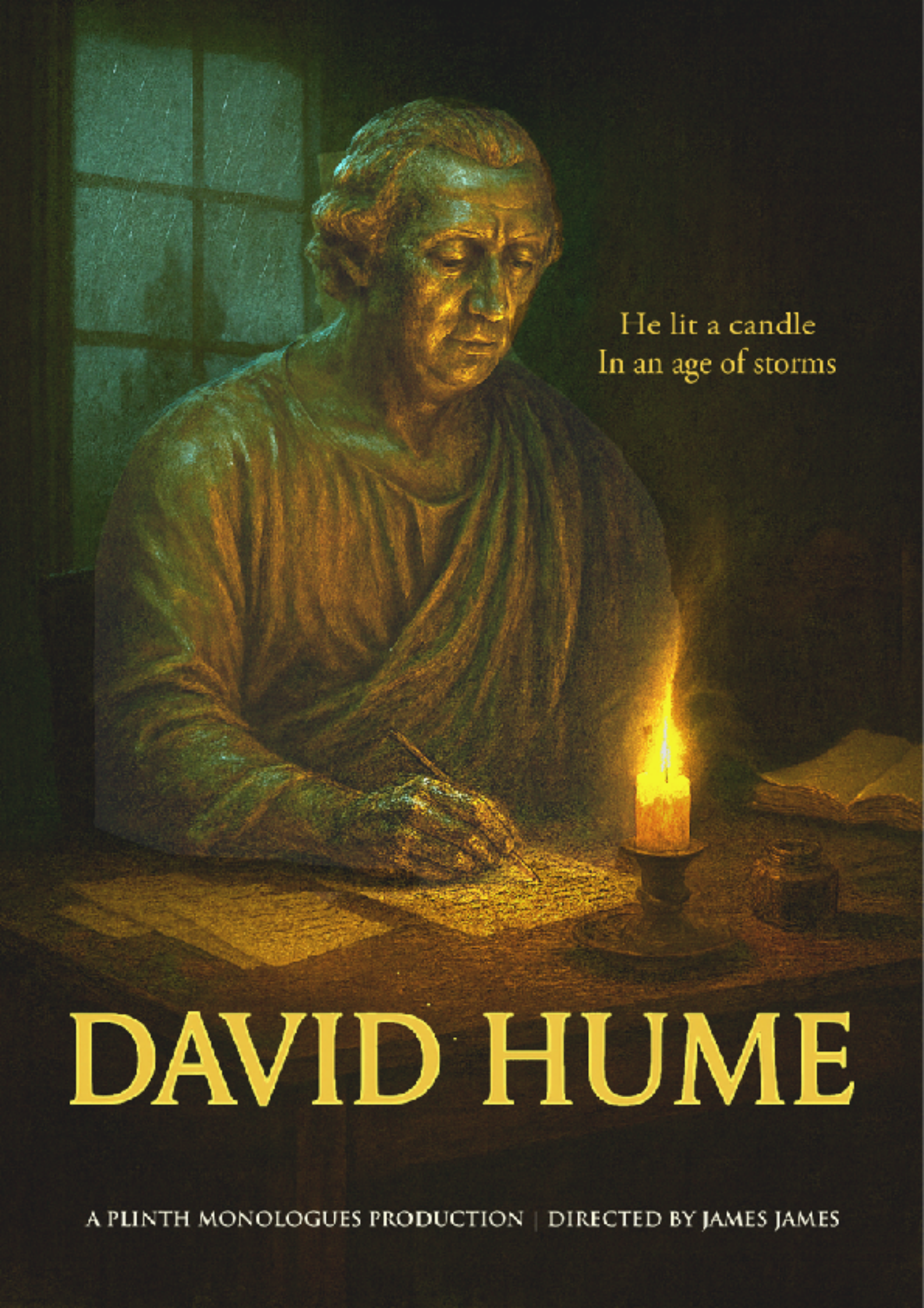


A dramatic painting of David Hume, an 18th-century philosopher, seated at a desk and writing with a quill. The scene is dimly lit, with a single candle in a brass holder providing the primary light source, casting a warm glow on his face and the desk. In the background, a window with multiple panes is visible, showing a dark, rainy night. The overall mood is contemplative and scholarly.

He lit a candle
In an age of storms

DAVID HUME

A PLINTH MONOLOGUES PRODUCTION | DIRECTED BY JAMES JAMES

An Historical Companion

Another figure to have left a deep mark on the modern world while remaining so frequently misunderstood is David Hume.

To many visitors encountering his statue on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, Hume appears simply as another distinguished gentleman cast in bronze among Scotland's many celebrated historical figures.

Yet beneath the flowing robes and calm expression lies one of the most influential thinkers ever produced by Scotland, a man whose ideas helped transform philosophy, history, economics, politics, psychology, and the very way human beings understand knowledge itself.

Born in eighteenth-century Scotland during a period of extraordinary intellectual energy, Hume became one of the leading lights of what would later be known as the Scottish Enlightenment.

His work challenged long-held assumptions about religion, certainty, morality, and human understanding. Some admired him as a fearless seeker of truth. Others condemned him as a dangerous sceptic whose ideas threatened traditional beliefs.

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Today Hume's influence extends far beyond academic philosophy. Modern scientific thinking, political debate, economics, psychology and even everyday assumptions about evidence and reason bear traces of his work.

