Concerning_Human_Understanding). The *Enquiry* proved little more successful than the *Treatise*.

Hume was charged with [heresy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_heresy), but he was defended by his young clerical friends, who argued that—as an [atheist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheist)—he was outside the [Church's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scotland) jurisdiction. Despite his acquittal, Hume failed to gain the [Chair of Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professor_of_Moral_Philosophy,_Glasgow) at the [University of Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Glasgow).

It was after returning to Edinburgh in 1752, as he wrote in *My Own Life*, that "the Faculty of Advocates chose me their Librarian, an office from which I received little or no emolument, but which gave me the command of a large library".[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-15) This resource enabled him to continue historical research for *The History of Great Britain*.

Hume achieved great literary fame as a historian. His enormous [*The History of Great Britain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_Great_Britain), tracing events from the [Saxon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxons) kingdoms to the [Glorious Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glorious_Revolution), was a best-seller in its day. In it, Hume presented political man as a creature of habit, with a disposition to submit quietly to established government unless confronted by uncertain circumstances. In his view, only religious difference could deflect men from their everyday lives to think about political matters.

However, Hume's volume of *Political Discourses* (published by Kincaid & [Donaldson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Donaldson_%28bookseller%29), 1752)[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-Sher-16) was the only work he considered successful on first publication.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-17)

### [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=4)] Religion



Tomb of David Hume in [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh)

### Later life

From 1763 to 1765, Hume was Secretary to Lord Hertford in Paris. He met and later fell out with [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau). He wrote of his Paris life, "I really wish often for the plain roughness of [The Poker Club](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Poker_Club) of Edinburgh ... to correct and qualify so much lusciousness".[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-20) For a year from 1767, Hume held the appointment of Under Secretary of State for the Northern Department. In 1768, he settled in [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh).

[James Boswell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Boswell) visited Hume a few weeks before his death (most likely of either bowel or liver [cancer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancer)). Hume told him he sincerely believed it a "most unreasonable fancy" that there might be life after death.[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-21) This meeting was dramatized in semi-fictional form for the [BBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC) by [Michael Ignatieff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Ignatieff) as *Dialogue in the Dark*. Hume wrote his own epitaph: "Born 1711, Died [—]. Leaving it to posterity to add the rest". It is engraved with the year of his death 1776 on the "simple Roman tomb" he prescribed, and which stands, as he wished it, on the Eastern slope of the [Calton Hill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calton_Hill,_Edinburgh) overlooking his home in the [New Town](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Town,_Edinburgh) of Edinburgh at No. 1 St. David Street.

## [[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=6)] Science of man



Statue of David Hume in Edinburgh, Scotland

In the introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes "'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, more or less, to human nature ... Even *Mathematics*, *Natural Philosophy*, and *Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man". Also, "the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences", and the method for this science assumes "experience and observation" as the foundations of a logical argument.[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-22) Because "Hume's plan is to extend to philosophy in general the methodological limitations of [Newtonian physics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newtonian_physics)"[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-23), Hume is characterised as an [empiricist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricism).

Until recently, Hume was seen as a forerunner of the [logical positivist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logical_positivism) movement; a form of anti-metaphysical empiricism. According to the logical positivists, unless a statement could be verified by experience, or else was true or false by definition (i.e. either [tautological](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tautology_%28logic%29) or [contradictory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contradiction)), then it was meaningless (this is a summary statement of their [verification principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verificationism)). Hume, on this view, was a proto-positivist, who, in his philosophical writings, attempted to demonstrate how ordinary propositions about objects, causal relations, the self, and so on, are [semantically equivalent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logical_equivalence) to propositions about one's experiences.[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-24)

Many commentators have since rejected this understanding of Humean empiricism, stressing an [epistemological](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemology), rather than a [semantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantics) reading of his project.[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-25) According to this view, Hume's empiricism consisted in the idea that it is our knowledge, and not our ability to conceive, that is restricted to what can be experienced. To be sure, Hume thought that we can form beliefs about that which extends beyond any possible experience, through the operation of faculties such as custom and the imagination, but he was skeptical about claims to *knowledge* on this basis.

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=7)**] Induction**

The cornerstone of Hume's epistemology is the so-called [Problem of Induction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_induction). It has been argued that it is in this area of Hume's thought that his skepticism about human powers of reason is the most pronounced.[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-26) Understanding the problem of induction, then, is central to grasping Hume's general philosophical system.

