

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

## 9. *Hume on Personal Identity*

As background, briefly explain Locke's approach to the problem of identity in general, and personal identity in particular, noting the objections of Butler and Reid. What does Hume's account of personal identity aim to achieve, what problems does it encounter, and how successful is it? How should we interpret Hume's despairing comments about it in the *Appendix* of the *Treatise*?

### **READING**

#### **Background: Locke on Identity and Personal Identity**

*It is helpful to be familiar with Locke's account, which set the scene for Hume's. Mackie is illuminating, if you have time, and mentions the objections of Butler and Reid (note that Hume's account was published in 1739.)*

John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (any reasonable edition will do, but best is the Clarendon edition by P. H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press, 1975), II xxvii.

Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion* (1736), Dissertation I (Appendix), "Of Personal Identity".

Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), Essay III, chapter 6, "Of Mr Locke's Account of our Personal Identity".

J. L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke* (Oxford University Press, 1976), chapters 5 and 6 (*note that chapter 5 contains a section on Hume's account of identity*)

#### **Hume on Personal Identity**

David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (any reasonable edition will do), 1.4.6 and Appendix discussion of 1.4.6 (paragraphs 10-22 in Norton edition; T 633-6 in Selby-Bigge edition).

Harold W. Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge* (Routledge, 1999), chapter 5.

Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers* (OUP, 2001), volume 2 §§303-9.

*There is much interpretative debate concerning Hume's Appendix, where he expresses despair about his account of personal identity, but in terms that leave the source of the difficulty obscure. Fogelin gives a broad review of interpretations that try to make sense of this, as does Garrett, while Ainslie is the fullest recent account.*

Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume's Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (RKP, 1985), chapter 8.

Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (OUP, 1997), chapter 8, "Personal Identity".

Donald Ainslie, "Hume on Personal Identity", chapter 8 of Elizabeth Radcliffe ed., *A Companion to Hume* (Blackwell, 2008).

*For a representative selection of interpretations discussed by Ainslie, illustrating each of the four patterns of interpretation that he criticises, see particularly those of McIntyre, Patten, Robison, and Garrett, all referenced in Ainslie's bibliography.*