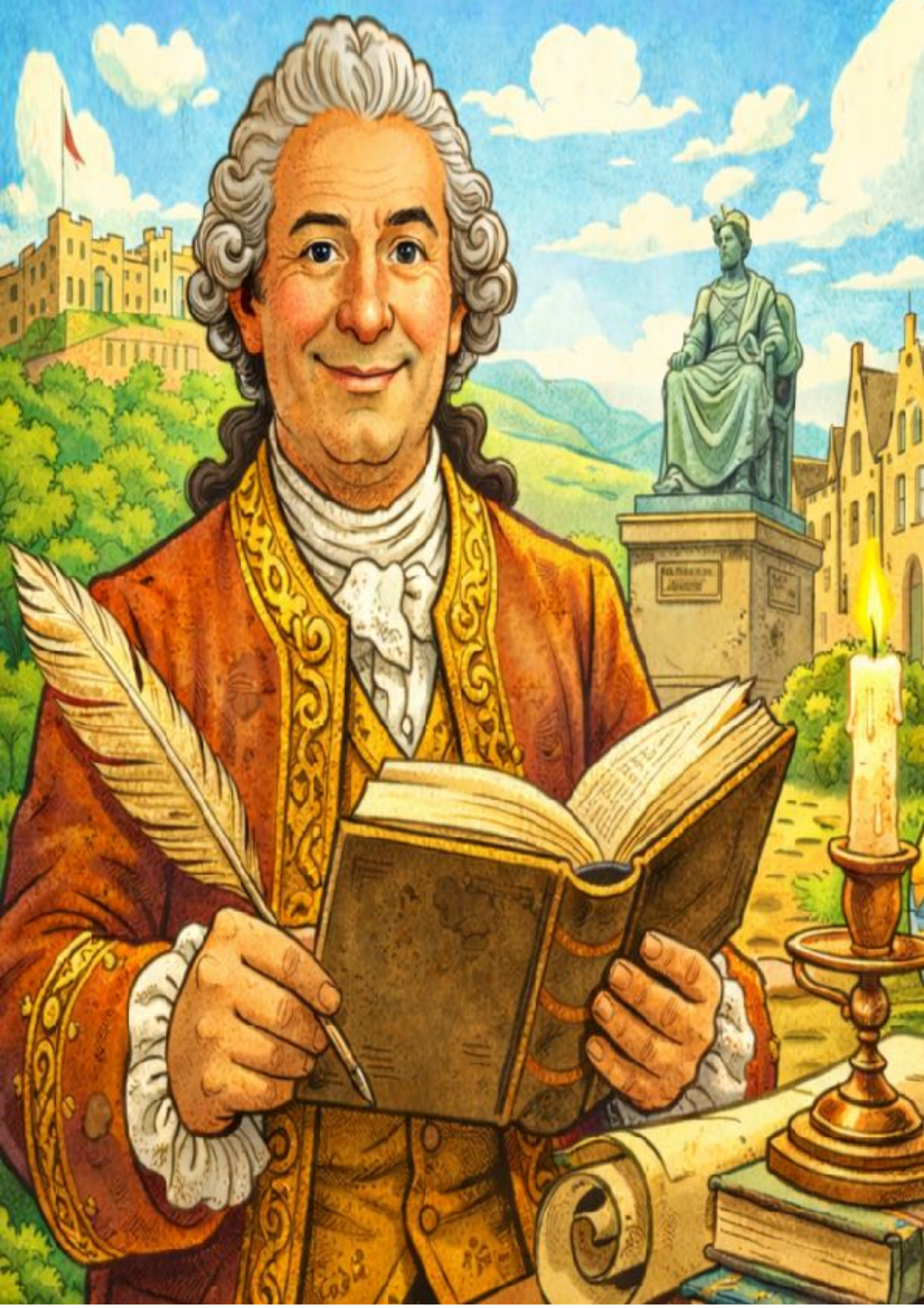
His ideas influenced generations of thinkers including Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, and countless others who followed. Many of the questions he asked remain unresolved. How do people know what is true?

Can reason alone guide human behaviour? What role do habit and experience play in shaping beliefs? What limits exist on human knowledge?

Understanding Hume means exploring not only the life of one remarkable individual but also a period when Scotland stood at the forefront of international intellectual life.

It means examining a world in transition, where old certainties were increasingly questioned and new ways of thinking were emerging.

Above all, it means recognising why a philosopher born more than three centuries ago still speaks to modern concerns about truth, belief, evidence and human nature.



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Foundations (Early Life)

David Hume was born on 7 May 1711 in Edinburgh, then a growing city whose intellectual significance was beginning to expand alongside its political and commercial importance.

He entered a world shaped by the recent union of Scotland and England, a development that had transformed the country's political landscape while creating both opportunities and tensions.

Although often associated with Edinburgh throughout his life, Hume spent much of his childhood at Ninewells, the family estate near Chirnside in Berwickshire.

His father, Joseph Hume of Ninewells, died when David was still a young child. The responsibility for raising David and his siblings therefore fell largely to their mother, Katherine Falconer, a woman remembered for her intelligence, resilience, and strong sense of duty.

The family belonged to the Scottish landed gentry but was far from wealthy. David inherited neither great estates nor significant financial security.

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This relatively modest position would influence many of his later decisions, as he repeatedly sought employment and patronage while pursuing his intellectual ambitions.

From an early age Hume demonstrated unusual academic ability. Like many educated Scottish boys of the period, he entered university remarkably young and around the age of twelve, he began studying at the University of Edinburgh.

Such an age may seem extraordinary today, but early university attendance was not uncommon in eighteenth century Scotland. His studies initially followed a traditional curriculum centred on classical languages, rhetoric, philosophy, and logic. Yet Hume's interests soon expanded beyond formal requirements. He developed an intense curiosity about literature, history, human behaviour, and the workings of the mind. This intellectual appetite would become a defining feature of his life.

The Scotland of Hume's youth was undergoing profound change.

Improved education, expanding trade, and increasing engagement with European intellectual developments created an atmosphere of possibility.

Young scholars could access ideas from France, the Dutch Republic, England, and beyond, with a flow of books and correspondence connected Scotland to wider debates taking place across Europe.

Despite family expectations that he might pursue a legal career, Hume found himself increasingly drawn toward scholarship and philosophical inquiry. He later recalled experiencing what he described as a "new scene of thought" opening before him.

This intellectual awakening convinced him that his future lay elsewhere.

Yet the path ahead was uncertain. Philosophy offered little financial security.

Unlike law, medicine, or the church, it provided no established profession. Choosing a life of intellectual pursuit therefore involved considerable personal risk.

Hume nevertheless persisted, believing that understanding human nature represented one of the most important tasks any thinker could undertake.

These formative years shaped the themes that would dominate his later work.

Exposure to classical learning, observation of human behaviour, and immersion in Scotland's increasingly vibrant intellectual culture encouraged him to ask questions that few others dared to pursue with such determination.

What exactly is human understanding? Where do beliefs come from? Can certainty ever truly be achieved? Such questions would occupy him for decades and ultimately secure his place in history.



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The Making of David Hume

The transition from gifted student to internationally recognised thinker was neither straightforward nor immediate.

Hume's early adult years were marked by uncertainty, disappointment, and persistent effort.

After abandoning plans for a legal career, he briefly attempted work in commerce, an experiment proving quite unsuccessful.

Business held little appeal for someone whose interests lay overwhelmingly in books and ideas, he recognised that he needed time and space to develop his thinking, so he eventually travelled to France, where he lived frugally while dedicating himself to study.

France exposed him to a wider intellectual world. The country was emerging as one of Europe's great centres of learning, and its thinkers were increasingly challenging traditional authority.

Absorbing these influences whilst developing his own distinctive approach he embarked on an ambitious project: **nothing less than a complete investigation of human nature.**

He believed that many fields of knowledge suffered because they lacked a proper understanding of the human mind.

If scholars could first understand how people think, perceive, reason, and believe, then progress in other disciplines might follow.

The result was his monumental work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Published in stages between 1739 and 1740, it represented one of the most ambitious philosophical undertakings of the eighteenth century.

Its reception, however, was deeply disappointing.

Hume later wrote that the work "fell dead-born from the press." Readers largely ignored it. Reviews were limited, and public interest proved minimal.

For a young thinker who had invested years of effort into the project, the disappointment was considerable.

