

The Great Guide: What David Hume Can Teach Us about Being Human and Living Well

Julian Baggini

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Julian Baggini's *The Great Guide* approaches David Hume as an example for living a rich life.

Rooted in a biography of Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, this detailed book focuses on his insights into human nature. It showcases the unity between Hume's philosophical work and his day-to-day life, called "equal parts of a harmonious whole." While the book presents Hume as a guide, it also draws on Hume's idea that "'custom' or habit 'is the great guide of human life;'" this proves to be a practical insight when it comes to replicating Hume's fulfilling lifestyle.

The narrative is methodical about unpacking years of Hume's life, covering his words and actions, what others said about him, and scholarly insights into his times. It evinces deep, contagious admiration for Hume, but still tells his life story with texture and nuance, covering his difficulties and complexities, in addition to his successes.

The book closes with Hume's own assessment of his character—an honest, self-effacing, and even humorous account. It draws some conclusions about how Hume's decisions can be replicated to direct other people's thoughts and actions. Still, much of the book's application angle is open-ended: readers are directed to ruminate on Hume, allowing his wisdom to intersect with their own humanity.

The appendix breaks Hume's impact into pieces for maximum impact, collecting dozens of Hume's maxims about what it means to live well, and covering topics like knowledge, character, and doubt. This portable, powerful wisdom includes the encouragement to "Assume no more and no less than you have to assume," and the idea that "Ethics without empathy is a contradiction in terms."

The Great Guide is the biography of a philosopher that has practical, life-changing applications.

MELISSA WUSKE (May / June 2021)

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