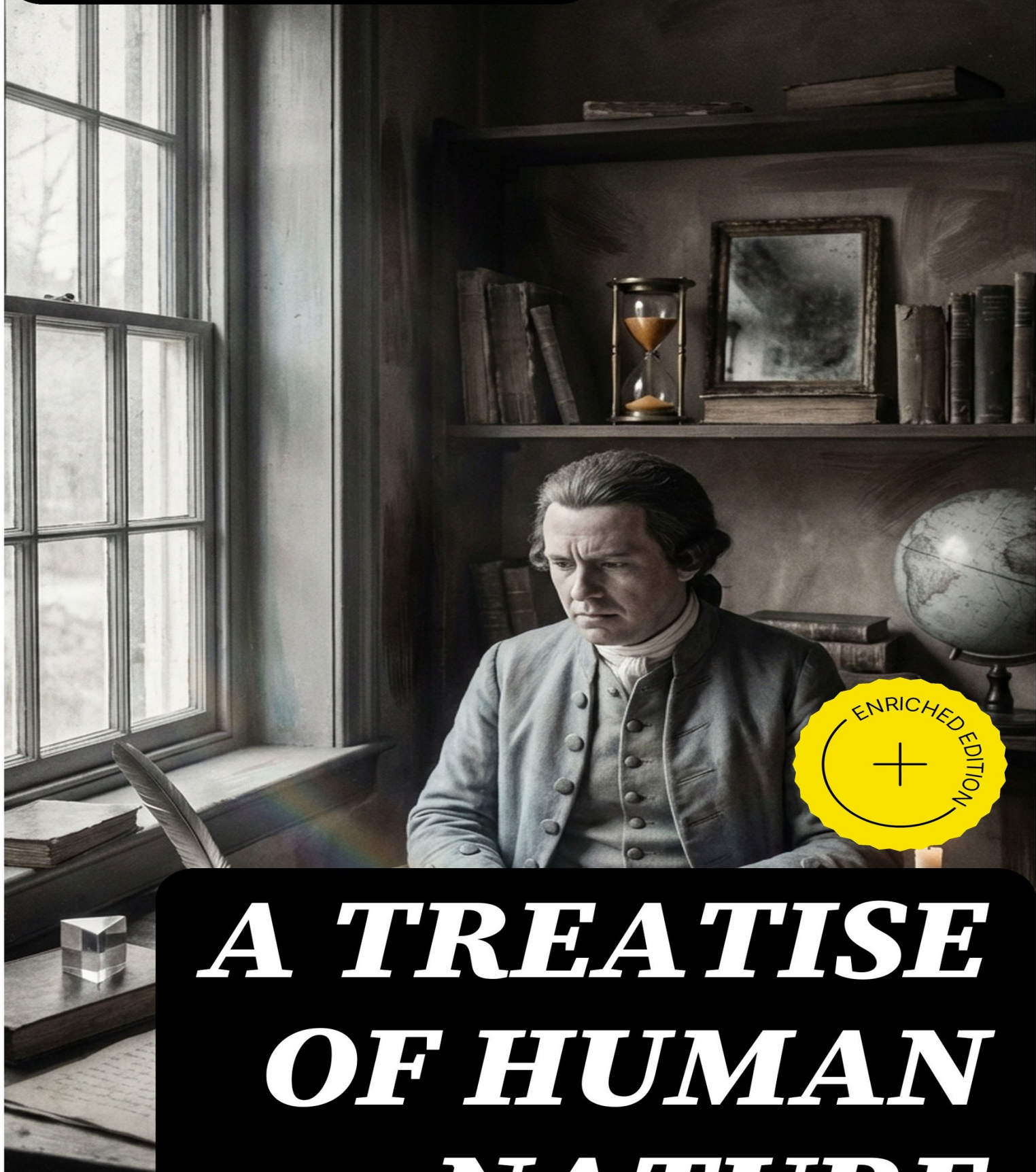


**DAVID HUME**



***A TREATISE  
OF HUMAN  
NATURE***

**David Hume**

# **A Treatise of Human Nature**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Lucas Alder*

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# Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Historical Context](#)

[Author Biography](#)

## **[A Treatise of Human Nature](#)**

[Analysis](#)

[Reflection](#)

[Memorable Quotes](#)

[Notes](#)

# Introduction

## [Table of Contents](#)

Here the restless mind meets the stubborn facts of experience, and neither leaves unchanged. David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* invites readers into a rigorous exploration of how we come to know, feel, and act, all without appealing to inherited certainties. Composed during the Enlightenment, the book proposes that careful attention to experience can illuminate the workings of understanding, passion, and morality. It frames philosophy not as a set of decrees but as an inquiry guided by patient observation. In this spirit, the *Treatise* challenges confidence in easy answers while offering a disciplined path toward clarity about the human condition.