Yet failure did not deter him. Instead, Hume reassessed his approach. He concluded that some of the *Treatise's* complexity may have limited its accessibility.

Over subsequent years he rewrote and refined many of its arguments in a clearer style, producing essays and philosophical works aimed at a broader audience.

At the same time, he sought employment through various roles.

He served as a tutor, secretary, diplomat, and librarian.

These positions provided income while exposing him to political affairs, international diplomacy, and extensive historical sources. One particularly important appointment came when he gained access to the library of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh.

The vast collection offered invaluable resources and encouraged a growing interest in historical writing.

Gradually, Hume's reputation improved. His essays attracted readers who appreciated their clarity, wit, and practical insights. Unlike many philosophers, Hume could write for both specialists and general audiences. His prose combined intellectual rigour with elegance and accessibility.

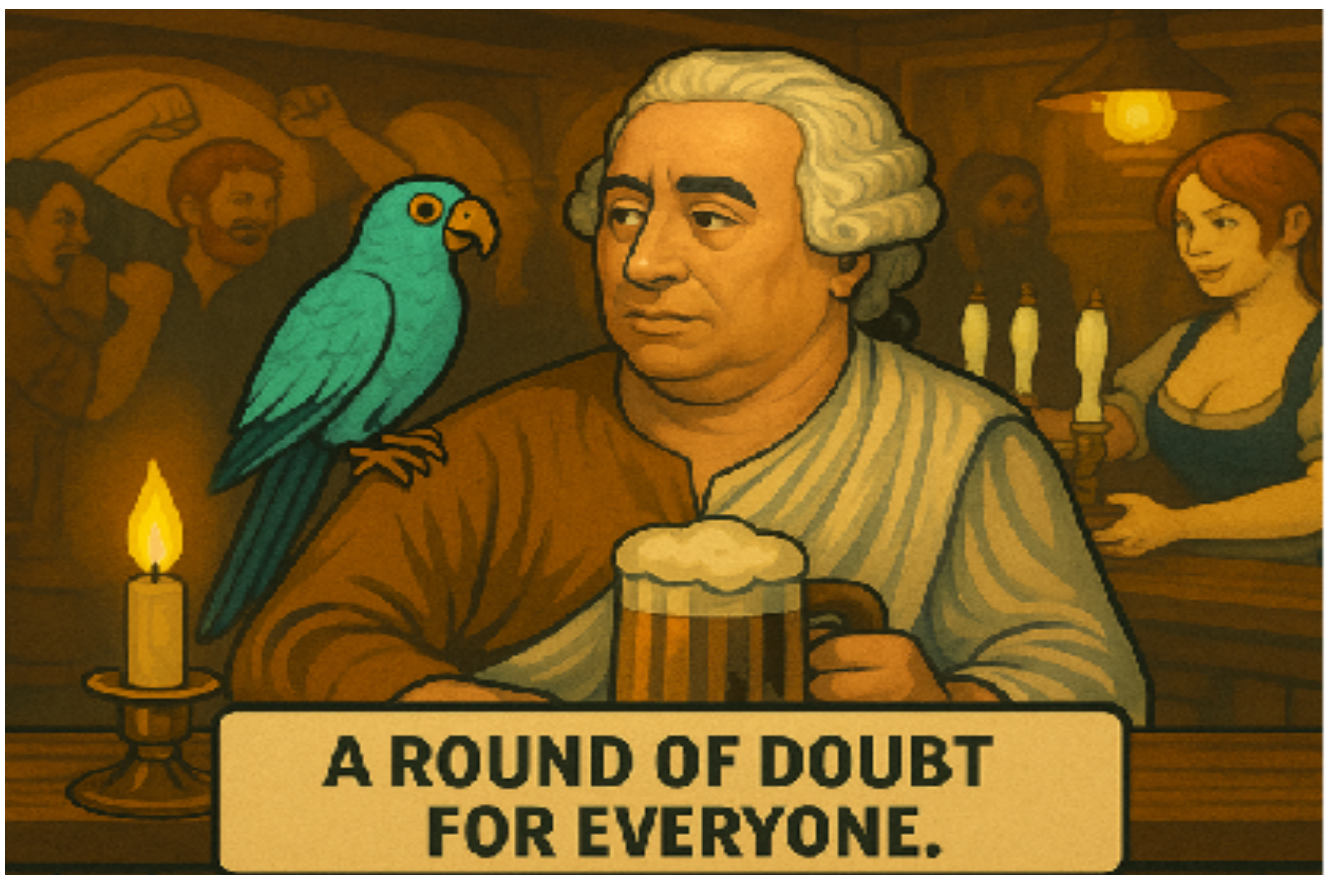
By middle age he had become one of Britain's most respected men of letters, with recognition arriving slowly, but it arriving...nonetheless.

The obscure young philosopher whose masterpiece initially attracted little attention was evolving into an internationally known intellectual figure.

The transformation reflected not only talent but perseverance.

Hume's career demonstrates how influential ideas sometimes require years or even decades before their significance becomes fully appreciated.

His willingness to revise, adapt, and communicate more effectively helped ensure that his work eventually reached the audience it deserved.



The Defining Contribution

David Hume's greatest achievement was not a single book, theory, or discovery.

Rather, it was the creation of a new way of examining human understanding itself.

He sought to investigate the mind with the same spirit of inquiry that scientists applied to the natural world.

Instead of beginning with assumptions about how people ought to think, Hume examined how they actually think.

This approach was revolutionary.

For centuries many philosophers had searched for absolute certainty, in hoping to identify foundations of knowledge so secure, that doubt would become impossible.

Hume took a different path. Rather than assuming certainty existed, he asked whether human beings were genuinely capable of achieving it.

His conclusions proved both influential and controversial.

At the centre of Hume's philosophy lay a distinction between impressions and ideas.

Impressions referred to direct experiences: sights, sounds, emotions, sensations, and feelings, whereas ideas were the mental copies of those experiences that remained in memory and imagination.

According to Hume, all complex thought ultimately originated from experience and human beings could not simply invent knowledge from nothing... ideas had to emerge from impressions.

This seemingly simple observation carried profound implications.

If knowledge depended upon experience, then many traditional philosophical claims required re-examination.

Assertions about reality, causation, religion, morality, and even the self could no longer be accepted merely because respected authorities declared them true.

No! One of Hume's most famous contributions concerned the problem of causation. People routinely assume that causes produce effects.

A struck match causes a flame. Gravity causes objects to fall. The sun will rise tomorrow because it has always risen before.

Yet Hume asked an unsettling question.

How do people actually know that one event causes another?

When observing two events, individuals see one thing followed by another. They observe a billiard ball strike a second ball and then watch the second ball move. What they do not directly observe, Hume argued, is any invisible force called causation itself. Instead, people become accustomed to seeing events occur together and develop expectations about future occurrences.

This insight became known as the problem of induction.