The problem concerns the explanation of how we are able to make [inductive inferences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inductive_reasoning). Inductive inference is reasoning from the observed behavior of objects to their behavior when unobserved; as Hume says, it is a question of how things behave when they go "beyond the present testimony of the senses, and the records of our memory".[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-27) Hume notices that we tend to believe that things behave in a regular manner; i.e., that patterns in the behavior of objects will persist into the future, and throughout the unobserved present (this persistence of regularities is sometimes called the [Principle of the Uniformity of Nature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principle_of_uniformity)).

Hume's argument is that we cannot rationally justify the claim that nature will continue to be uniform, as justification comes in only two varieties, and both of these are inadequate. The two sorts are: (1) demonstrative reasoning, and (2) probable reasoning.[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-28) With regard to (1), Hume argues that the uniformity principle cannot be demonstrated, as it is "consistent and conceivable" that nature might stop being regular.[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-29) Turning to (2), Hume argues that we cannot hold that nature will continue to be uniform because it has been in the past, as this is using the very sort of reasoning (induction) that is under question: it would be [circular reasoning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circular_reasoning).[[31]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-30) Thus no form of justification will rationally warrant our inductive inferences.

Hume's solution to this skeptical problem is to argue that, rather than reason, it is natural instinct that explains our ability to make inductive inferences. He asserts that "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable [[*sic*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sic)] necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel". Although many modern commentators have demurred from Hume's solution, some have concurred with it, seeing his analysis of our epistemic predicament as a major contribution to the theory of knowledge: here, for example, is the Oxford Professor John D. Kenyon: "Reason might manage to raise a doubt about the truth of a conclusion of natural inductive inference just for a moment in the study, but the forces of nature will soon overcome that artificial skepticism, and the sheer agreeableness of animal faith will protect us from excessive caution and sterile suspension of belief".[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-31)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=8)**] Causation**

The notion of [causation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causation) is closely linked to the problem of induction. According to Hume, we reason inductively by associating constantly conjoined events, and it is the mental act of association that is the basis of our concept of causation. There are three main interpretations of Hume's theory of causation represented in the literature: (1) the logical positivist; (2) the skeptical realist; and (3) the quasi-realist.

The logical positivist interpretation is that Hume analyses causal propositions, such as "A caused B", in terms of regularities in perception: "A caused B" is equivalent to "Whenever A-type events happen, B-type ones follow", where "whenever" refers to all possible perceptions.[[33]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-32)

power and necessity... are... qualities of perceptions, not of objects... felt by the soul and not perceived externally in bodies[[34]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-33)

This view is rejected by [skeptical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skepticism) [realists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_realism), who argue that Hume thought that causation amounts to more than just the regular succession of events.[[35]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-34) When two events are causally conjoined, there is a necessary connection which underpins the conjunction:

Shall we rest contented with these two relations of contiguity and succession, as affording a complete idea of causation? By no means ... there is a *necessary connexion* to be taken into consideration.[[36]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-35)

Hume held that we have no perceptual access to the necessary connection (hence *skepticism*), but we are naturally compelled to believe in its objective existence (hence *realism*).

It has been argued that, whilst Hume did not think causation is reducible to pure regularity, he was not a fully fledged realist either: Simon Blackburn calls this a [quasi-realist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quasi-realism) reading.[[37]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-36) On this view, talk about causal necessity is an expression of a functional change in the human mind, whereby certain events are predicted or anticipated on the basis of prior experience. The expression of causal necessity is a ["projection"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Projectivism) of the functional change onto the objects involved in the causal connection: in Hume's words, "nothing is more usual than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation which they occasion".[[38]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-37)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=9)**] The self**

According to the standard interpretation of Hume on [personal identity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_identity), he was a [Bundle Theorist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundle_theory), who held that the self is nothing but a bundle of interconnected perceptions linked by relations of similarity and causality; or, more accurately, that our idea of the self is just the idea of such a bundle. This view is forwarded by, for example, positivist interpreters, who saw Hume as suggesting that terms such as "self", "person", or "mind" referred to collections of "sense-contents".[[39]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-38) A modern-day version of the bundle theory of the mind has been advanced by [Derek Parfit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derek_Parfit) in his [Reasons and Persons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reasons_and_Persons) (1986).