The author is David Hume, a Scottish philosopher born in 1711, who wrote much of the *Treatise* in his twenties. The work was first published anonymously in 1739 and 1740 in three books, corresponding to understanding, the passions, and morals. Hume had spent formative years drafting the project in France, including time at La Flèche, and returned to Britain to oversee its publication. Although he later became famous for essays and a vast history, this youthful enterprise remains his most comprehensive philosophical system. Its timing within the European Enlightenment gives it both the energy of intellectual rebellion and the discipline of emerging scientific method.

The central premise is straightforward yet provocative: if we wish to understand human knowledge, motives, and ethics, we must begin by examining the mind's operations as they appear in experience. Hume proposes a systematic analysis of perception, association, belief, emotion, and moral judgment, always asking what supports our claims and how our practices form. He favors explanations

traceable to observation and habit over appeals to innate metaphysical structures. Rather than building a philosophy from abstract first principles, he tests the limits of what can be established by reflection on lived experience. The result is an ambitious attempt to place human nature itself at the foundation of philosophy.

The Treatise holds classic status for its scope, ambition, and lasting argumentative power. Though it initially met limited attention, it gradually came to be recognized as a landmark of modern philosophy. Hume later recast major portions of the project in shorter works, the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding and the Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, yet the Treatise preserves the full architecture of his vision. It has shaped debates about knowledge, motivation, and ethics for centuries. Readers return to it not only for doctrine but for the way it models rigorous inquiry, balancing bold skepticism with an empirically sensitive method.

Hume's literary achievement contributes to the book's enduring appeal. The prose is clear, measured, and methodical, avoiding ornament in favor of precision. Arguments unfold with a steady cadence: terms are defined, distinctions introduced, and consequences traced patiently. While the subject is abstract, the writing regularly turns to familiar examples, bridging the everyday and the philosophical. The Treatise exemplifies Enlightenment style at its best—lucid, economical, and attentive to the reader's progress through difficult terrain. Its artistry lies in the architecture of reasoning, where each step prepares the next and the cumulative effect clarifies what once seemed opaque.

Without revealing conclusions, we can note the terrain Hume surveys. He analyzes the materials of thought and the ways ideas relate, explores why we form beliefs about the world beyond immediate perception, and examines the springs of action. He devotes sustained attention to emotion

and motivation before considering the sources of moral judgment and the stability of social life. The overarching question is how experience grounds our convictions about causes, persons, obligations, and practices. By pressing each issue to its limits, Hume demonstrates how philosophical problems arise from ordinary thinking—and how careful analysis can both unsettle and illuminate.

The influence of the *Treatise* reaches well beyond its century. Hume's account of causation and our reliance on inductive patterns directly shaped later epistemology and prompted pivotal developments in Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy. In the British and Scottish traditions, thinkers such as Thomas Reid engaged with Hume's positions, while utilitarian moralists, including Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, drew on themes about motivation and moral evaluation. In the twentieth century, analytic philosophers and empiricists revisited Hume's challenges about meaning, knowledge, and method, finding in his work a touchstone for debates about science, language, and rational justification.

Its reach also extends across the human sciences. Hume's attention to association, habit, and sentiment informed later psychological theories and continues to resonate in discussions about cognition and decision-making. His analysis of how conventions help coordinate social life influenced legal and political thought, encouraging explanations that trace institutions to human practices rather than to fixed essences. Economists and moral philosophers have found in his treatment of sympathy, interest, and norm formation a resource for modeling behavior. The *Treatise* thus stands at a crossroads where philosophy meets emerging empirical disciplines, offering concepts that still guide interdisciplinary inquiry.

Historically, the book belongs to the Scottish Enlightenment's collaborative spirit, even as its first appearance was modest in impact. Hume summarized and promoted its key arguments in an Abstract published in

1740, then refined his views in later essays and enquiries intended for a broader audience. He came to prefer those shorter presentations for beginners, yet the *Treatise* retained its status as the most sustained articulation of his system. Over subsequent generations, scholars mined it for its foundational analyses, and debates about its interpretations helped define modern philosophy's curriculum and self-understanding.

Readers approaching the *Treatise* benefit from patience and attention to its internal signposts. Hume builds his case gradually: technical distinctions matter, transitions carry argumentative weight, and examples anchor abstract claims. He often returns to earlier discussions, so keeping track of definitions and cross-references repays the effort. Though demanding, the text rewards careful reading with vivid insights into everyday reasoning, feeling, and valuing. Its discipline is never merely technical; it aims to clarify how we actually think and live. Entering the work as a sustained investigation rather than a set of isolated theses provides the surest guide.