Human beings constantly make predictions based upon past experience. Farmers expect crops to grow.

Sailors expect tides to behave in familiar ways.

Scientists expect experiments to produce consistent results.

Everyday life would be impossible without such expectations.

However, Hume pointed out that no logical proof guarantees the future will always resemble the past. The fact that something has happened repeatedly does not provide absolute certainty that it will happen again.

This was not an argument against science, quite the opposite.

Hume recognised that experience remained humanity's most reliable guide. His point was subtler, with scientific knowledge resting upon evidence, probability, observation, and repeated testing rather than absolute certainty.

Modern scientific thinking, with its emphasis on evidence and revision, owes much to this insight.

The impact of these arguments reached far beyond philosophy. Scientists, historians, economists, and social researchers increasingly embraced methods grounded in observation rather than unquestioned authority. Hume helped encourage a culture of critical inquiry that remains central to modern intellectual life.

**Another major aspect of Hume's work concerned...
Religion.**

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Eighteenth-century Europe remained deeply religious.

Public criticism of religious doctrines could attract hostility and damage careers, therefore Hume approached such topics carefully, though he never concealed his sceptical tendencies.

Rather than attacking religion directly, he examined the evidence offered in support of particular claims. His famous discussion of miracles illustrates this method, where he argued that extraordinary claims require extraordinarily strong evidence.

Since human testimony can be mistaken, exaggerated, or deceptive, reports of miraculous events should be evaluated with particular caution.

Again, his argument rested not on dogmatic denial but on standards of evidence.

This approach influenced later discussions about scientific reasoning, historical investigation, journalism, and legal evidence.

These questions remain familiar today: what level of proof should be required before accepting extraordinary claims?

Equally important was Hume's examination of personal identity. Most people assume they possess a stable, enduring self, yet when Hume looked inward, he found only a constantly changing collection of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Whenever he searched for a permanent self, he encountered only particular mental events.

This became known as the "bundle theory" of personal identity. While many philosophers disagreed with his conclusions, the questions he raised, continue to influence debates in psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy of mind, with his contributions to ethics proving equally significant.

Many thinkers before him assumed morality emerged primarily from reason. Hume disagreed. He argued that emotions, sentiments, and human feelings play essential roles in moral judgement.

His famous observation that "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions" captured this position.

The statement is often misunderstood.

Hume did not believe reason was unimportant. Rather, he argued that reason alone cannot determine what people value.

Logic can explain how to achieve goals, but emotions help determine which goals matter in the first place.

Modern psychology increasingly supports aspects of this insight, with research suggesting that emotion and reason operate together, rather than independently.

Moral decisions frequently involve empathy, intuition, and feeling alongside rational analysis.

Hume also explored political and social questions, rejecting simplistic theories claiming governments derived solely from abstract contracts, or divine authority. Instead, he examined how political institutions actually developed over time.

Stable government, he believed, emerged through experience, convention, and practical adaptation with pragmatic outlook influencing later political thought and encouraging a more realistic understanding of institutions.

His historical writing reflected similar concerns.

Today Hume is remembered primarily as a philosopher, but during his lifetime he became even more famous as a historian, with his multi-volume *History of England* enjoying enormous popularity.

For many readers of the eighteenth century, Hume the historian overshadowed Hume the philosopher.

The work attempted to explain not merely events but patterns within history and examined the development of government, religion, culture, and society across centuries. Although modern historians criticise certain interpretations and biases, the scale and ambition of the project remain impressive.

Perhaps most importantly, Hume influenced an extraordinary range of later thinkers. His close friend Adam Smith drew inspiration from Hume's work on human nature, morality, and society with Immanuel Kant famously stating that Hume awakened him from his "dogmatic slumber."

Later philosophers, economists, psychologists, historians, and scientists all engaged with questions Hume had raised. Few intellectuals have exerted influence across so many disciplines.

What makes David Hume remarkable is not that he supplied final answers. In many cases he did the opposite. He exposed assumptions, challenged certainties, and revealed complexities, showing that some questions are more difficult than they first appear.

That achievement explains why his work remains relevant.

Modern societies continue to wrestle with issues of evidence, misinformation, certainty, belief, identity, morality, and political authority. The questions have changed form, but many remain recognisably Human.

How should evidence be evaluated?

What can genuinely be known?

Why do people believe what they believe?

What role do emotion and reason play in decision-making?

How should claims be tested before acceptance?

Such questions occupy scientists, journalists, judges, politicians, and citizens every day. In this sense, Hume's greatest contribution was not a particular doctrine but a habit of critical inquiry that continues to shape the modern world.



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Beyond the Legend

Like many historical figures of great influence, David Hume exists today in two forms:

The historical individual and the public legend.

The relationship between the two is often more complicated than popular memory suggests, as one persistent misconception portrays Hume as a cold intellectual concerned only with abstract reasoning.

Contemporary accounts suggest the opposite. Friends consistently described him as warm, sociable, humorous, and remarkably cheerful and even critics who strongly disagreed with his ideas often acknowledged his personal kindness.

His close friendship with Adam Smith provides a revealing example.

The two men shared intellectual interests, but their relationship extended beyond philosophical discussion.

Smith admired Hume's character as much as his intellect and later defended his reputation after his death.

Another misconception presents Hume as a relentless enemy of religion.

Reality was more nuanced.

Hume certainly questioned religious arguments and expressed scepticism toward many theological claims. Yet he generally preferred careful analysis to direct confrontation. His writings explored the strengths and weaknesses of competing arguments rather than simply dismissing religious belief outright.

This moderation did not prevent controversy.

Some contemporaries regarded him as dangerously irreligious.

Attempts to secure certain academic positions were hindered by concerns about his theological views. In eighteenth-century Scotland, where religious questions remained highly sensitive, such suspicions carried significant consequences.

Historians continue to debate the precise nature of Hume's personal beliefs. Some interpret him as effectively atheist. Others view him as agnostic or sceptical in a more limited sense. The evidence supports different interpretations, and certainty remains elusive.

His historical writings have generated their own controversies. Modern scholars recognise that Hume's *History of England* reflected certain assumptions and biases common to his era.

Like many eighteenth-century historians, he sometimes interpreted events through frameworks that later generations would question. Nevertheless, the work represented a major achievement in historical scholarship and significantly influenced public understanding of Britain's past. More recently, aspects of Hume's writings concerning race have attracted attention and criticism. Certain remarks contained in his work have been interpreted as expressing racial prejudice.

These passages have generated substantial scholarly discussion and public debate.

Such issues illustrate the challenges involved in assessing historical figures. Hume produced ideas that advanced understanding in many areas while also reflecting some limitations and assumptions of his own age.

Recognising both realities allows for a more honest engagement with history.

His statue on Edinburgh's Royal Mile has occasionally become a focus for these discussions. Public monuments increasingly prompt questions about how societies remember historical individuals. Should monuments celebrate achievement, acknowledge flaws, or attempt to do both?

