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Reading Question Week 4

Locke, "Qualities and Ideas" (Essay . . .) – pp. 86-90

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

According to Locke, qualities of matter refer to the properties or characteristics of physical objects that can be perceived by our senses. He divides qualities into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary qualities are inherent and essential to matter, while secondary qualities depend on the perception of the observer.

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?

Examples of primary qualities include shape, size, motion, solidity, and number. Examples of secondary qualities include color, taste, smell, and texture. Locke explains that primary qualities exist in the object itself, independent of the observer, while secondary qualities are the result of how the object interacts with the observer's senses.

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.

In his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Locke uses the example of a snowball to illustrate the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. He argues that the snowball's primary qualities, such as its size, shape, and motion, are inherent to the snowball and exist independently of any observer. On the other hand, the snowball's secondary qualities, such as its whiteness and coldness, are dependent on the observer's perception of the snowball. Locke suggests that while the snowball's primary qualities are objective and can be measured, its secondary qualities are subjective and can vary depending on the observer. This distinction helps to explain why different people can perceive the same object differently.

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"?

According to Berkeley, when we say something is "real" or "exists," we mean that it is perceivable or capable of being perceived by the senses or the mind. In other words, something exists if we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell it, or if we can conceive of it in our minds.

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 argues that we should not believe in the existence of independent Primary Qualities because they are not perceivable in themselves, but rather, are only perceived through their secondary qualities. He contends that Primary Qualities, such as shape, size, and motion, are not independent of our perception, but rather, are dependent on our minds to be perceived. Therefore, the existence of matter as traditionally conceived is called into question, as it relies on the existence of Primary Qualities.

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.

Berkeley argues that the ultimate source of all sensory experiences we receive is not material objects but rather, God or a higher power. According to Berkeley, all sensory experiences are caused by ideas in our minds, and these ideas are created and controlled by God. He believes that the sensory world we experience is a product of God's continuous creation and sustenance. Therefore, the external world that we perceive is not independent of our minds, but rather, is a manifestation of God's will.