The themes advanced here remain strikingly contemporary. Questions about what justifies scientific inference, how habits and expectations shape belief, how emotions inform practical reasoning, and how norms arise within communities still stand at the center of current debates. Philosophers, cognitive scientists, legal theorists, and social researchers continue to engage Hume's analyses, finding both challenges and resources. The *Treatise* does not foreclose inquiry; it opens paths. By casting philosophy as an empirical, reflective enterprise, it invites collaboration between reflective thought and careful observation, a partnership that modern intellectual life continues to prize.

To read *A Treatise of Human Nature* today is to encounter a work that recognizes both the power and the limits of human understanding while taking our feelings and practices seriously. Its classic status derives from

intellectual daring wedded to methodological restraint, from prose that enlightens without spectacle, and from ideas that echo across disciplines. With its clear-eyed examination of belief, emotion, and morality, it speaks to contemporary concerns about knowledge, persuasion, and communal life. Its lasting appeal lies in a promise: that by studying ourselves with honesty, we may gain a steadier grasp of what we can know and how we ought to live.

# Synopsis

## Table of Contents

David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, published in 1739–1740, proposes a “science of man” that studies understanding, passions, and morals with the same empirical rigor applied to nature. Hume's plan is to investigate the workings of the mind first, then trace how feelings influence action, and finally explain moral distinctions. He proceeds cautiously, building claims from experience and psychological observation rather than speculation. The *Treatise* is organized into three books: *Of the Understanding*, *Of the Passions*, and *Of Morals*. Throughout, Hume aims to reveal the limits of reason, the force of habit and sentiment, and the social foundations of justice and obligation.

Hume begins with perceptions, distinguishing impressions—vivid, forceful experiences—from ideas, which are fainter copies of impressions. This “copy principle” guides his account of how the mind forms even complex notions by compounding, augmenting, and associating simpler elements. He identifies three principles of association—resemblance, contiguity, and cause or effect—that explain the mind's tendency to link ideas. With these tools, Hume undertakes to explain abstract ideas and general reasoning without positing innate concepts. His method treats philosophy as an observational psychology: claims about knowledge and belief must be traced to their experiential sources or shown to arise from mental habits shaped by experience.

Turning to knowledge, Hume distinguishes relations of ideas, knowable a priori, from matters of fact, which depend on experience. Demonstration secures mathematical truths, but empirical claims rely on probability and custom. Hume

investigates belief as a distinctive liveliness or firmness of ideas that exceeds mere imagination and results from repeated conjunctions in experience. He analyzes probable reasoning, showing how the mind accumulates evidence and forms expectations, while also exposing the fragility of such inference. By emphasizing the role of custom in stabilizing belief, Hume sets up his examination of causation and prepares a measured skepticism about what our experience can securely justify.

In his treatment of causation, Hume argues that our idea of necessary connection does not arise from any perceivable power in objects but from the mind's habit of expecting one event to follow another after repeated conjunction. Constant conjunction gives rise to the feeling of necessity, and this projection underwrites causal judgment. He offers practical rules for evaluating causal claims, such as attending to contiguity, temporal succession, and uniform experience, while recognizing exceptions and counterevidence. This analysis highlights a deep challenge: there is no demonstrative proof that the future must resemble the past, yet custom powerfully guides both theoretical inference and everyday action.

Hume extends his scrutiny to the external world and the self. He examines how the imagination leads us to ascribe a continued and distinct existence to objects, despite our experience presenting only intermittent perceptions. He similarly analyzes personal identity, proposing that what we call the self is a bundle of perceptions connected by relations of resemblance and causation rather than a simple, unchanging substance. Discussions of space and time probe their experiential basis and expose tensions in metaphysical claims. While his skeptical arguments are formidable, Hume also notes that natural propensities of the mind support belief in bodies and persons, tempering extreme doubt in practical life.

Book 2 turns to the passions, classifying them as calm or violent, direct or indirect. Hume explains indirect passions such as pride, humility, love, and hatred through a “double relation” of impressions and ideas, showing how sentiments about ourselves and others arise from associative structures and evaluative viewpoints. Sympathy plays a central role: we communicate feelings by adopting others’ perspectives, and this psychological mechanism helps explain social emotions and concern for reputation. Hume highlights the way beliefs about causes, effects, and character traits interact with sentiment to motivate behavior, integrating his earlier account of understanding with an empirically grounded theory of affect.

Hume then considers action, motivation, and freedom. He argues that reason discovers truth and falsehood but does not by itself produce or oppose passions; rather, passions move the will, with reason informing their direction by supplying beliefs about means. On liberty and necessity, Hume defends the compatibility of moral responsibility with the regularity of human behavior: we infer character from conduct because motives and actions exhibit patterns analogous to causal regularities in nature. This framework preserves the intelligibility of praise and blame while rejecting the notion that pure rational insight compels action independent of sentiment or desire.