However, some philosophers have criticised the bundle-theory interpretation of Hume on personal identity. It is argued that distinct selves can have perceptions which stand in relations of similarity and causality with one another. Thus perceptions must already come parcelled into distinct "bundles" before they can be associated according to the relations of similarity and causality: in other words, the mind must already possess a unity that cannot be generated, or constituted, by these relations alone. Since the bundle-theory interpretation attributes Hume with answering an ontological or conceptual question, philosophers who see Hume as not very concerned with such questions have queried whether the view is really Hume's, or "only a decoy".[[40]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-39) Instead, it is suggested, Hume might have been answering an epistemological question, about the causal origin of our concept of the self.

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=10)**] Practical reason**

Hume's anti-rationalism informed much of his theory of belief and knowledge, in his treatment of the notions of induction, causation, and the external world. But it was not confined to this sphere, and permeated just as strongly his theories of motivation, action, and morality. In a famous sentence in the *Treatise*, Hume circumscribes reason's role in the production of action:

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.[[41]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-40)

It has been suggested that this position can be lucidly brought out through the metaphor of "[direction of fit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direction_of_fit)": beliefs—the paradigmatic products of reason—are propositional attitudes that aim to have their content fit the world; conversely, desires—or what Hume calls passions, or sentiments—are states that aim to fit the world to their contents.[[42]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-41) Though a metaphor, it has been argued that this intuitive way of understanding Hume's theory that desires are necessary for motivation "captures something quite deep in our thought about their nature".[[43]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-42)

Hume's anti-rationalism has been very influential, and defended in contemporary philosophy of action by neo-Humeans such as [Michael Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_A._Smith_%28philosopher%29)[[44]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-43) and [Simon Blackburn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Blackburn)[[45]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-44) The major opponents of the Humean view are cognitivists about what it is to act for a reason, such as [John McDowell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McDowell),[[46]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-45) and Kantians, such as [Christine Korsgaard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christine_Korsgaard).[[47]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-46)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=11)**] Ethics**

Hume's views on human motivation and action formed the cornerstone of his ethical theory: he conceived moral or ethical sentiments to be intrinsically motivating, or the providers of reasons for action. Given that one cannot be motivated by reason alone, requiring the input of the passions, Hume argued that reason cannot be behind morality

Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.[[48]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-47)

Hume's [sentimentalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_sense_theory) about morality was shared by his close friend [Adam Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Smith),[[49]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-48) and Hume and Smith were mutually influenced by the moral reflections of [Francis Hutcheson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Hutcheson).[[50]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-49)

Hume's theory of ethics has been influential in modern day ethical theory, helping to inspire various forms of [emotivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotivism),[[51]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-50)[[52]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-51) [error theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Error_theory)[[53]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-52) and ethical [expressivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expressivism) and [non-cognitivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-cognitivism)[[54]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-53) and [Alan Gibbard](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alan_Gibbard&action=edit&redlink=1).[[55]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-54)

See also: [is-ought problem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Is-ought_problem)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=12)**] Free will, determinism, and responsibility**

Hume, along with [Thomas Hobbes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes), is cited as a classical [compatibilist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compatibilist) about the notions of [freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will) and [determinism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinism).[[56]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-55) The thesis of compatibilism seeks to reconcile human freedom with the mechanist belief that human beings are part of a deterministic universe, whose happenings are governed by the [laws of physics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_physics).

Hume argued that the dispute about the compatibility of freedom and determinism has been kept afloat by ambiguous terminology:

From this circumstance alone, that a controversy has been long kept on foot... we may presume, that there is some ambiguity in the expression.[[57]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-56)

Hume defines the concepts of "necessity" and "liberty" as follows:

Necessity: "the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together..".[[58]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-57)

Liberty: "*a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*..".[[59]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-58)

Hume then argues that, according to these definitions, not only are the two compatible, but Liberty *requires* Necessity. For if our actions were not necessitated in the above sense, they would "have so little in connexion [sic] with motives, inclinations and circumstances, that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other". But if our actions are not thus hooked up to the will, then our actions can never be free: they would be matters of "chance; which is universally allowed not to exist".[[60]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-59)

Moreover, Hume goes on to argue that in order to be held morally responsible, it is required that our behaviour be caused, i.e. necessitated, for

Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil".[[61]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-60)

