



## **Modern philosophy: Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume [PY 1065]**

### **Introductory reading**

Hamlyn, D.W. *A History of Western Philosophy*. (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1987).

Woolhouse, R. *The Empiricists*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

### **Introductory books on individual philosophers**

Kenny, A. *Descartes: A Study of his Philosophy*. (Bristol: Thoemmes Publishers, 1997).

Lowe, E.J. *Locke on Human Understanding*. (London: Routledge, 1995).

Dancy, J. *Berkeley*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

Stroud, B. *Hume*. (London: Routledge, 1977).

### **Sample examination questions**

1. Examine Descartes' reasons for declaring that he is an essentially non-material thinking substance.
2. What weaknesses, if any, do you find in Descartes' proof of the existence of God in the Third Meditation?
3. Has Descartes, by the end of the Meditations, escaped from the sceptical dilemma recorded at the beginning of the Second Meditation?
4. Should Locke be described as holding a 'representational' theory of perception?
5. What gives a Lockean idea its content?
6. Assess Locke's claim about substance that 'we have no idea of what it is, but only a confused, obscure one of what it does.'
7. Does Locke make a good case for saying that the sense of natural kind words should be applied to 'nominal essences' rather than to 'real essences'?
8. Does the primary-secondary quality distinction give us a way of explaining how we perceive things as they really are? Discuss with reference to either or both of Locke and Berkeley.
9. Why does Berkeley reject the concept of material substance? Are his arguments persuasive?
10. What is meant by Berkeley's claim that *esse est percipi*? Is it refutable?
11. Give a critical account of Berkeley's argument for the claim that there is an infinite spirit which perceives everything always.
12. Critically discuss Hume's account of belief.

13. Why does Hume offer two 'definitions' of cause?
14. Can Hume account for the difference between memory and imagination?
15. Why does Hume think it is 'vain to enquire whether there be body or not'?
16. Does Hume deny that there is such a thing as the self? Is his view of the matter coherent?