Book 3 investigates morality. Hume maintains that moral distinctions are founded on sentiment: approval and disapproval reflect feelings shaped by sympathy and a common point of view. He distinguishes natural virtues, such as benevolence, from artificial virtues, such as justice and fidelity, whose value depends on social arrangements. Justice, property, and promise-keeping emerge from conventions that coordinate behavior under conditions of limited generosity and scarcity. By tracing moral evaluations to their psychological and social bases, Hume emphasizes the importance of utility and the stability of expectations,

while also accounting for how impartial perspectives refine and correct partial sentiments.

The Treatise concludes by integrating its empirical psychology with ethics and social theory, showing how understanding, passion, and moral life form a continuous field of inquiry. Although its initial reception was modest, its methodology and conclusions have had enduring influence, informing later discussions in epistemology, metaethics, political philosophy, and cognitive science. Without relying on speculative metaphysics, Hume advances a program that asks what human beings can know, what moves them to act, and how they come to live under stable rules. The broader message emphasizes grounding philosophy in observation and explaining norms through human nature and shared practices.

# Historical Context

## Table of Contents

A Treatise of Human Nature emerged from the British Isles in the 1730s, a period marked by political union, expanding commerce, and a self-conscious culture of learning. Scotland had joined England to form Great Britain in 1707, and Edinburgh and Glasgow developed as important academic and legal centers. The monarchy and Parliament structured public life, while the Church of Scotland remained a dominant moral authority. Across Britain, the Royal Society embodied the prestige of experimental science, and a growing print market linked London to provincial readers. These institutions framed the ambitions of young scholars like David Hume, who sought to refashion philosophy after the model of science.

The work belongs to the early phase of the Scottish Enlightenment, before its mid-century institutional bloom. Scottish universities fostered rigorous training in logic, moral philosophy, and natural law, while legal practice and civic debate nurtured analytical habits. Clubs and informal circles discussed literature, theology, and science; professors in Glasgow and Edinburgh taught modern philosophy alongside classical rhetoric. Francis Hutcheson's prominence at Glasgow from 1729 signaled a new moral sense approach, and figures such as Henry Home (later Lord Kames) encouraged systematic inquiry. Hume's project took shape within this ferment, aiming to found a "science of man" that could organize these disparate intellectual energies.

David Hume was born in Edinburgh in 1711 and educated at the University of Edinburgh, which he attended from a young age. The curriculum exposed students to classical languages, logic, and natural philosophy, and the city's legal

and clerical establishments shaped learned conversation. Hume read widely in Locke and Newton, and absorbed the period's confidence in observation and method, even as he cultivated a skeptical temperament. He resolved early to attempt a comprehensive philosophical system. That ambition required distance and study time, and his next moves—brief experiments in a commercial career and then self-imposed retreat—were dictated by the realities of patronage, work, and scholarly resources.

In 1734 Hume briefly worked with a merchant in Bristol, a major Atlantic port whose bustle underscored Britain's commercial turn. Soon after, he left for France in search of quiet living and substantial libraries. He settled in the town of La Flèche, home to a famous Jesuit college where René Descartes had once studied. There, between roughly 1734 and 1737, Hume drafted the *Treatise*. The inexpensive, disciplined environment and access to books on philosophy, theology, and science supported his attempt to systematize human understanding, the passions, and morals. By late 1737 he returned to Britain to arrange publication of the ambitious manuscript.

The *Treatise* appeared anonymously in London: Books I and II in 1739, and Book III in 1740. Its title announced an effort "to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects," signaling allegiance to the scientific ideals of the age. Initial reception was cool. Hume later wrote that it fell "dead-born from the press," a recollection that reflects its limited early impact rather than the scope of its arguments. To improve understanding and sales, an *Abstract* summarizing the main doctrines was published in 1740, probably by Hume himself. The episode illustrates the challenges of placing difficult, system-building philosophy in Britain's competitive book trade.

The prestige of Isaac Newton's achievements set a model for knowledge in early eighteenth-century Britain. Experimental philosophy, careful observation, and modest

theoretical claims were advocated by the Royal Society and popularized through textbooks and lectures. Hume explicitly framed his project in that spirit. He proposed to treat mental phenomena—belief, inference, emotion—as one would treat physical phenomena: identify principles from experience and avoid speculative hypothesis. The *Treatise's* method, with its emphasis on observation of human behavior and cautious generalization, echoed the anti-dogmatic ethos of the period, while testing how far Newtonian ideals could extend into morality and the mind.

Hume also wrote within a vigorous tradition of British empiricism. John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) had argued that ideas arise from sensation and reflection, while George Berkeley had challenged material substance and reshaped the notion of perception in the 1710s. Debates over abstract ideas, causation, and personal identity framed elite discussion. Hume radicalized these inquiries. He pressed on the limits of reason in grounding causal inference and the self, leaning on habit and imagination rather than metaphysical necessity. Continental skeptics such as Pierre Bayle provided a reservoir of critical arguments, even as Hume sought to keep his own analysis aligned with empirical restraint.