This argument has inspired modern day commentators.[[62]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-61) However, it has been argued that the issue of whether or not we hold one another morally responsible does not ultimately depend on the truth or falsity of a metaphysical thesis such as determinism, for our so holding one another is a non-rational human sentiment that is not predicated on such theses. For this influential argument, which is still made in a Humean vein, see [P. F. Strawson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._F._Strawson)'s essay, *Freedom and Resentment*.[[63]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-62)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=13)**] Problem of miracles**

In his discussion of [miracles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle) in [*An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Enquiry_concerning_Human_Understanding) (Section 10) Hume defines a miracle as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent". Given that Hume argues that it is impossible to deduce the existence of a Deity from the existence of the world (for he says that causes cannot be determined from effects), miracles (including prophesy) are the only possible support he would conceivably allow for theistic religions.

Hume discusses everyday belief as often resulted from probability, where we believe an event that has occurred most often as being most likely, but that we also subtract the weighting of the less common event from that of the more common event. In the context of miracles, this means that a miraculous event should be labelled a miracle only where it would be even more unbelievable (by principles of probability) for it not to be. Hume mostly discusses miracles as testimony, of which he writes that when a person reports a miraculous event we [need to] balance our belief in their veracity against our belief that such events do not occur. Following this rule, only where it is considered, as a result of experience, less likely that the testimony is false than that a miracle occur should we believe in miracles.

Although Hume leaves open the possibility for miracles to occur and be reported, he offers various arguments against this ever having happened in history:[[64]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-63)

* People often lie, and they have good reasons to lie about miracles occurring either because they believe they are doing so for the benefit of their religion or because of the fame that results.
* People by nature enjoy relating miracles they have heard without caring for their veracity and thus miracles are easily transmitted even where false.
* Hume notes that miracles seem to *occur* mostly in "ignorant" and "barbarous" nations and times, and the reason they don't occur in the "civilized" societies is such societies aren't awed by what they know to be natural events.
* The miracles of each religion argue against all other religions and their miracles, and so even if a proportion of all reported miracles across the world fit Hume's requirement for belief, the miracles of each religion make the other less likely.

Despite all this Hume observes that belief in miracles is popular, and that "The gazing populace receive greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition and promotes wonder".[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)]

Critics have argued that Hume's position assumes the character of miracles and natural laws prior to any specific examination of miracle claims, and thus it amounts to a subtle form of begging the question. They have also noted that it requires an appeal to inductive inference, as none have observed every part of nature or examined every possible miracle claim (e.g., those yet future to the observer), which in Hume's philosophy was especially problematic.

Hume's main argument concerning miracles is the following. Miracles by definition are singular events which differ from the established Laws of Nature. The Laws of Nature are codified as a result of past experiences. Therefore a miracle is a violation of all prior experience. However the probability that something has occurred in contradiction of all past experience should always be judged to be less than the probability that either my senses have deceived me or the person recounting the miraculous occurrence is lying or mistaken, all of which I have past experience of. For Hume, this refusal to grant credence does not guarantee correctness - he offers the example of an Indian Prince, who having grown up in a hot country refuses to believe that water has frozen. By Hume's lights this refusal is not wrong and the Prince is thinking correctly; it is presumably only when he has had extensive experience of the freezing of water that he has warrant to believe that the event could occur. So for Hume, either the miraculous event will become a recurrent event or else it will never be rational to believe it occurred. The connection to religious belief is left inexplicit throughout, save for the close of his discussion wherein Hume notes the reliance of Christianity upon testimony of miraculous occurrences and makes an ironic [[65]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-64)[[66]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-65) remark that anyone who "is moved by faith to assent" to revealed testimony "is aware of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=14)**] Design argument**

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| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/f/f2/Edit-clear.svg/40px-Edit-clear.svg.png | This article **is in a list format that may be better presented using** [**prose**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose)**.** You can help by converting this article to prose, if [appropriate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Embedded_list). [Editing help](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing) is available. *(December 2008)* |