There are no universally accepted answers.

What remains clear is that Hume's significance cannot be reduced to either hero worship or condemnation. His life and work contain achievements, controversies, insights, and limitations, so understanding him requires accepting complexity rather than seeking simplistic conclusions.

Perhaps this complexity itself reflects a Human lesson. Human beings often prefer certainty, yet reality frequently proves more complicated.

Historical understanding, like knowledge itself, benefits from careful examination rather than unquestioned assumptions and Hume spent much of his life encouraging precisely that habit of mind.

The World Around Him

To understand David Hume properly, it is necessary to understand the remarkable world in which he lived.

Great thinkers do not emerge from a vacuum. They are shaped by the societies around them, the opportunities available to them, the problems they inherit, and the conversations taking place during their lifetimes.

Hume was born only four years after the Acts of Union 1707 united the kingdoms of Scotland and England into the new state of Great Britain.

The political consequences of the Union remained controversial throughout his lifetime, with many Scots viewing it as a practical necessity, while others regarded it as a loss of national independence.

Economic opportunities expanded, but political tensions persisted. Scotland itself was undergoing profound transformation. Although still a relatively poor country by modern standards, it possessed one of Europe's most impressive educational systems. Universities in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and St Andrews attracted ambitious students from across the country.

Education was valued at a level unusual for the period, helping to create an environment in which intellectual talent could flourish.

The Scotland of Hume's youth was also deeply religious.

The Church of Scotland exerted significant influence over public life.

Religious belief shaped education, politics, morality, and community relations and debates over theology were not confined to churches or universities; they formed part of everyday life.

At the same time, Europe was entering what historians call the Enlightenment. Across the continent, scholars increasingly questioned traditional assumptions and sought new methods of understanding the world.

Scientific discoveries challenged inherited beliefs. Philosophers examined the foundations of knowledge. Political thinkers reconsidered the nature of government and society.

The achievements of figures such as Isaac Newton demonstrated the power of observation, experimentation, and reason.

Newton's explanation of planetary motion and gravity suggested that the universe operated according to discoverable principles rather than mysterious forces.

Many intellectuals wondered whether similar methods could be applied to human society.

Could morality be studied systematically?

Could political institutions be understood scientifically?

Could human behaviour itself become the subject of careful investigation?

These questions fascinated Hume.

The Scottish Enlightenment emerged from precisely this intellectual climate. Unlike some movements centred around a single institution or city, it developed through networks of scholars, writers, lawyers, ministers, physicians, and merchants.

Edinburgh became one of its most important centres. and visitors from across Europe often expressed surprise at the city's intellectual vitality.

Clubs, societies, libraries, coffee houses, and informal gatherings provided opportunities for discussion and debate. Ideas circulated rapidly.

Hume stood at the heart of this world.

Among his contemporaries were Adam Smith, whose economic writings would transform understanding of markets and trade; Adam Ferguson, an influential social thinker; William Robertson, one of Britain's leading historians; and numerous other figures who contributed to Scotland's growing international reputation.

These individuals did not always agree with one another. Disagreements were frequent and sometimes intense, yet they shared a commitment to inquiry, discussion, and intellectual improvement.

The economic world around Hume was changing as well.

Trade networks expanded across the Atlantic and beyond. Britain increasingly emerged as a global commercial power, with wealth being generated by trade, reshaped cities, institutions, and patterns of daily life.

Questions about commerce, prosperity, and national development therefore became increasingly important. Hume took a keen interest in these issues.

His essays on trade, money, taxation, and economic policy influenced contemporary debates and helped shape ideas later developed more fully by Adam Smith.

The political environment was equally dynamic.

The eighteenth century witnessed conflicts involving Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, and other European powers. Wars altered borders, shifted alliances, and affected economic conditions throughout the continent. Hume observed these developments not merely as a philosopher but also as someone who participated directly in aspects of public life through diplomatic and administrative roles.

His experiences reinforced his interest in practical politics and international affairs. The intellectual culture of Europe also benefited from expanding communication networks.

Books circulated more widely than ever before. Letters connected scholars across national boundaries. Ideas developed in Edinburgh could influence readers in Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, or London. Hume became part of this international republic of letters.

His works were translated into multiple languages. European intellectuals discussed, criticised, and debated his arguments. By the end of his life, he had become one of the most widely recognised thinkers in Europe.

France held particular importance.

French intellectuals admired Hume's writings and welcomed him warmly during visits to the country. For a period he enjoyed celebrity status among leading figures of the French Enlightenment. His connections extended to some of the most influential thinkers and writers of the age.

Yet this broader Enlightenment world was far from universally progressive by modern standards.

European societies remained marked by inequality, limited political participation, colonial expansion, and social hierarchies. Many groups lacked rights and opportunities enjoyed by elites. Ideas about race, gender, empire, and class frequently reflected assumptions that later generations would challenge.

Understanding Hume requires recognising these realities.

He helped advance critical thinking and intellectual inquiry while simultaneously inhabiting a society shaped by limitations and prejudices characteristic of its era. The world around him was therefore one of both remarkable progress and significant contradiction.

Scientific knowledge expanded rapidly.

Educational opportunities increased.

Economic development accelerated.

Intellectual freedom broadened.

Yet inequalities persisted.

Religious conflict remained influential.

Political rights remained restricted.

Colonial systems expanded.

These tensions formed part of the environment in which Hume lived and worked.

His ideas emerged from this complex landscape. They reflected its opportunities, responded to its challenges, and helped shape its future. The Scottish Enlightenment would eventually become one of the most influential intellectual movements in modern history.

Through philosophy, economics, science, medicine, history, engineering, and education, its influence spread far beyond Scotland's borders.

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David Hume stood among its most important figures.

His work both embodied and helped define the spirit of inquiry that made the movement so significant and understanding the world around him therefore reveals not only the context of his life but also the origins of many ideas that continue to influence modern society.



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Legacy in Stone

Visitors walking along Edinburgh's Royal Mile eventually encounter one of the city's most recognisable monuments...

The statue of David Hume.

Standing near the High Court and overlooking one of the busiest historic thoroughfares in Scotland, the monument occupies a location deeply connected to the intellectual and cultural life of Edinburgh.

Thousands of residents and visitors pass it every day, often pausing to admire the figure or photograph one of the city's most famous philosophers.

The statue was created by the Scottish sculptor Alexander Stoddart and unveiled in 1997. Its appearance immediately attracts attention because it differs from what many people might expect. Rather than depicting Hume in eighteenth-century everyday clothing, Stoddart chose to portray him in a classical style inspired by ancient Greece and Rome.

The flowing robes evoke the image of a timeless philosopher rather than a specific historical individual.

This artistic choice reflects Hume's enduring intellectual significance and places him within a tradition stretching back to classical thinkers.

The decision was not without controversy.

Some critics argued that the statue presented an idealised version of Hume rather than a historically precise likeness.