No less active were disputes in moral philosophy. Moral rationalists like Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston defended the authority of reason and eternal relations; Francis Hutcheson championed a moral sense tied to benevolence and approval; Bernard Mandeville provoked readers by stressing self-interest and the social uses of vice. Hume's *Book II* and *Book III* engaged these controversies by locating morals in sentiment and social practice. He examined the passions, sympathy, and the formation of character, and explained virtues in terms of their usefulness and agreeableness. The *Treatise* neither endorsed austere rationalism nor embraced cynicism; it offered a naturalistic account of moral judgment shaped by experience.

Scottish curricula also featured natural jurisprudence, derived from Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, which treated rights, property, and political order historically and comparatively. Lawyers and philosophers in Scotland used this framework to assess civil society and economic development. Hume's discussion of justice as an artificial virtue—emerging from conventions that stabilize property, transfer, and promise—resonated with those concerns. It interpreted law and obligation as human solutions to scarcity and limited generosity, not as innate dictates or divine commands. Such analysis fit a Britain increasingly defined by commerce, credit, and formal rules governing exchange, contract, and public trust.

Religion remained a powerful force. The Church of Scotland's Calvinist orthodoxy exerted social and academic influence, while debates over natural religion and deism animated British print culture. Although England's Toleration Act had eased penalties for some Protestant dissenters, blasphemy and heterodoxy could still draw sanction. Hume published anonymously and framed his work cautiously, yet his naturalistic account of mind and morals had implications that troubled clerical readers. Correspondence in 1739 indicates that Francis Hutcheson admired elements of the *Treatise* but objected to parts of its skepticism. Later controversies around Hume's career would confirm how sensitive philosophical heterodoxy remained in mid-eighteenth-century Scotland.

The political environment also mattered. After the 1688–89 settlement and the 1707 Union, Britain experienced relatively stable governance under a Hanoverian monarchy and long Whig administrations, notably Robert Walpole's. This order prized fiscal credibility, public credit, and peace, though Jacobite risings in 1715 and 1745 reminded Britons of lingering dynastic conflict. Philosophers probed the sources of allegiance and authority. In Book III, Hume portrayed government as grounded in convention, utility,

and opinion rather than in contract or divine right alone. The analysis aligned with a culture wary of political and religious enthusiasm yet dependent on public confidence in institutions.

Everyday life in cities like London and Edinburgh reflected the rise of commerce and polite sociability. Coffeehouses, clubs, and periodicals fostered debate, while a growing consumer economy expanded horizons. The language of politeness emphasized self-command, sympathy, and the management of passions. Hume's psychological analysis of the imagination, custom, and sympathy addressed the mechanisms that knit individuals into a commercial society. His account of the passions explained how esteem, interest, and habit guide conduct, offering a philosophical portrait of the same social processes celebrated and worried over in essays, sermons, and conduct literature of the time.

Print culture shaped the Treatise's fate. The lapse of prepublication licensing in England in 1695 had encouraged a more competitive and diverse book market. By the 1730s, London booksellers dominated national distribution, and authors navigated patronage, subscription, and outright commercial publication. Anonymity could protect a writer from ecclesiastical or political backlash and let arguments speak before reputations formed. The Treatise's length and technicality limited immediate audience, prompting the 1740 Abstract to guide readers. Hume's later decision to recast portions as Enquiries, more concise and polished, reflected the practical demands of Britain's expanding but still selective reading public.

Scottish education and language were also in transition. Professors increasingly lectured in English rather than Latin, and curricula featured modern authors alongside Aristotle. Hutcheson's lectures in Glasgow exemplified a plain, accessible style, and Scottish students encountered criticism of scholastic subtleties. Hume shared the reforming

impulse but wrote the *Treatise* in a dense, systematic manner that some contemporaries found forbidding. His subsequent *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) distilled key doctrines, indicating how the intellectual aims of the 1730s adapted to the rhetorical expectations of a broader Enlightenment audience.

The *Treatise* also belongs to a cross-Channel republic of letters. Hume's residence at La Flèche placed him near a Jesuit intellectual tradition and the memory of Descartes, even as French censorship remained stricter than Britain's. He read French scholarship and absorbed debates mediated by Bayle's *Dictionnaire* and other compendia. Yet the work's immediate European circulation was limited; it would take later essays, histories, and correspondence, along with shifting continental tastes, to give Hume wider fame. The *Treatise* thus illustrates the uneven pathways by which British philosophy, despite ambitions to generality, reached and persuaded foreign audiences.