One of the oldest and most popular [arguments for the existence of God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence_of_God) is [the design argument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teleological_argument): that order and "purpose" in the world bespeaks a divine origin. Hume gave the classic criticism of the design argument in [*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogues_concerning_Natural_Religion) and [*An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Enquiry_concerning_Human_Understanding). However, Hume argued that for the design argument to be feasible, it must be true that order and purpose are observed only when they result from design. But order is often observed to result from presumably mindless processes like the generation of snowflakes and crystals. Design can account for only a tiny part of our experience of order. Furthermore, the design argument is based on an incomplete analogy. Because of our experience with objects, we can recognise human-designed ones, as when we compare a pile of stones with a constructed wall, but to deduce that the Universe is designed, we would need to have an experience of a range of different universes. As we only experience one, the analogy cannot be applied. We must ask therefore if it is right to compare the world to a machine—as in [Paley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Paley)'s [watchmaker analogy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchmaker_analogy)—when perhaps it could be better described as a giant inert animal. Even if the design argument is completely successful, it could not (in and of itself) establish a robust theism. One could easily reach the conclusion that the universe's configuration is the result of some morally ambiguous, possibly unintelligent agent or agents whose method bears only a remote similarity to human design. In this way it could be asked, if the Universe is designed, is the designer God? It could also be asked, if there is a designer god, who designed the designer? If a well-ordered natural world requires a special designer, then God's mind (being so well-ordered) *also* requires a special designer. Then this designer would need a designer, and so on *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, if we could be happy with an inexplicably self-ordered divine mind, why should we not rest content with an inexplicably self-ordered natural world? Often, what appears to be purpose, where it looks like object X has feature F in order to secure outcome O, is better explained by a filtering process: that is, object X wouldn't be around did it not possess feature F, and outcome O is only interesting to us as a human projection of goals onto nature. This mechanical explanation of [teleology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teleology) anticipated [natural selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection). The design argument doesn't explain pain, suffering, and natural disasters.

See also: [anthropic principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropic_principle) and [problem of evil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_evil)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=15)**] Political theory**

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| Part of [the Politics series](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Politics) on |
| [Utilitarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism) |
| Predecessors[[show]](javascript:toggleNavigationBar(3);)  [Epicurus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicurus) **David Hume ·** [William Godwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Godwin) |
| [People](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_utilitarians)[[show]](javascript:toggleNavigationBar(4);)  [Jeremy Bentham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Bentham)**·** [John Stuart Mill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stuart_Mill) [Henry Sidgwick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Sidgwick)**·** [Peter Singer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Singer) |
| Types of utilitarianism[[show]](javascript:toggleNavigationBar(5);)  [Preference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preference_utilitarianism)**·** [Rule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_utilitarianism)**·** [Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_utilitarianism) [Two-level](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-level_utilitarianism)**·** [Total](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_utilitarianism)**·** [Average](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Average_utilitarianism) [Negative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism#Negative)**·** [Hedonism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedonism) [Enlightened self-interest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightened_self-interest) |
| Key concepts[[show]](javascript:toggleNavigationBar(6);)  [Pain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pain)**·** [Suffering](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffering)**·** [Pleasure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasure) [Utility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utility)**·** [Happiness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happiness)**·** [Eudaimonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudaimonia) [Consequentialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consequentialism)**·** [Felicific calculus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felicific_calculus) |
| Problems[[show]](javascript:toggleNavigationBar(7);)  [Mere addition paradox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mere_addition_paradox) [Paradox of hedonism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_of_hedonism) [Utility monster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utility_monster) |
| Related topics[[show]](javascript:toggleNavigationBar(8);)  [Rational choice theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_choice_theory)**·** [Game theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game_theory) [Social choice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_choice)**·** [Economics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics) |
|  |
| [**Politics portal**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Politics) |
| [v](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Utilitarianism) • [d](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_talk:Utilitarianism) • [e](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Utilitarianism&action=edit) |

It is difficult to categorize Hume's political affiliations. His thought contains elements that are, in modern terms, both [conservative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative) and [liberal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism), as well as ones that are both [contractarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contractarian) and [utilitarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarian), though these terms are all anachronistic. His central concern is to show the importance of the rule of law, and stresses throughout his political *Essays* the importance of moderation in politics. This outlook needs to be seen within the historical context of eighteenth century Scotland, where the legacy of religious civil war, combined with the relatively recent memory of the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite risings, fostered in a historian such as Hume a distaste for enthusiasm and factionalism that appeared to threaten the fragile and nascent political and social stability of a country that was deeply politically and religiously divided. He thinks that society is best governed by a general and impartial system of laws, based principally on the "artifice" of contract; he is less concerned about the form of government that administers these laws, so long as it does so fairly (though he thought that republics were more likely to do so than monarchies).

