

# **Philosophy Paper 101: History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant**

## *8. Hume on Scepticism and the External World*

Give a broad outline of Hume's arguments concerning our belief in the external world in *Treatise* I iv 2 and I iv 4. Compare also his summary of those arguments in *Enquiry* XII Part i. Then move on to consider what Hume is trying to prove with these arguments, bearing in mind his position in the rest of *Enquiry* Section XII and in *Treatise* I iv 7. (It is controversial whether Hume's arguments and his aims are the same in both works, but for the purposes of this essay it is probably sensible to assume that they are at least broadly similar, since the *Treatise* is your set text but the *Enquiry* is easier to understand.)

### **READING**

David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (any reasonable edition will do), I iv 2, 4, 7.

David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (any reasonable edition will do), Section XII

*The interpretation of Hume's scepticism is notoriously tricky and controversial, and this applies particularly to his argument about the external world, which can easily leave you wondering whether he really believes in physical objects or not. To get a general overview of the range of approaches that have been favoured by scholars, you might do well to start with my Critical Survey of the Literature:*

Peter Millican, "Critical Survey of the Literature on Hume and the *Enquiry*", §§10-10.3, in Peter Millican (ed.), *Reading Hume on Human Understanding* (OUP, 2002), pp. 461-72.

*You could use this to decide what else to read, and that would be fine, but the following are my suggestions with a bias towards those readings that are relatively straightforward:*

### **The Arguments of *Treatise* I iv 2 (and I iv 4)**

Harold W. Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge* (Routledge, 1999), chapter 4

Georges Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology & Metaphysics* (Routledge, 1998), chapter 6

(Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* (OUP, 1971), chapter 13 and pp. 91-4 is discussed by Dicker, and is excellent though hard! Bennett's *Learning from Six Philosophers* (OUP, 2001), volume 2 chapter 37 is a more recent presentation, which is perhaps a bit more accessible.)

Donald L.M. Baxter, "Identity, Continued Existence, and the External World", chapter 7 of Saul Traiger (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise* (Blackwell, 2006)

Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume's Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (RKP, 1985), chapters 6 and 7

Barry Stroud, *Hume* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), chapter 5

John Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (Manchester University Press, 1983), chapter 2 and §11

### **Hume's Sceptical Position**

*Of the readings above, Fogelin and Wright most take views on Hume's sceptical position (see my Critical Survey, pp 462-4 for comments on both). For other views, see:*

David Fate Norton, "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy", chapter 12 of Peter Millican (ed.), *Reading Hume on Human Understanding* (OUP, 2002)

Don Garrett, "Hume's Conclusions in 'Conclusion of this Book'", chapter 9 of Saul Traiger (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise* (Blackwell, 2006)