Others praised the approach, suggesting that it captured the philosopher's broader importance rather than merely reproducing his physical appearance.

The debate itself reflects a wider question about public monuments.

Should statues aim for strict historical realism, or should they symbolise larger ideas? The Hume statue leans firmly toward symbolism.

Perhaps the most famous feature of the monument is the statue's right foot.

Over the years a popular tradition developed in which visitors rub the toe for good luck, wisdom, examination success, or intellectual inspiration.

As a result, the toe has become noticeably polished and golden compared with the surrounding bronze.

The practice is so widespread that many visitors immediately notice the contrast. Ironically, there is little evidence that Hume himself would have approved of such a superstition.

Given his scepticism regarding unsupported beliefs, he might have regarded the ritual with amusement. Yet the tradition persists and has become part of the statue's modern identity.

Whether one participates or not, the gleaming toe serves as a visible reminder of how historical memory evolves. People continually create new customs around old monuments, adding layers of meaning that their subjects never anticipated. The statue also occupies an important position within Edinburgh's broader commemorative landscape.

The city contains monuments to philosophers, scientists, writers, political leaders, inventors, and cultural figures. Together they create a public conversation about Scottish history and identity. Nearby stands the statue of Adam Smith, Hume's close friend and fellow giant of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The proximity of the two monuments is fitting, as their friendship and intellectual exchange helped shape one of the most influential periods in Scottish history.

Visitors interested in Hume can also explore other locations associated with his life.

Edinburgh itself functioned as his intellectual home for much of his career, where the city's Old Town preserves elements of the environment he knew, while institutions such as libraries, universities, and museums continue to interpret the world of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Beyond physical locations, Hume's legacy survives through ideas.

Universities across the world teach his writings.
Philosophers continue debating his arguments.
Scientists cite questions he first formulated.

Economists study essays that influenced later developments.

Historians examine his methods and interpretations.
Psychologists explore themes he identified centuries before modern cognitive science emerged. Few monuments can claim to represent someone whose influence extends across so many disciplines.

Yet public memory is never static.

Recent discussions surrounding historical commemoration have prompted renewed examination of many monuments, including those dedicated to Enlightenment figures.

Questions about race, empire, religion, and historical representation increasingly shape debates about public statues and Hume's monument has occasionally become part of these wider conversations.

Supporters emphasise his immense contribution to philosophy and intellectual history, whilst critics point to aspects of his writings that modern readers find troubling.

Both perspectives form part of an ongoing discussion about how societies remember complex historical figures.



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The statue therefore serves multiple purposes simultaneously.

It commemorates an individual.

It celebrates intellectual achievement.

It invites historical reflection.

It provokes debate.

It connects the present with the past.

Perhaps most importantly, it encourages curiosity.

Many people who encounter the statue know little about Hume beforehand. The monument acts as an invitation to learn more. It transforms an abstract historical figure into a visible presence within the city and encourages questions about who he was and why he remains important. In that sense, the statue fulfils one of the highest purposes of public commemoration. It keeps conversation alive.

More than two centuries after his death, David Hume continues to challenge assumptions, provoke discussion, and inspire inquiry. The bronze figure on the Royal Mile is therefore more than a monument to the past.

It is a reminder that ideas remain capable of shaping the future.

Fascinating Facts

1. David Hume was born in Edinburgh on 7 May 1711.
2. His family surname was originally spelled "Home." and he later adopted the spelling "Hume" to make pronunciation easier for English readers.
3. His father died while he was still a child.
4. He was raised largely by his mother, Katherine Falconer.
5. Hume entered the University of Edinburgh at around twelve years of age.
6. He briefly considered a career in law.
7. He also spent a short period working in commerce.
8. He abandoned business because he found intellectual pursuits far more appealing.
9. He wrote much of *A Treatise of Human Nature* while living in France.
10. He regarded the Treatise as his philosophical masterpiece.
11. The Treatise initially attracted little public attention.
12. Hume famously described its reception as having "fallen dead-born from the press."

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13. He later rewrote many of its arguments in more accessible forms.
14. His essays became widely popular during his lifetime.
15. Hume served as a diplomat as well as a philosopher.
16. He worked as a librarian at the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh.
17. Access to the library helped inspire his historical research.
18. His *History of England* became one of the bestselling historical works of the eighteenth century.
19. During his lifetime he was often more famous as a historian than as a philosopher.
20. Hume was a central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment.
21. He maintained a close friendship with Adam Smith.
22. Adam Smith later defended Hume's reputation after his death.
23. Hume never married.
24. Contemporary accounts describe him as cheerful and sociable.

25. He was known for enjoying conversation and good company.
26. His writings influenced Immanuel Kant.
27. Kant credited Hume with awakening him from his "dogmatic slumber."
28. Hume questioned whether absolute certainty was possible.
29. His analysis of causation remains one of philosophy's most influential arguments.
30. The "problem of induction" is closely associated with his work.
31. He argued that experience forms the basis of human knowledge.
32. Hume explored the role of emotion in moral decision-making.
33. He believed morality involved sentiment as well as reason.
34. His work anticipated aspects of modern psychology.
35. He wrote extensively on politics and economics.
36. Several of his economic essays influenced later thinkers.

37. He spent time in Paris and was celebrated by French intellectuals.
38. Hume was admired by many leading figures of the French Enlightenment.
39. He became involved in a famous dispute with Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
40. The dispute damaged their friendship.
41. Hume's final illness was widely documented by friends and observers.
42. He remained calm and composed during his last months.
43. He died in Edinburgh in 1776.
44. He was buried at Old Calton Burial Ground.
45. His mausoleum remains visible today.
46. The David Hume statue on the Royal Mile was unveiled in 1997.
47. The statue was sculpted by Alexander Stoddart.
48. It depicts Hume wearing classical robes rather than eighteenth-century clothing.
49. Visitors frequently rub the statue's toe for good luck.

50. The toe has become noticeably polished through repeated contact.

51. There is no evidence that Hume himself encouraged such traditions.

52. His works continue to be studied worldwide.

53. Modern philosophers still debate many of his arguments.

54. Hume remains one of the most cited figures in the history of philosophy.

55. Hume's philosophical influence extends into economics, psychology, political science, and history.

56. He believed that custom and habit play a major role in human thinking.

57. He argued that people often act first and justify their actions afterwards.

58. His essays were widely read throughout Britain and Europe.

59. Hume wrote on subjects ranging from religion to commerce.

60. He believed that studying human nature was the foundation of all other knowledge.

61. His works were translated into several European languages during his lifetime.
62. He lived through the reigns of five British monarchs.
63. Hume witnessed major political and military changes across Europe.
64. He was acquainted with many of the leading intellectuals of his age.
65. His writings helped shape modern scepticism.
66. He influenced later debates about scientific methodology.
67. Charles Darwin read thinkers who had themselves been influenced by Hume.
68. Many modern discussions about evidence trace intellectual roots back to Hume.
69. His analysis of miracles remains one of the most discussed texts in the philosophy of religion.
70. Hume believed that extraordinary claims require strong evidence.
71. He viewed human beings as social creatures shaped by experience.
72. He argued that governments often develop gradually rather than through deliberate design.

