

Essay Guideline: Berkeley's Criticisms of Locke

Essay Topic: Present, explain, and evaluate Berkeley's arguments against Locke's primary/secondary quality distinction.

Instructions: Begin by reading pages 166 – 168 in the textbook. Make sure you understand how Berkeley's arguments work. If it's not making sense, get in touch with me and I'll help you out.

Outline:

- I. Explain the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and the role they play in Locke's representative realism.
 - a. Primary qualities are really "out there" in the object. These include size, shape, motion/rest, number, and structure.
 - b. Secondary qualities are NOT really "out there" in the object. Instead, they are the result of our sensory systems responding to the primary qualities of objects. Secondary qualities include color, taste, smell, sound, and feelings of warmth or coolness.
 - c. Locke uses this distinction to explain when differences between how people experience the world indicates error and when it doesn't. The issue of accuracy applies only to primary qualities.
 - i. If we disagree about secondary qualities, no one is in error. Instead, our sensory systems are simply responding differently to the primary qualities of objects in our environment.
 - ii. If we disagree about primary qualities, then someone is mistaken.
- II. Present Berkeley's inseparability argument against the primary/secondary quality distinction.
 - a. If there were a genuine distinction between primary and secondary qualities, we would be able to form a mental image of the primary qualities without including any secondary qualities.
 - b. It is impossible to have a mental image of an object's primary qualities without also including secondary qualities. (Explain this, using an example.)
 - c. Because this mental separation is impossible, there is no real distinction between primary and secondary qualities.
- III. Evaluate Berkeley's inseparability argument.
 - a. Berkeley assumes that all thought involves mental images, but this is incorrect. Although we may not be able to *imagine* (i.e., have a mental image of) primary qualities without including secondary qualities, we can *understand* one without the other.
 - b. Our inability to imagine something is not a reliable indicator that it is impossible. E.g., We can understand a 1,000-sided figure, but cannot imagine it – even though it is certainly possible.
- IV. Present Berkeley's variability argument against the primary/secondary quality distinction.
 - a. According to Locke's own view, secondary qualities are the ones that vary from person to person.
 - b. Experience shows us that *all* qualities of objects – even the ones Locke says are primary – vary from person to person. E.g., Objects get smaller as we move away

from them, so size must be a secondary quality (even though Locke says it is a primary quality).

- c. If all qualities of objects are secondary, then the primary/secondary quality distinction is a failure.
- V. Evaluate Berkeley's variability argument.
- a. Berkeley says that objects appear to change size or shape when moved, but this is false. Although an object may occupy an area of our visual space that is smaller or shaped differently, the object itself does not seem to change.