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Hume: An Intellectual Biography

By James A. Harris

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This is the first book to provide a comprehensive overview of the entire career of one of Britain's greatest men of letters. It sets in biographical and historical context all of Hume's works, from *A Treatise of Human Nature* to *The History of England*, bringing to light the major influences on the course of Hume's intellectual development, and paying careful attention to the differences between the wide variety of literary genres with which Hume experimented. The major events in Hume's life are fully described, but the main focus is on Hume's intentions as a philosophical analyst of human nature, politics, commerce, English history, and religion. Careful attention is paid to Hume's intellectual relations with his contemporaries. The goal is to reveal Hume as a man intensely concerned with the realization of an ideal of open-minded, objective, rigorous, dispassionate dialogue about all the principal questions faced by his age.

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Hume: An Intellectual Biography By James A. Harris Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #134911 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 2015-10-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.98" h x 1.61" w x 5.98" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 633 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"This book is original in its perspective on Hume, partly because it sees Hume as a literary man eager to make a successful career through the exercise of skepticism and impartiality over a wide range of topics. It is a well-thought-out biography which is as good as or better than anything written on Hume's thought. It is well written and makes good sense of what Hume should be remembered for."

Roger Emerson, Emeritus Professor, University of Western Ontario

"This is quite simply the first serious intellectual biography of David Hume, and as such it will be indispensable reading for all students of his work. Harris has absorbed all that is now known of the details of Hume's life and of his reading, and deploys this knowledge to offer powerful, consistently intelligent readings of the whole range of Hume's works."

John Robertson, University of Cambridge

"Harris' magnificent intellectual biography of Hume sweeps away stereotypes of this major philosophical thinker that have accumulated over the past 250 years. It is a 'must-read' for Hume scholars, and for anyone who seeks to understand what it meant to write about history, politics, economics and religion - as well as epistemology and morals - from a philosophical point of view during the Enlightenment."

John P. Wright, Central Michigan University

"A superbly researched and beautifully written biography which paints a nuanced and compelling portrait of a Hume we can all believe in. A classic in the making."

Nicholas Phillipson, University of Edinburgh

"A lucid, well-organised and readable narrative, carefully informed by nuanced historical-intellectual scholarship."

Times Higher Education

"A book which seems sure to revolutionise our views of one of the greatest Scots."

The Herald

"Guided by Harris we can now see a figure more human and more engaging, whose ideas developed and flexed over time. Harris' meticulous anatomising of this figure is a major achievement in Hume studies and in studies of the Enlightenment more generally."

David Womersley, Standpoint

"... informed and informative ..."

The Tablet

"Harris' book is, as advertised, an intellectual biography ... As a historian of Hume's ideas ... Mr Harris far surpasses Mossner[*'s* 1954 biography] ... Hume emerges as a product of the Enlightenment as it really was, not as it exists in complacent legend."

Jeffrey Collins, The Wall Street Journal

"... James Harris's intellectual biography of Hume is the first to have been attempted. As such, it covers the full trajectory of Hume's intellectual career - from his earliest experiments in epistemology and ethics,

through his views on religion, economics, and politics, to his mature efforts to complete his classic History of England. The result is an engrossing reconstruction of his ideas along with his position in eighteenth-century intellectual life. A significant place is given to Hume's 'anatomy' of human nature, and thus to the criticism of Stoicism which he developed in that context."

Richard Bourke, The Nation

"... Harris delivers a rich portrayal of the Scottish philosopher ..."

David J. Davis, The American Conservative

"Clear, civil and straightforward ..."

James Buchan, Literary Review

"Harris skillfully explores the background of Hume's economic and other essays, and indeed all of his works, describing in some depth the debates to which they contributed and the influences of Hume's own reading."

The New York Review of Books

About the Author

James A. Harris is Reader in the History of Philosophy at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (2005) and of articles on Hume, Hutcheson, Reid, Beattie, Priestley, and various themes in eighteenth-century British philosophy. He is the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century* (2013) and the coeditor with Aaron Garrett of *Scottish Philosophy in the Age of Enlightenment, Volume 1* (2015).

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