73. His political essays emphasised practicality over abstract theory.

74. Hume's ideas influenced the development of utilitarian thought.

75. He maintained correspondence with scholars across Europe.

76. Edinburgh's intellectual reputation grew significantly during his lifetime.

77. The Scottish Enlightenment became one of the most influential intellectual movements in modern history.

78. Hume was among its most internationally recognised figures.

79. His reputation continued to grow long after his death



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Further Exploration

David Hume's life and work reward continued exploration.

Few thinkers have influenced so many fields while remaining accessible to interested general readers. Those wishing to go beyond this companion can follow several paths, depending on their interests.

For readers curious about philosophy, Hume's ***An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*** remains one of the best starting points.

Although written in the eighteenth century, it remains remarkably readable and introduces many of the ideas for which he is best known.

Readers interested in morality may wish to explore ***An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals***, which Hume himself considered among his finest works.

Those interested in history should examine Hume's ***History of England***.

Modern historians may disagree with some of its conclusions, but the work remains an important milestone in historical writing and offers insight into how educated eighteenth-century thinkers understood the past.

Visitors exploring Edinburgh can deepen their understanding by following the wider story of the Scottish Enlightenment, with Hume's achievements become even more impressive when viewed alongside those of his contemporaries.

The city contains numerous locations connected to this remarkable period, including universities, libraries, monuments, museums, and historic streets where ideas that shaped the modern world were discussed.

The relationship between Hume and Adam Smith provides another rewarding avenue of exploration.

Their friendship represents one of the most important intellectual partnerships in Scottish history and understanding one often helps illuminate the other.

Readers interested in modern science may find Hume's influence surprisingly familiar.

Questions about evidence, probability, observation, and certainty remain central to scientific practice today. Exploring the connections between Hume's philosophy and modern scientific thinking reveals how deeply his ideas continue to shape contemporary understanding.

Those interested in religion, ethics, politics, psychology, or economics will likewise discover that many modern debates still echo questions first articulated by Hume. His work rarely provides simple answers, but it consistently encourages careful thought and critical examination.

The best way to approach Hume may be the same way he approached knowledge itself...with curiosity, patience, and a willingness to follow evidence wherever it leads



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Conclusion

David Hume occupies a unique place in history.

He was neither a military leader nor a political ruler. He founded no empire, commanded no army, and held no great office of state, yet his influence has proved more enduring than that of many individuals who possessed far greater power during their lifetimes.

His achievement lay in changing how people think.

Through philosophy, history, economics, politics, and moral inquiry, Hume encouraged a habit of mind grounded in evidence, observation, and critical reflection.

He challenged assumptions that others accepted and asked difficult questions where others preferred certainty.

He exposed the complexity hidden beneath apparently simple beliefs. Such work inevitably attracted controversy. Some regarded him as dangerous. Others considered him one of the most important thinkers of the age.

The debates he provoked during his lifetime have never entirely disappeared, modern readers continue to argue over his conclusions, interpretations, and legacy.

Yet perhaps this ongoing discussion represents part of his success.

Hume did not seek unquestioning agreement. He encouraged inquiry. He believed that understanding grows through examination, debate, and reflection rather than blind acceptance.

The world has changed dramatically since his death in 1776.

Empires have risen and fallen.

Scientific knowledge has expanded beyond anything Hume could have imagined.

Technological advances have transformed daily life.

Political systems have evolved.

Entirely new fields of study have emerged.

Yet many of the questions that occupied him remain strikingly familiar.

How should evidence be judged?

What can genuinely be known?

Why do people believe what they believe?

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What role should reason play in human affairs?

How do societies balance tradition with progress?

These questions remain relevant because they concern fundamental aspects of human experience.

Standing before Hume's statue today, it is easy to see only a figure from the distant past. Yet the ideas associated with that bronze monument continue to shape conversations taking place in classrooms, laboratories, courtrooms, newsrooms, universities, and homes across the world.

The philosopher depicted there belongs not only to eighteenth-century Scotland but also to the continuing story of modern thought.

His legacy endures because the pursuit of understanding never truly ends.



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Sources & Further Reading

Primary Works by David Hume

- *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740)
 - *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748)
 - *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)
 - *Political Discourses* (1752)
 - *The Natural History of Religion* (1757)
 - *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously, 1779)
 - *The History of England* (1754–1762)

Major Biographies

- Ernest Campbell Mossner — *The Life of David Hume*
- James A. Harris — *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*
- Nicholas Phillipson — *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian*
- Peter Jones — *Hume*

Scholarly Studies

- Don Garrett (Editor) — *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*
- Alexander Broadie — *The Scottish Enlightenment*

- John Robertson — *The Case for the Enlightenment*
- Ronald Hamowy (Editor) — *The Scottish Enlightenment Reader*

Museums, Archives & Institutions

- National Library of Scotland
- National Museums Scotland
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
- Royal Society of Edinburgh
- Faculty of Advocates

Recommended Topics for Further Study

- The Scottish Enlightenment
- Enlightenment Philosophy
- History of Scepticism
- Philosophy of Science
- Moral Philosophy
- Eighteenth-Century Scotland
- Adam Smith and Political Economy
- The History of Historical Writing



Reference Index

People

Adam Ferguson — Scottish philosopher, historian, and important figure of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Adam Smith — Scottish economist, philosopher, and close friend of David Hume.

Alexander Stoddart — Scottish sculptor who created the David Hume statue on Edinburgh's Royal Mile.

Charles Darwin — Naturalist whose intellectual environment was influenced indirectly by traditions shaped by Human inquiry.

David Hume — Scottish philosopher, historian, essayist, and leading figure of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Immanuel Kant — German philosopher profoundly influenced by Hume's arguments concerning knowledge and causation.

Isaac Newton — Scientist whose success inspired Enlightenment thinkers to seek systematic understanding of nature and society.

James A. Harris — Modern biographer and scholar of David Hume.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau — French-speaking philosopher whose friendship with Hume ended in a famous dispute.

Joseph Home — David Hume's father and owner of the Ninewells estate.

Katherine Falconer — David Hume's mother, who oversaw his upbringing after his father's death.

Nicholas Phillipson — Historian and biographer noted for his work on Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment.

William Robertson — Scottish historian and contemporary of Hume.

Places

Berwickshire — Historic Scottish county where the Ninewells family estate was located.

Chirnside — Settlement near which Hume spent much of his childhood.

Edinburgh — Scotland's capital city and the centre of much of Hume's intellectual life.

France — Country where Hume wrote portions of his early philosophical work and later enjoyed considerable acclaim.

