

David Hume (1711-1776)

Year	Event	Commentary
1711	David Hume is born in Edinburgh.	
1713	Hume's father dies; Hume is raised by his mother on the family farm, Ninewells, in the Scottish Borders, near Chirnside.	A disproportionate number of creative geniuses lose their father during childhood, and there has been substantial research and theorizing about this phenomenon (see Ochse, 1990, ch. 4, and Simonton, 1999, ch. 4).
1721	At the age of 10, Hume attends Edinburgh University with his brother; Hume spends 3–4 years there in his studies.	Hume didn't obtain a formal degree, which was common for the times, but also common for creative geniuses (see Simonton, 1999, ch. 4).
1725	Hume begins studying law, but gives it up for an intensive, self-directed, and passionate study of philosophy, temporarily ruining his health in the process.	Intensive, self-directed study is a common characteristic of creative geniuses, as is precociousness (see Ochse, 1990, ch. 8).
1734	Hume takes a post as a clerk in Bristol, but is sacked for correcting his boss's grammar – Hume immediately leaves for France.	The attraction of France must have been immense for the young Hume, for at least three reasons: (a) there was a long tradition of young, well-heeled Scotsmen being educated on the Continent, doing the "Grand Tour", (b) there had been a special relationship between France and Scotland for centuries, and (c) France was the springboard of the Enlightenment – home to major Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Rousseau.
1734– 37	Hume settles at La Flèche, on the Loire, where the Jesuit College was still the center for disciples of Descartes and Malebranche – while in La Flèche, Hume composed <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> .	It is significant that Hume "went away" to produce his <i>magnum opus</i> ; major intellectual achievements often require concentrated effort over large periods of time, without interruption (see Ochse, 1990, ch. 9, and Simonton, 1999, ch. 2).
1739– 40	The <i>Treatise</i> is published anonymously in London.	Why was it published anonymously?
1740	Due to poor sales and a poor reception for the <i>Treatise</i> , Hume publishes an <i>Abstract</i> , synthesizing and clarifying his major theses.	It is not enough to <i>have</i> a great idea or insight, you must also be able to effectively communicate it, and it will almost always benefit from critical feedback (see Ochse, 1990, ch. 9).
1741– 42	Hume publishes his <i>Essays, Moral, Political and Literary</i> .	Although these essays are not as well known as his philosophical and historical works, they are significant for at least two reasons: First, moral philosophy was a major concern of the Enlightenment, and was addressed by virtually all of the <i>litterati</i> . Second, another characteristic of creative geniuses is that they tend to be continually productive, even though not all of their "productions" are of highest quality (see Simonton, 1999, ch. 5).
1745	The Provost of Edinburgh recommends Hume for the vacant Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University, but the appointment is	Hume was an atheist, and his religious convictions caused him trouble all of his life, as on this occasion.

- blocked by the Principal of the University; in order to defend himself against allegations made by the Principal, Hume publishes *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*.
- 1746– Hume accompanies General James St. Clair (a
48 distant relative) on several military misadventures. Hume gets his first taste of public service, which he finds immensely satisfying; this is a common pattern among creative geniuses of the Scottish Enlightenment, pursuing work within their domain early in life, and gradually phasing into public service later in life.
- 1748 Hume publishes his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The *Enquiry* is a revision of the part of the *Treatise* devoted to what we would now call epistemology, philosophy of science, and cognitive science.
- 1751 Hume publishes *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* Also a revision of parts of the *Treatise*, this *Enquiry* is devoted to topics that would now fall within the domains of history, sociology, and anthropology; Hume finally gives up his "anonymous" status, and identifies himself as the author of his previous works, including the present one.
- 1752 Hume publishes a series of essays under the title *Political Discourses*, and is appointed Keeper of the Advocates Library at Edinburgh University. This position gives him access to an outstanding collection of historical works, giving him the opportunity to write his *History of England*.
- 1754– Hume publishes his *History of England*.
62 Hume was better known in his own time for his historical writing than for his philosophical writing, which took longer for his "audience" to appreciate.
- 1757 Hume resigns as Librarian, after a censorship dispute with the Library's Curators.
- 1763– Hume returns to France, this time staying in
66 Paris — first as Secretary, and then as Chargé d' Affairs, at the British Embassy. Hume was fêted and lionized by the French — scholars and ladies alike; the French as a whole, calling him "le bon David", appreciated Hume more than his British countrymen.
- 1767– Hume returns to London, where he serves as
69 Undersecretary of State for the powers north of France, including the Russia of Catherine the Great.
- 1769 Hume returns to Edinburgh, and renews his old acquaintances, including Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, and Benjamin Franklin.
- 1771 Hume moves from James's Court, off of High Street in Old Town, to St Andrew's Square (SW corner), in Edinburgh's New Town.
- 1776 Hume dies (graciously, much to the chagrin of his detractors) on August 25th.
- 1779 Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* is published posthumously, with the help of his friend Adam Smith.