Hume expressed suspicion of attempts to reform society in ways that departed from long-established custom, and he counselled peoples not to resist their governments except in cases of the most egregious [tyranny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyranny)[[67]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-66). However, he resisted aligning himself with either of Britain's two political parties, the [Whigs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Whig_Party) and the [Tories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tories), and he believed that we should try to balance our demands for liberty with the need for strong authority, without sacrificing either. Neil McArthur (2007, p. 124) characterizes Hume as a 'precautionary conservative': whose actions would have been "determined by prudential concerns about the consequences of change, which often demand we ignore our own principles about what is ideal or even legitimate" [[68]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-67) , He supported [liberty of the press](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_of_the_press), and was sympathetic to [democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy), when suitably constrained. It has been argued that he was a major inspiration for [James Madison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Madison)'s writings, and the [*Federalist No. 10*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_No._10) in particular. He was also, in general, an optimist about social progress, believing that, thanks to the economic development that comes with the expansion of trade, societies progress from a state of "barbarism" to one of "civilisation". Civilised societies are open, peaceful and sociable, and their [citizens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen) are as a result much happier. It is therefore not fair to characterise him, as [Leslie Stephen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Stephen) did, as favouring "that stagnation which is the natural ideal of a [skeptic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skeptic)".[[69]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-68)

Though it has been suggested Hume had no positive vision of the best society, he in fact produced an essay titled [*Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Idea_of_a_Perfect_Commonwealth&action=edit&redlink=1),[[70]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-69) which lays out what he thought was the best form of government. His pragmatism shone through, however, in his caveat that we should only seek to implement such a system should an opportunity present itself, which would not upset established structures. He defended a strict [separation of powers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_powers), [decentralisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decentralisation), extending the [franchise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffrage) to anyone who held property of value and limiting the power of the [clergy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clergy). The [Swiss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland) [militia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Militia) system was proposed as the best form of protection. Elections were to take place on an annual basis and representatives were to be unpaid. It is also important to note that the ideal commonwealth laid out by Hume was held to be ideal only for the British Isles in the 18th century. Hume was a relativist, and realized that such a form of government would not be ideal for all cultures, nor would it necessarily be permanent as historical conditions change.[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)]

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=16)**] Contributions to economic thought**

Through his discussions on politics, Hume developed many ideas that are prevalent in the field of economics. This includes ideas on private property, inflation, and foreign trade.[[71]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-70)

Hume does not believe, as Locke does, that [private property](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_property) is a natural right, but he argues that it is justified since resources are limited. If all goods were unlimited and available freely, then private property would not be justified, but instead becomes an "idle ceremonial". Hume also believed in unequal distribution of property, since perfect equality would destroy the ideas of thrift and industry. Perfect equality would thus lead to impoverishment.[[72]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-71)

Hume did not believe that foreign trade produced specie, but considered trade a stimulus for a country's economic growth. He did not consider the volume of world trade as fixed because countries can feed off their neighbors' wealth, being part of a "prosperous community". The fall in foreign demand is not that fatal, because in the long run, a country cannot preserve a leading trading position.

Hume was among the first to develop automatic [price-specie flow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Price_specie_flow_mechanism), an idea that contrasts with the [mercantile system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercantile_system). Simply put, when a country increases its in-flow of gold, this in-flow of gold will result in price inflation, and then price inflation will force out countries from trading that would have traded before the inflation. This results in a decrease of the in-flow of gold in the long run.

Hume also proposed a theory of beneficial inflation. He believed that increasing the money supply would raise production in the short run. This phenomenon would be caused by a gap between the increase in the money supply and that of the price level. The result is that prices will not rise at first and may not rise at all. This theory was later developed by [John Maynard Keynes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Maynard_Keynes).

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=17)**] As historian of England**

Between Hume's death and 1894, there were at least 50 editions of his 6-volume [*History of England*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_England), a work of immense sweep. The subtitle tells us as much, "From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688".

There was also an often-reprinted abridgement, The Student's Hume (1859).

Hume's history was that of a [Tory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tories_%28political_faction%29), in sharp contrast to the [Whiggish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_history) works then prevailing.

