

# David Hume



David Hume was a Scottish philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist who was best known for his highly influential system of empiricism, philosophical scepticism and metaphysical naturalism. Beginning with *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), Hume strove to create a naturalistic science of man that examined the psychological basis of human nature. Hume followed John Locke in rejecting the existence of innate ideas, concluding that all human knowledge derives solely from experience. This places him with Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and George Berkeley as an empiricist.

## Biography

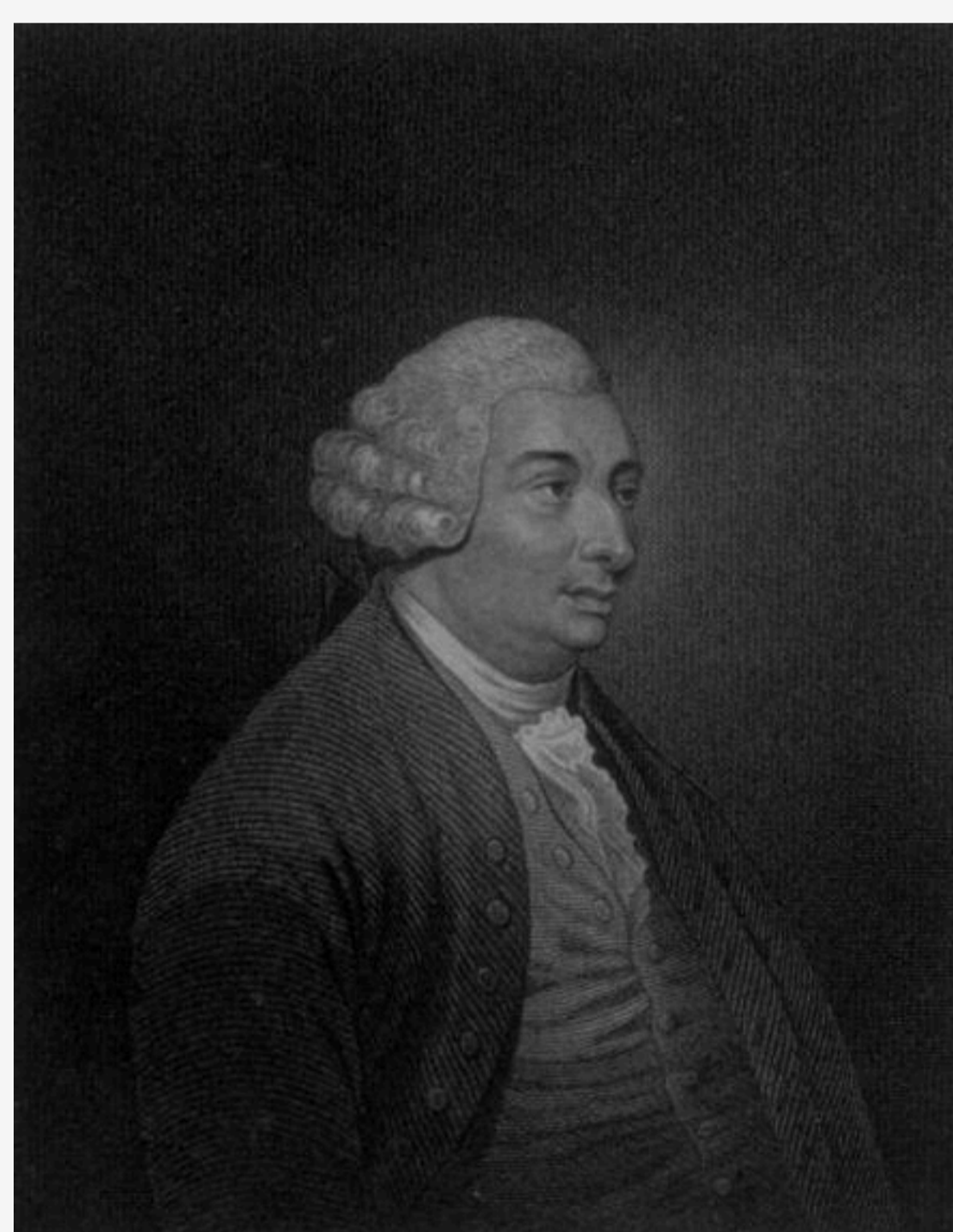
Hume was born on 26 April 1711, as David Home, in a tenement on the north side of Edinburgh's Lawnmarket. He was the second of two sons born to Catherine Home (née Falconer), daughter of Sir David Falconer of Newton, Midlothian and his wife Mary Falconer (née Norvell), and Joseph Home of Chirnside in the County of Berwick, an advocate of Ninewells. Joseph died just after David's second birthday. Catherine, who never remarried, raised the two brothers and their sister on her own.

Hume changed his family name's spelling in 1734, as the surname 'Home' (pronounced as 'Hume') was not well-known in England. Hume never married and lived partly at his Chirnside family home in Berwickshire, which had belonged to the family since the 16th century. His finances as a young man were very "slender", as his family was not rich; as a younger son he had little patrimony to live on. Hume attended the University of Edinburgh at an unusually early age—either 12 or possibly as young as 10—at a time when 14 was the typical age. Initially, Hume considered a career in law, because of his family. However, in his words, he came to have: "...an insurmountable aversion to everything but the pursuits of Philosophy and general Learning; and while [my family] fancied I was poring over Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the Authors which I was secretly devouring."

He had little respect for the professors of his time, telling a friend in 1735 that "there is nothing to be learnt from a Professor, which is not to be met with in Books". He did not graduate.

At around age 18, Hume made a philosophical discovery that opened up to him "a new Scene of Thought", inspiring him "to throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it". As he did not recount what this scene exactly was, commentators have offered a variety of speculations. One prominent interpretation among contemporary Humean scholarship is that this new "scene of thought" was Hume's realisation that Francis Hutcheson's theory of moral sense could be applied to the understanding of morality as well. From this inspiration, Hume set out to spend a minimum of 10 years reading and writing. He soon came to the verge of a mental breakdown, first starting with a coldness—which he attributed to a "Laziness of Temper"—that lasted about nine months. Scurvy spots later broke out on his fingers, persuading Hume's physician to diagnose him with the "Disease of the Learned".

Hume wrote that he "went under a Course of Bitters and Anti-Hysterick Pills", taken along with a pint of claret every day. He also decided to have a more active life to better continue his learning. His health improved somewhat, but in 1731, he was afflicted with a ravenous appetite and palpitations. After eating well for a time, he went from being "tall, lean and raw-bon'd" to being "sturdy, robust [and] healthful-like." Indeed, Hume would become well known for being obese and having a fondness for good port and cheese, often using them as philosophical metaphors for his conjectures. Hume was born on 26 April 1711, as David Home, in a tenement on the north side of Edinburgh's Lawnmarket. He was the second of two sons born to Catherine Home (née Falconer), daughter of Sir David Falconer of Newton, Midlothian and his wife Mary Falconer (née Norvell), and Joseph Home of Chirnside in the County of Berwick, an advocate of Ninewells. Joseph died just after David's second birthday. Catherine, who never remarried, raised the two brothers and their sister on her own.



## Major Works

- "A Treatise of Human Nature"
- "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding"
- "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals"
- "The History of England"



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