



My Own Life

David Hume (1711 - 1776)

Read by:	D. S. Harvey	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case, jewel case, or paper sleeve; MP3 download
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In April, 1776 David Hume, suffering from gastrointestinal disease and aware that the end was likely drawing nigh, wrote a short summary of his life which he titled “My Own Life”. He opens by saying “It is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity; therefore, I shall be short. It may be thought an instance of vanity that I pretend at all to write my life; but this Narrative shall contain little more than the History of my Writings; as, indeed, almost all my life has been spent in literary pursuits and occupations.” Those literary pursuits and occupations taken together have exercised a vast influence on the development of modern philosophy that, in turn, had major effects on the evolution of economics, psychology, political science, theology,

and even physics. His *History of England* in six volumes, which includes this autobiography, was considered the definitive work in its time. Einstein was inspired by his positivism while formulating the theory of special relativity. Philosopher Jerry Fodor considers Hume’s *Treatise* “the founding document of cognitive science”. The brevity of the work stands in stark opposition to the scope of his contribution to human knowledge. The work is light and congenial throughout, and he is self-deprecating and a bit rueful of about his literary ambitions and reputation. The autobiography is followed by a letter from his close friend Adam Smith that describes his death and closes with a stirring and heartfelt eulogy.

David Hume (May 7, 1711 – August 25, 1776) was a Scottish intellectual who made key contributions to the disciplines of philosophy, history, and economics during his lifetime. He is best known as a philosopher who ranks with Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Thomas Hobbes as a British Empiricist. He attempted to establish a naturalistic science of psychology, holding that all knowledge is founded on experience, either sensations or ideas derived from reasoning about experience, and that passion rather than reason governs human behavior. He was born in Edinburgh the second son of an advocate who died when David was two; his mother, daughter of Lord Falconer, never remarried. Hume entered the University of Edinburgh at age 12 to study law but instead pursued philosophy and general learning. He reported making a philosophical discovery at age 18 that opened “a new Scene of Thought” and led to years of study and *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), now considered one of the most important works in western philosophy but poorly received at the time. He was eventually made librarian at the University of Edinburgh in 1752, where he researched and wrote his massive six-volume *History of England*, which brought him the literary recognition he coveted. He later served the English embassy in Paris and famously quarreled with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He is also known for “My Own Life”, a biographical essay summarizing his life in “fewer than 5 pages”.