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History of Modern Philosophy

Spring 2021Mid-Term.

**Section 1: Match the Quotes**

1. (B) Berkeley
2. (A) Locke
3. (C) Hume

**Section 2: Short Answer**

1. **Locke’s account of secondary qualities:**

Locke argued in defense of the existence of an unknowable substance that is the cause of all our perceptions. He said that everything we know, we know only through our ideas, and our only way of knowing the world must be learned through our ideas (we can never directly know the world, since our knowledge, our ideas, are based on either sensation or reflection—from our perceptions). However, contrary to Hume, he believes that the perceptions we experience must be caused by *something*, by a substance that is ultimately unknowable (directly). According to Locke, because we can perceive the qualities of an object, there must be something which causes (or has the power to produce) those qualities. Locke distinguishes the different types of qualities: Primary and secondary. While primary qualities, like shape and size, are qualities which have the power to produce in us ideas that actually resemble the corresponding qualities of the substance, secondary qualities, like color and smell, do not actually resemble the substance which causes them. Secondary qualities, he said, only suggests/indicates the existence of something that caused them, like how the color of an object is caused by the structure of the object which causes light to refract at different wavelengths, but doesn’t actually *resemble* those underlying causes (color does not resemble the most base structure that causes it, and neither does it resemble, to us, the wavelengths of light that bring it to our eyes).

Part of his argument for the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is that, no matter what you try to do to an object, you can never strip it of the primary qualities of shape or size. But the color of an object, for example, can change depending on the amount of light that reaches the object, like how we cannot perceive color in the dark, so an object that appeared red in natural light would appear gray in the dark. The color of the object is not the objective reality—color is caused by a different quality (the structure, texture, shape).

1. **Locke’s Theory of the origin of personal property**

Locke’s theory of personal property stems from labor. He argues that the Earth is owned by all men in common, that God created the Earth for humanity as a whole. Therefore all people can use resources without stealing (in contrast to the argument that God gave ownership to royalty, etc, by divine right)—you just have to make sure you aren’t harming other people. Personal property, then, stems from labor. Locke argues that the one property, ownership, right we are born with is ourselves. We have rights over ourselves and our labor, and therefore we are able, if we so choose, to expend labor on things. We can sell our labor, exchanging it for money, or we can expend our labor on “unimproved” resources and, after we have changed it enough, we are able to lay claim over the resources, land, or objects, that we have improved—that thing that we spend our labor on has been “removed from the common state nature hath placed it in” and has been “annexed” when labor has been mixed with it. Therefore, ownership can be achieved. We own our labor and we mix that labor with something in nature. Because the labor has been mixed in with this, we then come to have ownership over it. This is provided, however, that there is enough left “in common” for other people—that you aren’t damaging other people directly through your ownership.

1. **Hume’s theory of Morality**

A big part of Hume’s arguments are based on his idea that all of our ideas, and therefore our ability to reason, comes from our perceptions, from experience. Further, he argues that there can be nothing in our experience that can be used as reason to predict something in the future: we learn to associate certain effects with certain causes, but there’s nothing in our experience that can lead us to continue to always expect the same cause and effect sequence. Our association of those causal relationships and our expectation of their continuance are based in our feelings, our imagination, not in reason (relation of resemblance). This is similar to his argument about morality. Our notion of morality, Hume argued, comes from our emotional reactions to things, not from reason. We cannot conclude, based on reason alone (Hume said), that an action or belief is immoral, is bad. If we try to do this with reason, it would have to be with the relation of resemblance, which would also then lead us to assign morality to inanimate objects, which he said was absurd (that a chair could be deemed morally good or bad). Reason doesn’t concern what ought to be the case, only what is the case. So we can conclude that, for example, 10 is greater than 1 but not that 10 is better than 1. Abuse is merely abuse, but our judgment concerning abuse comes from our emotional reaction to it.