Technological and infrastructural changes reinforced the period's empirical spirit. Improved roads, stagecoach networks, and a reliable postal system accelerated communication among authors, booksellers, and reviewers. Urban print shops, cheaper paper, and specialized journals made philosophy visible to a dispersed public. Demonstrations of scientific instruments in coffeehouses popularized experiment as a cultural ideal. Hume's insistence on observing mental operations, cataloging associative principles, and explaining belief by habit resembles, in methodological aspiration, the laboratory's caution and reporting. The texture of daily life, saturated with printed controversy and empirical spectacle, encouraged a philosophy that emphasized experience over hypothesis.

Reception within Scotland highlighted the costs of intellectual independence. The *Treatise's* skepticism and its

naturalistic morals complicated Hume's prospects for academic posts. In 1744-45, his candidacy for the Edinburgh chair of moral philosophy met organized opposition on religious grounds, and he withdrew. Though this episode occurred after the *Treatise's* publication, it helps illuminate the climate in which it was conceived and read. Hume nevertheless remained connected to Scottish institutions, later serving as librarian to the Faculty of Advocates and contributing to the republic of letters that would include Adam Smith, William Robertson, and other architects of the mature Scottish Enlightenment. As a work of its moment, *A Treatise of Human Nature* both mirrors and challenges its age. It absorbs Newtonian method, British empiricist debates, and Scottish moral philosophy, while unsettling inherited metaphysical and theological frameworks. Its analysis of belief, passion, justice, and convention reflects a Britain defined by commerce, print, and institutional authority, yet it resists easy reconciliation with prevailing orthodoxies. The *Treatise* announced a "science of man" suited to an enlightened society and at the same time exposed the tensions that such a society carried within its forms of knowledge and power.

# Author Biography

## [Table of Contents](#)

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, historian, and essayist whose work reshaped modern thought about knowledge, morality, politics, and religion. Writing in an era that prized scientific method and public debate, he advanced a radical empiricism and a measured skepticism that challenged inherited metaphysics and theological certainties. His clear prose and methodological ambition sought a “science of human nature” grounded in observation. Beyond philosophy, Hume became one of the most widely read historians in Britain. His ideas on causation, induction, personal identity, and moral sentiment continue to inform contemporary philosophy, economics, psychology, and the study of religion, securing him a central place in Western intellectual history.

Hume’s early education was in Edinburgh, where he studied broadly, including law, before turning decisively to philosophy. He absorbed the British empiricist tradition after John Locke and engaged critically with George Berkeley, while drawing inspiration from Isaac Newton’s experimental method. The intellectual climate of the Scottish Enlightenment, with its clubs, periodicals, and civic discourse, provided both models and audiences for his work. In the mid-1730s he spent significant time in France, including at La Flèche, where he composed much of his first major book. These formative years crystallized Hume’s commitment to explaining cognition, emotion, and social life through experience, custom, and the careful description of mental processes.

Hume’s first major publication, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), aimed to establish the foundations of a

comprehensive “science of man.” It analyzed ideas, belief, causation, personal identity, the passions, and morals, but initially met with a cool reception. Hume soon recast and clarified parts of the *Treatise in Essays, Moral and Political* (1741–1742), which found a wider readership. He further refined his epistemology in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), emphasizing the limits of reason, the centrality of habit in belief formation, and the problem of induction. The *Enquiry* also contained his famous discussion of miracles and reflections on liberty and necessity.

Hume’s moral philosophy culminated in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), which he regarded as his best work. There he argued that moral evaluation arises from sentiment, informed by sympathy and social utility, rather than from reason alone. He treated virtues such as benevolence and justice as grounded in human needs and conventions. In aesthetics and criticism, essays later collected with *Four Dissertations* (1757) included “Of the Standard of Taste,” which proposed how educated critics might converge on refined judgments despite variations of sentiment. These works consolidated his reputation as a master of elegant prose and a subtle analyst of common life.

In political economy, Hume’s *Political Discourses* (1752) explored money, trade, interest, luxury, and public credit, advancing arguments for commercial liberty and anticipating aspects of classical economics. Around the same period he served as a librarian in Edinburgh, a post that gave him access to sources used in *The History of England* (published between the mid-1750s and early 1760s). That multi-volume narrative, spanning from ancient times through the seventeenth century and beyond, became a bestseller, known for its balanced prose and controversial judgments. It secured Hume financial independence and a broad public profile, even as some

critics challenged his interpretations of constitutional and religious conflict.

Hume also held public appointments in the 1760s, including diplomatic and civil service roles that brought him to Paris and London. In France he engaged prominent philosophes, and his sociability enhanced his international reputation. His writings on religion—*The Natural History of Religion* (1757) and the posthumous *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779)—offered naturalistic accounts of belief and critical examinations of design arguments. While avoiding dogmatic atheism, he pressed for evidential restraint, toleration, and the separation of moral life from theological claims. These positions drew clerical suspicion in Britain yet resonated with Enlightenment efforts to subject inherited doctrines to public reason.

