

Philosophy Paper 101: History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant

5. *Locke and Berkeley on Substance, Essence, and Immaterialism*

Explain Locke's notions of "substance", "real essence", and "nominal essence". Explain and evaluate Berkeley's attack on the notion of material substance and his argument for immaterialism. Can Berkeley give a satisfactory account of perceptual error?

READING

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 xxiii 1-22; II xxxi, III iii 12-20; III iv 1-7, 11-12, 17; III v 1-5, 9-10, 14; III vi 1-9; IV xii 6-10.

George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* (any reasonable edition will do, but best is the Oxford Philosophical Texts edition by Jonathan Dancy, Oxford University Press, 1998), all of "Part I" (§§1-156).

This essay covers a particularly important range of topics, figuring very prominently in examination papers (Locke on essence 4 out of 6, Berkeley's argument 5 years out of 6!). So the most important thing is to get a clear grasp of what Locke and Berkeley are saying. Try to read at least one of Ayers and Lowe on Locke (preferably both), and likewise Ayers and Fogelin on Berkeley. Then Mackie's is a well-known discussion of Locke on essences, which makes an interesting link with Kripke's modern work. Bennett is more advanced, closely argued discussion from which a lot can be learned if you feel confident to move on further, perhaps particularly suitable for less pressured vacation reading. Smith and Foster are interesting papers if you want to look more at Berkeley's arguments in particular.

Michael Ayers, *Locke: Ideas and Things* (Phoenix/Orion Publishing, 1997), pp. 6-58

E. J. Lowe, *Locke on Human Understanding* (Routledge, 1995), chapter 3 (especially pp. 47-9) and chapter 4

J. L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke* (Oxford University Press, 1976), chapter 3

Michael Ayers, Editor's Introduction to *George Berkeley: Philosophical Works* (Everyman, 1975)

Robert J. Fogelin, *Berkeley and the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Routledge, 2001), chapters 1-7

Jonathan Dancy, Introduction to his edition of Berkeley's *Principles* (above), §§3-6.

Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, volume 2 (Oxford University Press, 2001), chapters 26-29

A. D. Smith, "Berkeley's Central Argument Against Material Substance", in John Foster and Howard Robinson (eds), *Essays on Berkeley* (Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 37-57

Howard Robinson, "The General Form of the Argument for Berkeleian Idealism", in Foster and Robinson (eds), *as above*, pp. 163-86