Reason comes into play, though, if you look at desires. If you act against your desire for something, it can be called irrational—reason guides our *choices*, not the judgment we assign to those choices. We can reason that $10 is *better* than $1 if choosing to receive $10 brings you closer to your desire of buying food for your family. But we find someone blameworthy, for, say, stealing $10 from a homeless person, because of our emotional reaction caused by the action (which could vary based on a person’s particular situation).

1. **Hume’s bundle theory of the mind**

Hume argued that our *selves,* our identities, are made up of bundles of other perceptions. You cannot observe yourself without also receiving other perceptions. Further, because all our ideas are based on our perceptions, we cannot conceive of things which we cannot perceive (an argument against material substance). Objects, like people, exist as bundles of perceptions—he argues against inherent, universal qualities, and against the idea that there is a permanent self which is unchanging. Since identity is based on perceptions, and perceptions change and shift over time, we cannot conceive of a permanent, inherent quality of self. We are therefore made up of ideas, perceptions, memories, and desires—a bundle of perceptions that can change over time.

1. **Berkeley’s Master argument**

Berkeley argued that mind-independent objects do not exist because existence relies on perceiving or being perceived. This argues against the existence of a substance, which both Locke and Hume discussed as well; he denies the existence of substances, similar to Hume in at least that aspect. But Berkeley argued against mind-independent objects because nothing can exist that is unperceivable—there cannot be an aspect which exists that is impossible for us to perceive (Locke wrote the opposite, that all our perceptions are caused by something we cannot perceive directly). Objects, to Berkeley, are made up of ideas created by the mind of God and perceived by our minds (God actively perceiving, creating, and us passively perceiving, experiencing). He says that our perceptions reflect reality—experience can lead us to discover everything we want to know of the world (contrary to Locke). In the dialogues, Berkeley, as Philonous, asks Hylas if he can perceive of any physical object that exists independent of a mind, and Hylas responds that he’s thinking of a tree that is unperceived by anyone. Berkeley’s argument here is important—he argues that as soon as you try to think of an object that is unperceived, you are still imagining it. But if a material substance existed, which is unconceived/unperceived, you would never be able to imagine it. Therefore, such an object cannot exist.

**Section 3: Essay**

1. **Prompt 2: Explain how Hume thinks we get our idea of causation.**
   1. **Is Hume right, or is there another possible source for this idea that Hume fails to consider?**
   2. **After resenting this alternate source for our idea of causation, explain how Hume might object to this account.**

Hume argues that our idea of causation (that A causes B) can only be derived from experience. He says that we cannot, through reason alone, know what might be the particular effect of a particular cause. For example, we cannot conclude through reason, without prior experience, that when a billiard ball collides with another, the second ball will be hit into the pocket (or perhaps that it will miss and bounce off the side). This connection between the cause and effect cannot be a relation of ideas because we explain our perceptions and experiences in conjunction with other perceptions and experiences. We cannot know the particular cause of an event without prior experience, and vice vera. We cannot discover this relationship between particular causes and effects without prior experience that leads us to infer the relationship. Additionally, however, nothing in our experience can be used as reason to predict *future* events. When we see causes and effects, we can only relate them to the other because experience has allowed us to associate a certain effect to a certain cause. We cannot use reason to infer an effect from only looking at the cause. Through experience we form associations that lead us to believe that those certain effects will continue to happen, but this is not based in reason.

I think that Locke’s theory of primary qualities and causation makes a lot of sense, so I edge on believing that Hume is incorrect, at least in some aspects. I don’t disagree that to be able to associate causes and effects together requires experience, but I think I agree with Locke when he argues that through observing and understanding the primary qualities of an object, we may be able to deduce that those qualities will produce a certain effect. Through reason, Locke argued, a person may be able to suppose that if they change one primary quality, it will affect another primary quality. Or, moreover, if you understand the nature of one primary quality, you might come to understand how that might affect the object’s interaction with another object. So you could deduce that if you change the size of object (like chipping off a section of rock), the mass will also change, and if you know that an object is solid, you could deduce that another object could not pass through it.

