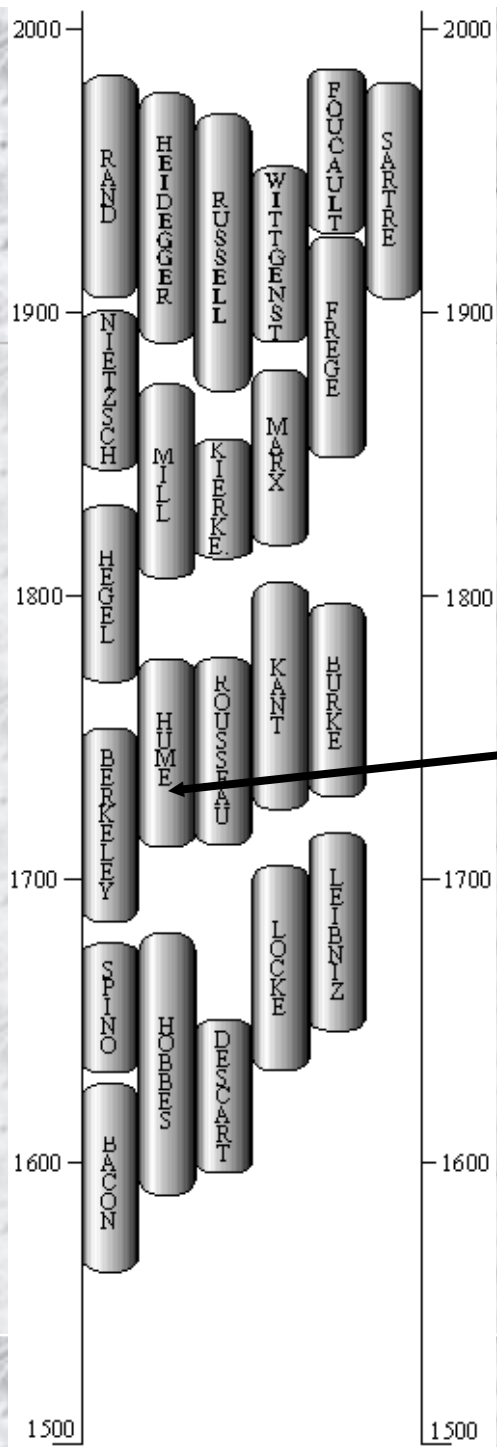


The background of the slide is a classic marbled paper pattern, featuring a complex, organic design of swirling, interlocking shapes in shades of light beige, cream, and pale grey. A thin, white rectangular border is centered on the page, framing the title text. On the left side of this border, there is a short, vertical white line.

# David Hume: *An Introduction*



David Hume  
1711-1776

# Life & Education

- **Hume, David**  
(1711-1776), Scottish historian and philosopher, who influenced the development of skepticism and empiricism, two schools of philosophy.



# Life and Education

- Born in Edinburgh on May 7, 1711, Hume was educated at home and at the University of Edinburgh, at which he matriculated at the age of 12. His health was poor, and after working for a short period in a business house in Bristol, he went to live in France.

# Life and Writings

- From 1734 to 1737 Hume occupied himself intensively with the problems of speculative philosophy and during this period wrote his most important philosophical work, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (3 volumes, 1739-40), which embodies the essence of his thinking. In spite of its importance, this work was ignored by the public and was, as Hume himself said, “dead-born,” probably because of its abstruse style. Hume's later works were written in the lighter essay or dialogue forms that were popular in his day.

# Life & Works

- After the publication of the *Treatise*, Hume returned to his family estate in Berwickshire; there he turned his attention to the problems of ethics and political economy and wrote *Essays Moral and Political* (2 volumes, 1741-42), which attained immediate success. He failed to obtain an appointment to the faculty of the University of Edinburgh, probably because, even early in his career, he was regarded as a religious skeptic.

# Life and Works

- Hume became, successively, tutor to the insane marquis of Annandale and judge advocate to a British military expedition to France. His *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (afterward entitled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*) appeared in 1748. This book, perhaps his best-known work, is in effect a condensation of the *Treatise*.

# Life & Works

- Hume took up residence in Edinburgh in 1751. In 1752, his *Political Discourses* was published, and in the following year, having again failed to obtain a university professorship, he received an appointment as librarian of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. During his 12-year stay in Edinburgh, Hume worked chiefly on his six-volume *History of England*, which appeared at intervals from 1754 to 1762.



# Life and Works

- In the years 1762 to 1765 Hume served as secretary to the British ambassador in Paris. There he was lionized by French literary circles and formed a friendship with the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Hume brought Rousseau back with him to England. Rousseau, however, plagued by delusions of persecution, accused Hume of plotting against him, and the friendship dissolved in public denunciations between the two men.

# Life & Works

- After serving as undersecretary of state in London (1767-68), Hume retired to Edinburgh and there spent the rest of his life. He died August 25, 1776. His autobiography was published posthumously (1777), as was his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). Hume had written the *Dialogues* in the early 1750s but had withheld the work because of its skepticism.

# Hume's Ideas

- Hume's philosophical position was influenced by the ideas of the British philosophers John Locke and Bishop George Berkeley. Hume and Berkeley both **differentiated between reason and sensation**. Hume, however, went further, endeavoring to prove that **reason and rational judgments are merely habitual associations** of distinct sensations or experiences.

# Metaphysics and Epistemology

- In a revolutionary step in the history of philosophy, Hume rejected the basic idea of causation, maintaining that **“reason can never show us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their conjunction in all past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determined by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects and unite them in the imagination.”** Hume's rejection of causation implies a rejection of scientific laws, which are based on the general premise that one event necessarily causes another and predictably always will.

# Metaphysics and Epistemology

- According to Hume's philosophy, therefore, knowledge of matters of fact is impossible, although as a practical matter he freely acknowledged that people had to think in terms of cause and effect, and had to assume the validity of their perceptions, or they would go mad. He also admitted the possibility of knowledge of the relationships among ideas, such as the relationships of numbers in mathematics.

# Metaphysics and Epistemology

- Hume's skeptical approach also denied the existence both of the spiritual substance postulated by Berkeley and of Locke's "material substance." Going further, Hume denied the existence of the individual self, maintaining that because people do not have a constant perception of themselves as distinct entities, they "are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions."

# Ethics

- In his ethical thinking, Hume held that the concept of right and wrong is not rational but arises from a regard for one's own happiness. The supreme moral good, according to his view, is benevolence, an unselfish regard for the general welfare of society that Hume regarded as consistent with individual happiness.

# Historian

- As a historian Hume broke away from the traditional chronological account of wars and deeds of state and attempted to describe the **economic and intellectual forces** that played a part in the history of his country. His *History of England* was for many years regarded as a classic.



# Economics

- Hume's contributions to economic theory, which influenced the Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith and later economists, included his belief that wealth depends not on money but on commodities and his recognition of the effect of social conditions on economics.