Another remarkable feature of the series was that it widened the focus of history, away from merely Kings, Parliaments, and armies, including literature and science as well.[[*neutrality*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view) *is* [*disputed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:David_Hume)]

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=18)**] Works**

* *A Kind of History of My Life* (1734) Mss 23159 [National Library of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Library_of_Scotland). A letter to an unnamed physician, asking for advice about "the Disease of the Learned" that then afflicted him. Here he reports that at the age of eighteen "there seem'd to be open'd up to me a new Scene of Thought... " which made him "throw up every other Pleasure or Business" and turned him to scholarship.[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)]
* [*A Treatise of Human Nature*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Treatise_of_Human_Nature)*: Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. (1739–40) Hume intended to see whether the *Treatise* met with success, and if so to complete it with books devoted to Politics and Criticism. However, it did not meet with success. As Hume himself said, "It fell *dead-born from the press*, without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots"[[73]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-72) and so was not completed.
* *An Abstract of a Book lately Published: Entitled A Treatise of Human Nature etc*. (1740) Anonymously published, but almost certainly written by Hume[[74]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-73) in an attempt to popularise his *Treatise*. Of considerable philosophical interest, because it spells out what he considered "The Chief Argument" of the *Treatise*, in a way that seems to anticipate the structure of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.
* *Essays Moral and Political* (first ed. 1741–2) A collection of pieces written and published over many years, though most were collected together in 1753–4. Many of the essays are focused on topics in politics and economics, though they also range over questions of aesthetic judgement, love, marriage and polygamy, and the demographics of ancient Greece and Rome, to name just a few of the topics considered. The Essays show some influence from [Addison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Addison)'s *Tatler* and [*The Spectator*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spectator_%281711%29), which Hume read avidly in his youth.
* *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh: Containing Some Observations on a Specimen of the Principles concerning Religion and Morality, said to be maintain'd in a Book lately publish'd, intituled A Treatise of Human Nature etc*. Edinburgh (1745). Contains a letter written by Hume to defend himself against charges of atheism and scepticism, while applying for a Chair at Edinburgh University.
* [*An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Enquiry_concerning_Human_Understanding) (1748) Contains reworking of the main points of the *Treatise*, Book 1, with the addition of material on free will (adapted from Book 2), miracles, the Design Argument, and mitigated scepticism. [*Of Miracles*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Miracles), section X of the *Enquiry*, was often published separately,
* [*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Enquiry_Concerning_the_Principles_of_Morals) (1751) A reworking of material from Book 3 of the *Treatise*, on morality, but with a significantly different emphasis. Hume regarded this as the best of all his philosophical works[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)], both in its philosophical ideas and in its literary style.
* *Political Discourses*, (part II of [*Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essays,_Moral,_Political,_and_Literary) within vol. 1 of the larger *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*) Edinburgh (1752). Included in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1753–6) reprinted 1758–77.
* *Political Discourses*/*Discours politiques* (1752–1758), *My ovn life* (1776), *Of Essay writing*, 1742. Bilingual English-French (translated by Fabien Grandjean). Mauvezin, France, Trans-Europ-Repress, 1993, 22 cm, V-260 p. Bibliographic notes, index.
* [*Four Dissertations*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Dissertations) London (1757). Included in reprints of *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (above).
* *The History of England* (Originally titled *The History of Great Britain*) (1754–62) Freely available in six vols. from the On Line Library of Liberty.[[75]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-74) More a category of books than a single work, Hume's history spanned "from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688" and went through over 100 editions. Many considered it *the* standard history of England until [Thomas Macaulay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Macaulay)'s *History of England*.
* [*The Natural History of Religion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Natural_History_of_Religion) (1757)
* "My Own Life" (1776) Penned in April, shortly before his death, this autobiography was intended for inclusion in a new edition of "Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects". It was first published by [Adam Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Smith) who claimed that by doing so he had incurred "ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain".[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)] ([Ernest Campbell Mossner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Campbell_Mossner), The Life of David Hume)
* [*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogues_concerning_Natural_Religion) (1779) Published posthumously by his nephew, David Hume the Younger. Being a discussion among three fictional characters concerning the nature of God, and is an important portrayal of the argument from design. Despite some controversy, most scholars agree that the view of Philo, the most sceptical of the three, comes closest to Hume's own.[[76]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-75)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=19)**] Hume's influence**

Attention to Hume's philosophical works grew after the [German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_people) philosopher [Immanuel Kant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant) credited Hume with awakening him from "dogmatic slumbers" (*circa* 1770).[[77]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-76)