I do think that Hume would be correct, however, in objecting that this understanding of these primary qualities requires prior experience. If, somehow, a person was raised suspended in zero-gravity and has never perceived (through touch or sight) a solid object, and was then presented with a rock to examine without context, would they be able to come to the conclusion that the rock’s mass would change when broken with a hammer? Or that nothing could pass through it? Understanding how changes in a particular primary quality would affect another primary quality is something, I think that Hume would point out, that comes from direct experience with other comparable situations.

1. **Prompt 3: Explain how Berkeley argues against Locke’s distinction between Primary and Secondary qualities.**
   1. **Explain Locke’s distinction and summarize how Locke argues for this distinction.**
   2. **Explain how Berkeley “refutes” these arguments and shows how primary qualities are just perspectival/subjective as secondary ones.**
   3. **Explain how you think Locke might be able to respond to Berkeley’s arguments.**

In Locke’s argument about ideas, and how we are able to come to know (or ultimately not know) the world, he says that everything we know comes from our ideas, which stem from our perceptions either through sensation or reflection. As we perceive objects, we perceive the qualities that the material substance cause. These perceptions are of either Primary or Secondary qualities. This distinction between the two types of perceptions is important for his argument for the existence of material substance because of the problem of subjectivity. Secondary qualities are those that do not directly resemble those inherent qualities of the material substance. For example, the redness of an apple which we perceive, is not inherent in the apple itself (as a substance). The material substance in the apple is the thing that has the power to produce in us the idea of the redness of the apple. The color does not resemble the minute structures and textures in the apple or the wavelengths of light that cause it to reach our eyes. As a result, secondary qualities are considered subjective to the particular situation in which the object was perceived by us. An apple in the light does not appear the same color as an apple in the dark.

Primary qualities, however, are those that have the power to produce in us ideas that actually resemble the corresponding qualities in the object that produced these ideas. These primary qualities, like shape, size, and mass, are those that cannot be removed from an object. You cannot remove the quality of *mass,* for example, from an object. Our ideas of Primary qualities of the objects, therefore, resemble the actual shape of the substance. That is not to say that we are able to perceive, directly, the substance that causes these qualities, but we may see qualities that more closely resemble those of the actual substance (as secondary qualities do not resemble those in the substance at all, only suggest the existence of other qualities).

But Berkeley argues that there is no distinction between Primary and Secondary qualities. He argues that material substances, which he calls mind-independent objects, do not exist. Objects and people exists because they are perceived or can perceive. Unlike Locke, who argues that there are material substances that we cannot directly know because we cannot perceive them, Berkeley argues that *because* we cannot perceive them, they do not exist. The world, argues Berkeley, is made up of minds—our own, and the all-knowing and all-perceiving mind of God. God creates the ideas that we perceive in the world. All that there is to the world is what we can directly perceive. In the dialogues, Berkeley, as Philonous, asks Hylas if he can perceive of any physical object that exists independent of a mind, and Hylas responds that he’s thinking of a tree that is unperceived by anyone. Berkeley’s argument here is important—he argues that as soon as you try to think of an object that is unperceived, you are still imagining it. But if a material substance existed, which is unconceived/unperceived, you would never be able to imagine it. Therefore, such an object cannot exist (Sorry, I used this bit on the dialogues from the short answer. I couldn’t think of another way to say it). Because of his idea that mind-independent objects (material substances) cannot exist beyond our perception, the distinctions between primary and secondary qualities (that Locke argues) dissolve. Without a material substance to try to relate our perceptions to, there is no distinction between qualities of shape and those of color—the nature of these perceptions are as they are defined as we perceive them.

I think that Locke might focus on the parts of Berkeley’s master argument that you discussed in the lecture, namely, that there is a possible scope fallacy in the third premise. It seems striking that there would be such a weakness in such an important part of Berkeley’s argument, and I don’t think that Locke would have overlooked it. He would then have argued as you mentioned in the lecture, that there are numbers and creatures (and other such natural features) that we can expect to exist but have not yet discovered, and therefore have not yet conceived. This creates room, then, for Locke to reassert that there *can* be aspects of nature, of the world, that we have not conceived, such as in the material substances that cause the qualities we perceive.