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Qualities and Ideas: Lesson 4 questions

1. Explain in your own words what Locke means by a "quality" of matter.

A “quality” of a matter is an attribute or a number of properties that make that particular object unique in its kind and/or as a unit, as well as distinguishable and distinctive from other objects. Locke makes a distinction between our subjective ideas of such objects, in the way we perceive or understand those objects through our senses, and “qualities”, or the actual capability or power within those objects to elicit, reflect, resemble, and provoke those ideas of the objects themselves into our minds; that is what Locke calls the “qualities” or properties of such objects where those powers are.

2. Give three examples of Locke's Primary Qualities, and three examples of Secondary Qualities. How does Locke explain the key differences between Primary and Secondary Qualities?

Locke categorizes two main types of qualities i.e. Primary and Secondary. Primary qualities are those who according to Locke “produce simple ideas in us”. The kind of ideas that are “utterly inseparable from the body, in what state soever” (p.87). These ideas appear to be most fundamental, solid, unchangeable, immutable, and objective, relating to how objects exist in nature. Locke identifies solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number as Primary qualities. Those primal inherent qualities are really stable and exist within the object regardless of the state of the object. Locke gives three examples of Secondary qualities, which he states: “in truth are nothing in the object themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities (p.87)”. Examples of Secondary qualities are colors, sounds, and tastes; those qualities are variable depending on how the object is perceived by the observer and the circumstances of the external environment that might affect or alter the object perception.

3. Present an example from Locke's writing that describes a material object in terms of its fundamental primary qualities versus its secondary qualities, and how Locke's distinction makes sense of the reality of that object.

Locke gives various examples of primary and secondary qualities of an object. He takes a simple object such as a grain of wheat and explains that no matter how many times such grain is divided into smaller parts, it will still conserve its Primary characteristics such as solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest. On the contrary, its secondary characteristics, such as color, smell or taste, are variable depending on how the object is perceived by different individuals, for instance, under bright lighting conditions, the grain might appear lighter, under dimmer lighting, its color may be perceived as a darker color, hence demonstrating that those perceptions of the object or secondary qualities are not within the object itself but more on the mind and idea of the beholder.

Berkeley, “Nothing Outside the Mind” (*Principles . . .*) – pp. 97-102

4. Explain Berkeley's criteria for "existence" - what does he think we mean when we say something is "real" or that it "exists"?

Berkeley's criteria for the "existence" is based on the premises of sensorial perception of objects that are collected and processed by the mind or conscience. In that respect, Berkeley says "objects' existence consists in their being perceived"; in other words: "Existence is perceivability" or "Esse is percipi". When confronted with Berkeley's apparent denial of the obvious reality that everybody could see. Berkeley responded he did not deny the physical existence of such external objects such as material things, and items found in nature and creation. However, he sustained that, the existence of those objects depended on individuals being able to perceive them by their senses, how else would we be aware of the existence of such objects unless they were able to be experienced through the senses, either seen, heard, smelled, touched, or perceived in some other way. Berkeley proposed that "nothing exists outside the mind". The mind makes sense of our perceptions of reality by a process of collection and processing of those ideas by our senses and minds. He adds the perceiving being is what he calls "mind, spirit, soul or myself (p.98). Therefore he claims objects that cannot be perceived by the senses do not exist

by themselves. Ideas of such objects need to be perceived and made sense of by the observer for them to take on existence and purpose.

5. Based on his definition of existence, why does Berkeley think we should not believe in the existence of independent Primary Qualities? What does this mean about the existence of matter?

Berkeley opposes Locke's distinction between Primary and Secondary qualities. Berkeley claims that all qualities primary and secondary are processed in a similar way, by the mind and the senses respectively, even shape and movement can be just as variable and changeable as color and taste, depending on the circumstances on which they are perceived. Berkeley points out that they are just ideas existing in the mind. "there is not any other substance than the spirit that perceives", and he adds: "for an idea to exist in unperceiving things is a manifest contradiction (p.99). So Berkeley concludes that minds and ideas are in a way innate transferred from God's spirit to our spirits.

6. As a result of his critique of materialism, explain what Berkeley has to say about the ultimate source of all the sensory experiences we receive.

The source of sensory experiences we receive is God who transfers ideas to our spirits, souls, and minds, which through the senses, make connections, put together all perceptions in an orderly way, and produce a tangible notion of what we perceive as objects and the reality at hand. Berkeley also acknowledges that nature and its perfect laws are ideas that exist in the mind of this higher spirit that is wise and benevolent where all things originate from. He is referring to God. Berkeley ultimately concludes that the cause of ideas and ultimate source of all the sensory experiences we receive is an "incorporeal active substance or spirit (p.102)".

Bibliography

Cottingham, J. (2008). *Western philosophy: An anthology* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Publishing.