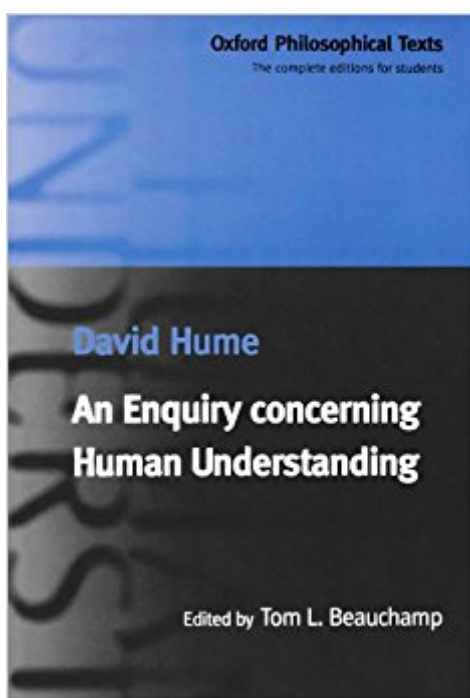


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# An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Oxford Philosophical Texts)



## Synopsis

The Oxford Philosophical Texts series consists of truly practical and accessible guides to major philosophical texts in the history of philosophy from the ancient world up to modern times. Each book opens with a comprehensive introduction by a leading specialist which covers the philosopher's life, work, and influence. Endnotes, a full bibliography, guides to further reading, and an index are also included. The series aims to build a definitive corpus of key texts in the Western philosophical tradition, forming a reliable and enduring resource for students and teachers alike. Now one of the most widely read works in philosophy, David Hume's *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748) introduced his philosophy to a broad educated readership. In it he gives an elegant and accessible presentation of strikingly original and challenging views about the limited powers of human understanding, the attractions of skepticism, the compatibility of free will and determinism, and weaknesses in the foundations of religion. In this volume, an authoritative new version of the text is enhanced by detailed explanatory notes, a glossary of terms, a full list of references, and a section of supplementary readings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

These new Oxford University Press editions have been meticulously collated from various extant versions. Each text has an excellent introduction including an overview of Hume's thought and an account of his life and times. Even the difficult, and rarely commented-on, chapters on space and time are elucidated. There are also useful notes on the text and glossary. These scholarly new

editions are ideally adapted for a whole range of readers, from beginners to experts.' Jane O'Grady, Catholic Herald, 4/8/00.

Library of Liberal Arts title. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the most impressive free kindle editions of a book that I have read. It is taken from a 1902 printing (a 2nd edition) that was reprinted from the posthumous edition of 1777. It includes endnotes and an extensive index put together by L.A Selby-Bigge, a late fellow of University College, Oxford. There is a table of contents at the beginning with hyperlinks. The endnotes also have hyperlinks, which makes it easy to read the notes and jump back to the text. The index also has hyperlinks. This is the first kindle freebie that I have seen with these features. This is handy for this type of book. Note that Hume is Scottish and the book was originally written in English. I have always had an interest in philosophy and history and finally got around to reading this foundational work. The title describes exactly what this book is about. Hume starts by giving a brief introduction to philosophy and then jumps into the main questions. The biggie is where do ideas come from? How do we understand things? What is instinct, inspiration? It is interesting that his answers to these questions still hold up well to modern thought. Hume wrote this book at a time and place where Calvinism still held great sway and God was thought to be behind every thought and action. His ideas were radical and I was interested to see how he tried to delicately handle ideas that would potentially offend many of his readers. I highly recommend this seminal work to any one interested in philosophy and enjoys stretching their minds a bit. This is something I will refer to often. I continue to enjoy the access my Kindle gives me to great classics like this.

This book is not the "best" book of philosophy. It is more. Nor is it the "king" of philosophy books. It is more. It is, to say the least, the "god" of the books of philosophy. The issues discussed are only the most serious philosophical issues. The arguments are not merely compelling but also beautiful, appealing. And the spirit is that of the enlightenment at its most robust form. A word for philosophy lovers: please read this book with your utmost concentration and you will love its ideas and enjoy its prose. The author may not convince everyone but challenges anyone that reads his philosophy. So you will be challenged, intrigued, motivated to question some or all of your convictions, or be persuaded to agree with the author. But more importantly, you will adore Hume.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), "the father of modern philosophy," was a rationalist who attempted to

attain certainty by discovering "first principles" on which he could overcome skeptical doubt and establish irrefutable truth. He claimed that one thing is absolutely certain: Cogito, ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"). From this solid rock on which to stand, he proceeded to claim that by reason alone he could prove the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the reality of an afterlife. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was trained in the rationalist tradition, but when he read David Hume's work, the impact shattered his way of thinking. In the preface to his 'Prolegomenon,' Kant stated that reading Hume woke him from his "dogmatic slumbers." If Hume was right, then metaphysics, as Kant had previously believed it, was impossible, nothing but "sophistry and illusion." In his most famous work, Critique of Pure Reason, Kant wrote, "I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge [that is, show the limits of reason and human understanding] in order to make room for faith." An empiricist and skeptic, David Hume (1711-1776) was born and died in Edinburgh, Scotland. His magnum opus, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748), like Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (1781), is one of the key texts of the 18th-century Enlightenment. Taking a dim view of miracles, mysticism, and metaphysics, Hume skeptically asserted that empirical proofs of religion (such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and an afterlife) are not possible. In effect, he was saying (to paraphrase Kant), "I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge [that is, reason and human understanding] in order to make room for lack of faith [that is, to make room for skepticism and unbelief]." In the famous last paragraph of his Enquiry, Hume writes: "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these [empirical and skeptical] principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume: of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask: Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and experience? No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." Hume clarifies the terms "a priori" reasoning (deduction) and "a posteriori" empiricism (induction). Deductive reasoning is done "before experience," such as the mathematical conclusion that  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Inductive reasoning is done "after experience"

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