

Primary/Secondary Distinction

Definitions

- Idea: “Whatever the mind perceives in itself or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call *idea*.”
- Quality: The power of an object to produce an idea in the mind.

Primary/Secondary Qualities

- Primary: solidity, extension, figure, mobility.
- Secondary: colors, sounds, tastes, etc.

Locke's Explanation

“These I call original or primary qualities of body, which I think we may observe to produce simple ideas in us, namely solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. Secondly such qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities... these I call secondary qualities.” (AW P. 333)

Negative Criteria

- If one can perceive an object as having two or more incompatible ideas, then those ideas do not represent real (primary) qualities of the object.
- Even if a change in us entails the change in the perceived quality, the ideas which change cannot be real (primary).

Positive Criterion

- If an idea of an object is the same under all conditions, that idea is real (a primary quality).

Corollary:

- If every observer receives the same idea from an object, then that idea is real (primary)

Possible problems

- The problem of the almond.
- The problem of solidity.
- Does a change in a primary characteristic mean the creation of a new/different object?
- Relativity of motion.

Connection to Descartes

- Descartes' view
- Implication of Locke's view