Old Calton Burial Ground — Edinburgh cemetery where David Hume is buried.

Paris — Major centre of Enlightenment thought where Hume spent part of his career.

Royal Mile — Historic Edinburgh street where Hume's statue stands.

Ninewells — Family estate associated with Hume's upbringing.

Books & Publications

A Treatise of Human Nature — Hume's ambitious early philosophical work exploring human understanding, emotion, and belief.

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding
Hume's accessible presentation of many of his most influential philosophical ideas.

An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals
Hume's exploration of ethics and moral judgement.

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
Philosophical examination of religious belief published after Hume's death.

History of England
Multi-volume historical work that made Hume one of the most famous historians of his era.

Political Discourses
Collection of essays on economics, politics, and commerce.

Monuments & Memorials

David Hume Statue — Bronze monument on Edinburgh's Royal Mile created by Alexander Stoddart and unveiled in 1997.

David Hume Mausoleum — Distinctive circular burial monument located at Old Calton Burial Ground.

Adam Smith Statue — Monument to Hume's friend and fellow Enlightenment thinker located nearby on the Royal Mile.

Organisations & Institutions

Church of Scotland — National Presbyterian church that played a major role in Scottish society during Hume's lifetime.

Faculty of Advocates — Legal institution whose library provided Hume with valuable research resources.

National Library of Scotland — Major repository of Scottish historical and literary material.

National Museums Scotland — Organisation preserving and interpreting Scotland's history and culture.

Royal Society of Edinburgh — Scotland's national academy of learning and scholarship.

University of Edinburgh — Educational institution attended by Hume and central to Edinburgh's intellectual life.

University of Glasgow — Major Scottish university associated with the Scottish Enlightenment and Adam Smith.

Major Historical Events

Acts of Union 1707 Legislation uniting the kingdoms of Scotland and England into Great Britain.

Age of Enlightenment Intellectual movement emphasising reason, inquiry, and critical examination.

Scottish Enlightenment Eighteenth-century intellectual flowering in Scotland that produced major advances in philosophy, economics, science, and history.

Expansion of Atlantic Trade Growth of international commerce that transformed eighteenth-century Britain and Europe.

Continue the Journey

You have now explored the life, ideas and legacy of David Hume. But history is more than dates and facts. It is also voices, personalities, rivalries, triumphs and failures.

The Plinth Monologues brings Edinburgh's statues and historical figures to life through immersive audio storytelling, allowing the people behind the monuments to speak for themselves. If you enjoyed this Historical Companion, you may also enjoy...

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David Hume The Plinth Monologue

Greyfriars Bobby The Plinth Monologue

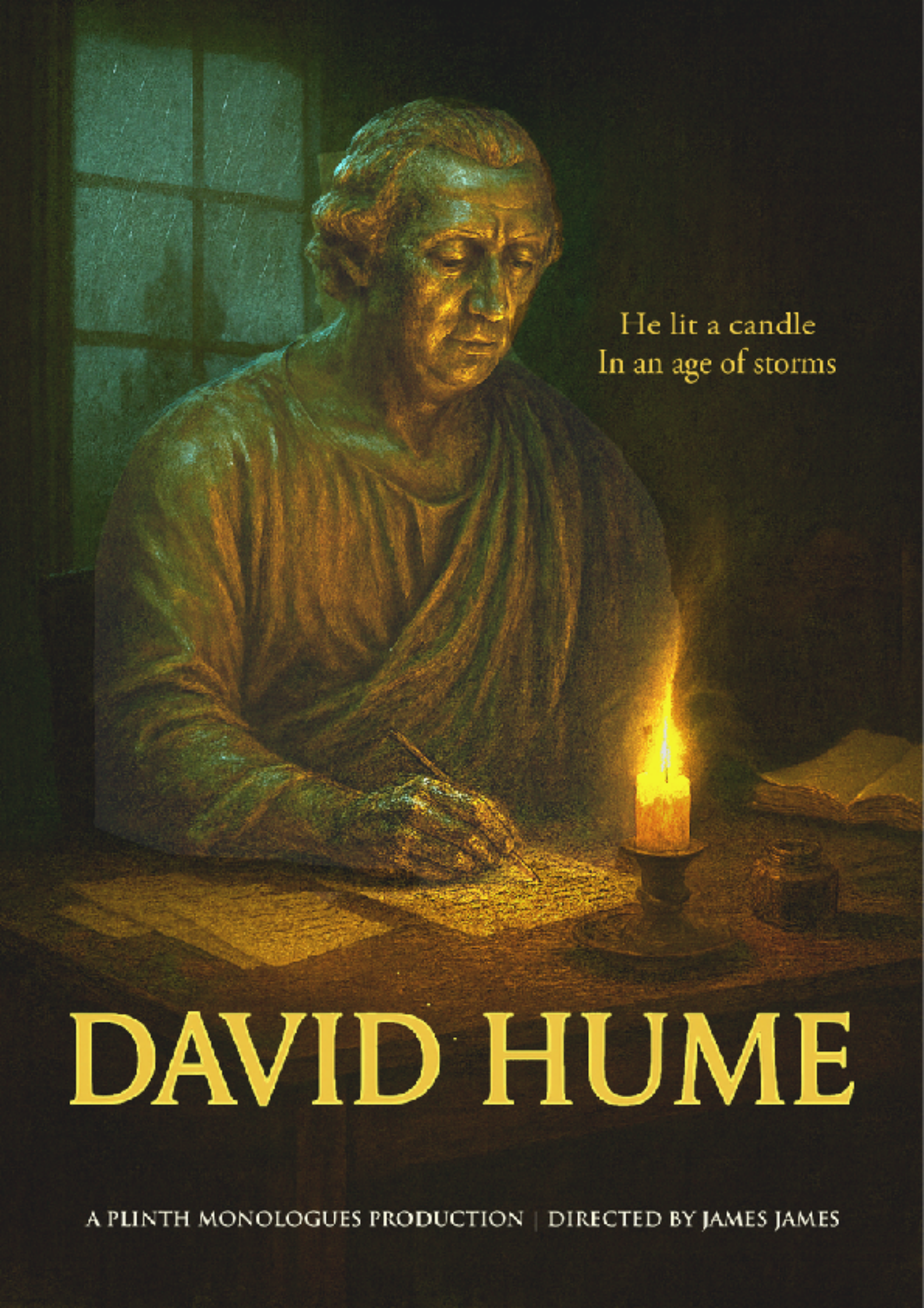
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A dramatic painting of David Hume, an 18th-century philosopher, seated at a desk and writing with a quill. The scene is dimly lit, with a single candle in a brass holder providing the primary light source, casting a warm glow on his face and the desk. In the background, a window with multiple panes is visible, showing a dark, rainy night. The overall mood is contemplative and scholarly.

He lit a candle
In an age of storms

DAVID HUME

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