According to [Schopenhauer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Schopenhauer), "there is more to be learned from each page of David Hume than from the collected philosophical works of [Hegel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel), [Herbart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Friedrich_Herbart) and [Schleiermacher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Daniel_Ernst_Schleiermacher) taken together".[[78]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-77)

[A. J. Ayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Ayer) (1936), introducing his classic exposition of logical positivism, claimed: "the views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the logical outcome of the [empiricism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricism) of Berkeley and Hume".[[79]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-78) [Albert Einstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Einstein) (1915) wrote that he was inspired by Hume's positivism when formulating his [Special Theory of Relativity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Theory_of_Relativity)[[80]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-79). Hume was called "the prophet of the [Wittgensteinian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Wittgenstein) revolution" by N. Phillipson, referring to his view that mathematics and logic are closed systems, disguised tautologies, and have no relation to the world of experience.[[81]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-80) David Fate Norton (1993) asserted that Hume was "the first post-sceptical philosopher of the early modern period".[[82]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-81)

Hume's [Problem of Induction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_Induction) was also of fundamental importance to the philosophy of [Karl Popper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Popper). In his autobiography, *Unended Quest*[[83]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-82), he wrote: "'Knowledge' ... is *objective*; and it is hypothetical or conjectural. This way of looking at the problem made it possible for me to reformulate Hume's *problem of induction*". This insight resulted in Popper's major work [The Logic of Scientific Discovery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Logic_of_Scientific_Discovery)[[84]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_note-83). In his [Conjectures and Refutations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjectures_and_Refutations), p 55, he writes:

"I approached the problem of induction through Hume. Hume, I felt, was perfectly right in pointing out that induction cannot be logically justified".

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=20)**] See also**

* [Age of reason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_reason)
* [Contributions to liberal theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contributions_to_liberal_theory)
* [Human science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_science)
* [Hume's fork](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hume%27s_fork)
* [Hume's Law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hume%27s_Law)
* [Hume's principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hume%27s_principle)
* [Liberalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism)
* [The Missing Shade of Blue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Missing_Shade_of_Blue)
* [Scientific scepticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_skepticism)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit&section=21)**] Footnotes**

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2. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-1) In the Introduction to his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (New York: Dover, 2003 edition), p.xi.fn., Hume mentions "[Mr Locke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke), [Lord Shaftesbury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Ashley-Cooper,_3rd_Earl_of_Shaftesbury), [Dr Mandeville](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_de_Mandeville), [Mr Hutcheson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Hutcheson_%28philosopher%29), [Dr Butler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Butler), etc". as philosophers "who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public"
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8. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-7) See Oliver A. Johnson, *The Mind of David Hume*, (University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp.8–9, for a useful presentation of varying interpretations of Hume's "scene of thought" remark
9. ^ [***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-ogcpkr_8-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-ogcpkr_8-1) Mossner, 193
10. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-9) *A Kind of History of My Life*, op. cit., p.352
11. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-10) Mossner, 195
12. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-11) Ibid., p.352
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16. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-15) Op. cit., p.353
17. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-Sher_16-0) Sher, Richard B. (2006). [*The Enlightenment & the book: Scottish authors & their publishers in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, & America*](http://books.google.com/books?id=gB9liJb5o7UC&pg=PA312&dq=%22alexander+donaldson%22+bookstore&hl=en&ei=YBvTS5SPNY-cswOI8KSbCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CEcQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false). Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology Series. University of Chicago Press. pp. 313. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0226752526](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/0226752526). <http://books.google.com/books?id=gB9liJb5o7UC&pg=PA312&dq=%22alexander+donaldson%22+bookstore&hl=en&ei=YBvTS5SPNY-cswOI8KSbCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CEcQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
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35. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-34) See Edward Craig, op. cit.; Galen Strawson, op. cit.; and John Wright, op. cit
36. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume#cite_ref-35) *Treatise*, op.cit., p.56
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| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/f/f2/Edit-clear.svg/40px-Edit-clear.svg.png | Constructs such as [*ibid.*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibid.) and [*loc. cit.*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loc._cit.) are **discouraged by** [**Wikipedia's style guide**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Footnotes#Style_recommendations) **for footnotes** as they are easily broken. Please [improve this article](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&action=edit) by replacing them with [named references](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Footnotes#Naming_a_ref_tag_so_it_can_be_used_more_than_once) ([*quick guide*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Refref)), or an abbreviated title. |

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