



# Hume and the Enlightenment

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## **Hume's Enlightenment Aesthetics And Philosophy Of Mathematics**

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David Hume exerted a profound influence on the later European Enlightenment. He did so primarily through the inherent appeal to a post-Rationalist, post-Baroque intellectual climate of his application of the 'experimental method' in the sciences to 'moral philosophy'. The experimental method, primarily adapted from Isaac Newton's successful studies in the natural sciences, in Hume's hands, serves in effect as a purge against any concepts in philosophy whose origin cannot be plausibly traced to immediate sense impressions resulting through a variety of cognitive manipulations in ideas. From this empirical standpoint, Hume challenges the legitimacy of classical mathematical concepts of infinite divisibility and extension, and, surprisingly, though in much the same vein and on precisely the same methodological grounds, advances a more humanized finitist account of the aesthetics of the sublime. The present essay examines the general principles of Hume's philosophy in both early and later periods as concerned throughout with the proper ideational credentials of all concepts belonging to science, mathematics, and the philosophy of art. Hume is portrayed as single-mindedly applying an empiricist criterion for the qualifications of philosophical concepts entering into both the formal and natural sciences and cultural studies of every kind. Among other thinkers, the intersection of Hume's interests in the conceptual foundations of mathematics and art are considered in relation to his enormous impact on the aesthetic philosophy of his contemporary Edmund Burke.

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