Hume spent his later years largely in Edinburgh, revising his works and corresponding with thinkers across Europe. He died in 1776 after a prolonged illness, widely noted for his composure. His immediate reputation rested as much on his *History* as on his philosophy, but subsequent generations brought a reversal: Immanuel Kant credited Hume with awakening him from “dogmatic slumber,” and later movements—utilitarianism, pragmatism, logical empiricism, and analytic philosophy—drew on Humean themes. Today his analyses of causation, selfhood, norms, and religious belief remain central, while his essays on commerce and taste continue to inform economics, political theory, and aesthetics.

# **A Treatise of Human Nature**

## **Main Table of Contents**

Introduction

## **BOOK I. OF THE UNDERSTANDING**

Part I. Of Ideas, Their Origin, Composition, Connexion, Abstraction, Etc.

Section I. Of The Origin Of Our Ideas

Section II. Division Of The Subject

Section III. Of The Ideas Of The Memory And Imagination

Section IV. Of The Connexion Or Association Of Ideas

Section V. Of Relations

Section VI. Of Modes And Substances

Section VII. Of Abstract Ideas

Part II. Of The Ideas Of Space And Time

Section I. Of The Infinite Divisibility Of Our Ideas Of Space And Time

Section II. Of The Infinite Divisibility Of Space And Time

Section III. Of The Other Qualities Of Our Idea Of Space And Time

Section IV. Objections Answered

Section V. The Same Subject Continued

Section VI. Of The Idea Of Existence, And Of External Existence

Part III. Of Knowledge And Probability

Section I. Of Knowledge

Section II. Of Probability, And Of The Idea Of Cause And Effect

Section III. Why A Cause Is Always Necessary

Section IV. Of The Component Parts Of Our Reasonings Concerning Cause And Effect

Section V. Of The Impressions Of The Senses And Memory

Section VI. Of The Inference From The Impression To The Idea

Section VII. Of The Nature Of The Idea Or Belief

Section VIII. Of The Causes Of Belief

Section IX. Of The Effects Of Other Relations And Other Habits

Section X. Of The Influence Of Belief

Section XI. Of The Probability Of Chances

Section XII. Of The Probability Of Causes

Section XIII. Of Unphilosophical Probability

Section XIV. Of The Idea Of Necessary Connexion

Section XV. Rules By Which To Judge Of Causes And Effects

Section XVI. Of The Reason Of Animals

Part IV. Of The Sceptical And Other Systems Of Philosophy

Section I. Of Scepticism With Regard To Reason

Section II. Of Scepticism With Regard To The Senses

Section III. Of The Antient Philosophy

Section IV. Of The Modern Philosophy

Section V. Of The Immateriality Of The Soul

Section VI. Of Personal Identity

Section VII. Conclusion Of This Book

## **BOOK II. OF THE PASSIONS**

Part I. Of Pride And Humility

Section I. Division Of The Subject

Section II. Of Pride And Humility, Their Objects And Causes

Section III. Whence These Objects And Causes Are Derived

Section IV. Of The Relations Of Impressions And Ideas

Section V. Of The Influence Of These Relations On Pride And Humility

Section VI. Limitations Of This System

Section VII. Of Vice And Virtue

Section VIII. Of Beauty And Deformity

Section IX. Of External Advantages And Disadvantages

Section X. Of Property And Riches

Section XI. Of The Love Of Fame

Section XII. Of The Pride And Humility Of Animals

Part II. Of Love And Hatred

Section I. Of The Object And Causes Of Love And Hatred

Section II. Experiments To Confirm This System

Section III. Difficulties Solved

Section IV. Of The Love Of Relations

Section V. Of Our Esteem For The Rich And Powerful

Section VI. Of Benevolence And Anger

Section VII. Of Compassion

Section VIII. Of Malice And Envy

Section IX. Of The Mixture Of Benevolence And Anger With Compassion And Malice

Section X. Of Respect And Contempt

Section XI. Of The Amorous Passion, Or Love Betwixt The Sexes

Section XII. Of The Love And Hatred Of Animals

Part III. Of The Will And Direct Passions

‘rich, a fool, and a batchelor’) to characterize one of the disputants in his moral scenario.

**105** An archaic slang term meaning a dupe, gull, or someone easily cheated; common in 17th–18th century English. Hume uses it to convey the fear that a solitary honest person would be taken advantage of if others act unjustly, motivating the need for institutions to enforce mutual restraint.

**106** Hume is referring to Indigenous peoples of North America (commonly called “American tribes” in 18th-century writings) and their social arrangements as reported by contemporary travelers. His account relies on generalized reports from that period and reflects eighteenth-century European perspectives rather than detailed ethnographic study.

**107** This phrase names a theory that political authority originates from the authority of a family father; it was a common explanation for monarchy in early modern political thought (notably defended by Robert Filmer in the 17th century). Hume contrasts this view with his own idea that rule often arises from military leaders and the practical needs of war and order.

**108** A theory in political philosophy that a society’s government is founded on an initial mutual agreement or promise among individuals to submit to authority. Thinkers often associated with versions of this idea include Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (17th century) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (18th century); Hume here treats the argument from an “original contract” as a fallacious way to justify allegiance and instead grounds obedience in ongoing public interest and security.

**109** In 18th-century usage, 'magistracy' denotes the office or authority of magistrates — civil officers, judges, or governing officials — rather than a single person. Hume uses it to refer broadly to the source of lawful power to which subjects owe obedience.

**110** The Salic law was an early medieval Frankish legal code later interpreted in many European contexts as a rule excluding female succession to the throne. Hume invokes it as an example of so-called 'fundamental laws' — traditional constraints on sovereign power whose scope and historical application varied by time and place.

**111** This phrase refers to William of Orange (William III), who led the Glorious Revolution (1688) and became joint monarch of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1689. Hume is noting that William's initial title was contested but later acquired settled authority through subsequent successions.

**112** Hume uses the phrase "laws of nations" to mean the body of rules governing relations among sovereign states— what modern readers call international law (Latin *jus gentium*). This early-modern concept, developed by writers such as Hugo Grotius in the 17th century, covered practices like diplomatic immunity, declaration of war, and prohibitions on certain weapons.

**113** An 18th-century idiom meaning women in general. Hume uses it to discuss virtues and social expectations applied specifically to women, reflecting period gender norms rather than a neutral contemporary expression.

**114** The phrase 'the laws of nations' refers to early modern notions of international law (Latin: *jus gentium*) — customary rules, treaties, and mutual expectations that govern relations between states and their subjects. Hume

treats such laws as artificial conventions created to serve social order and mutual advantage.

**115** Marcus Brutus (Marcus Junius Brutus, c. 85–42 BCE) was a Roman statesman best known as one of the leading conspirators in the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE and later as a symbol of republican virtue. Hume invokes Brutus to contrast historical admiration for notable patriots with the stronger, more immediate affection we may feel for familiar individuals like a faithful servant.

**116** 'Quinct. lib. 8.' is an abbreviated citation of Quintilian (Marcus Fabius Quintilianus), a Roman rhetorician; 'lib. 8' means Book 8 of his *Institutio Oratoria*. Hume quotes this classical passage to support the claim that attractiveness is often tied to usefulness, drawing on longstanding rhetorical and educational authorities.

**117** Alexander the Great was the king of Macedon who created one of the largest empires of the ancient world through campaigns across Persia and into India (died 323 BCE). Hume invokes Alexander as an example of pride and ambition—qualities that drive heroic actions and command admiration despite the social costs those actions can cause.

**118** The 'prince of Conde' refers to the title held by leaders of the French Bourbon-Condé family, a prominent noble house in early modern France (members were influential from the 16th through 18th centuries). Hume notes that this prince admired Alexander's proud remark, citing a report of that admiration recorded by St Evremond.

**119** The phrase 'public robber' is an 18th-century metaphor for a ruler or powerful person who plunders or oppresses the public; Hume uses it to describe the extreme form of ambition and courage unregulated by benevolence. It

conveys the idea of political tyranny or large-scale exploitation rather than a literal highwayman.

**120** Sallust (Gaius Sallustius Crispus, c. 86–35 BCE) was a Roman historian who wrote short, moralizing histories of the late Republic and is known for vivid portraits of political figures. Julius Caesar and Marcus Porcius Cato (Cato the Younger) were prominent Roman statesmen often contrasted in classical literature—Caesar as ambitious and politically effective, Cato as stoically principled—and Hume cites Sallust’s depictions to illustrate different kinds of virtue and the distinct feelings of approbation they inspire.

**121** An 18th-century colloquialism meaning men who are popular with women—often those famed for amorous exploits or conspicuous sexual prowess. In Hume's context it denotes 'ladies' men' or womanizers whose reputation wins them esteem even from women who have no intention of reciprocating.

**122** 'Anatomist' is used metaphorically here for a thinker who dissects ideas into detailed parts, contrasted with the 'painter' who composes a pleasing whole. Hume argues that these careful, analytical investigations (the 'anatomist's' work) are necessary to inform and improve practical moral teaching, even if they seem cold or unentertaining.

**123** An archaic idiom used by Hume for someone who constructs fanciful, impractical daydreams or projects. He contrasts the 'loose and indolent reveries of a castle-builder' with the firmer conceptions produced by impressions and experience to emphasize the difference between imagination and belief.

**124** A central philosophical problem Hume addresses about whether there is a simple, continuous 'self' underlying our perceptions. Hume argues skeptically that what we call