

A distinction between primary and secondary qualities essay samples

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [Primary and Secondary Qualities](#) \n \t
3. [Works Cited:](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Introduction

Rationalism is the major developed concept during the time of John Locke. His goal in his works is to build a more sophisticated foundation for information and science. The method he proposed is to evaluate the scope, limitation and reliability of the knowledge of humans and to differentiate it to the irrational concepts and ideas. He started to investigate the ability of the human mind by analysing the origin of our ideas. Locke believed that in order to understand the human mind, one should trace the origin of the idea from the individual's experience (Kaijo, np).

John Locke's investigation on the human mind started after he understood the basic concepts of sensation. According to Rene Descartes on his book 'Meditation of Philosophy', sensation is one of the attributes of certainty. On the other hand, Locke used sensation as the basis for his empirical study. In his investigation, he found out that ideas could be varied according to what an individual feel. For example, the colour of the floor could be varied according to the condition of the eyes of the observer or depending on the light qualities within the room. He differentiates qualities according to how it could produce the idea. He proposed that qualities could be classified into

two types which are primary and secondary qualities.

According to Locke, primary qualities resemble the things as we perceived them. It is the characteristic of the things that is independent to the individual's perception. Some examples of the primary qualities that are suggested by Locke are the motion, texture and the size of the material. For more scientific definition, it could be recognized as the intrinsic property of the materials. On the other hand, secondary qualities are the information that is perceived in us such as taste, smell and colour. It is the characteristic of the material that could only be defined using the senses. In this essay, Locke's division and dualism of primary and secondary qualities will be analysed and criticized. The essay opts to use arguments from the texts of Locke and other writers as well as my personal experience and idea about the dualism of qualities.

Thesis Statement: I agree to the Locke's distinction on the two types of qualities since primary qualities are explanatory and resemble a characteristic to the material unlike the secondary qualities.

Primary and Secondary Qualities

Consider bread as an example of material to be investigated using Locke's concept of dualism of qualities. Using his definitions, some of the primary qualities of the bread would be the bulk, the motion, the texture, and the size. On the other hand, the secondary qualities would be the smell, the colour and the taste. In my assessment of the investigation of the qualities of the bread, it is very difficult to differentiate the primary to the secondary qualities. However, I used the concept of resemblance of the quality to the

material and how the explanation of the qualities perceived in my own thoughts. Some critics may say that the dualisms of qualities defined by Locke are difficult to be distinguished. However, there is a distinction between the primary and the secondary qualities. The primary qualities resemble an idea to the material such as texture. If the texture is rough, then the mind perceived the material to be rough. However, the secondary qualities should be observed first before characterization since the quality does not resemble anything about the material. In addition, primary qualities are explanatory unlike the secondary qualities.

In Locke's definition, " the primary qualities of this rose (the material) include all of its quantifiable features, its mass and momentum, its chemical composition and microscopic structure; these are the features of the thing itself. The secondary qualities of the rose (the material), on the other hand, include the ideas it produces in me, its yellow color, its delicate fragrance; these are the merely the effects of the primary qualities of its corpuscles on my eyes and nose" (Kemerling, np). In this definition from the secondary source of Locke's ideas, the qualities could be separated into the primary and secondary using the concept of resemblance. In the primary qualities, the mass and the chemical composition could specifically define the material even without the senses since it resembles the material. The mass and the chemical composition of the material is the basic foundation of its characteristic. While the secondary qualities such as colour and fragrance do not resemble anything from the material since it is subjective to the receiver or observer.

Another distinction of the types of qualities suggested by Locke is that

primary qualities could be used to explain the nature of the object. In his book, he stated that “ power to produce various sensations in us” could be defined “ by their primary qualities i. e. by bulk, figure, texture and motion” (Locke, np). The quote explains how primary qualities could be used to define and explain the secondary qualities. In this quote, it could be recognized that primary qualities are inseparable to its perception in the mind since it could explain how the mind perceived the quality. For example, the hotness or coldness of the object could be considered secondary source but it could be explain using the primary qualities. The motion and the chemical properties of the material dictate its temperature which will be perceived in the mind using sensation. If the motion of particles is fast, then the object must be hot. The quote of Locke in his book could be useful in explaining the fact that primary qualities are explanatory while the secondary qualities are not.

According to Michael Jacovides, “ Locke thinks that mechanical explanations work for artifacts. He insinuates that similar explanations would work in the natural world, if we could perceive the real essences of natural objects” (Jacovides, 6). In this quote, the commenter of Locke’s work uses the idea the secondary qualities rely on primary qualities on the explanation of the characteristic. It is one of the main distinctions between the primary qualities and the secondary qualities. He also argued that “ resemblance allows us to represent external objects in a way that preserves the truth of theorems” (Jacovides, 8). The quote also supports the idea that resemblance to the material could be used to distinguish the primary to the secondary qualities. In short, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities could be

generalized to the concept of explanation and resemblance. In my personal experience, I realized that primary qualities are the ones that basically define the material when we perceived them as the secondary qualities. In general, primary qualities could be used to generalize the characteristic of the material.

Works Cited:

Descartes, Rene. Meditations on First Philosophy. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 1-32. 1996. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <http://selfpace.uconn.edu/class/percep/DescartesMeditations.pdf>

Jacovides, Michael. Locke's Distinction Between Primary and Secondary Qualities. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~mjacovid/CCLC.pdf>

Kaijo, Charles. Primary and Secondary Qualities. California Undergraduate Philosophy Review, 1, 49-54. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/philosophy/documents/Kaijo-CUPR1-1.pdf>

Kemerling, G. Locke: The origin of Ideas. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/4l.htm> .

Locke, John. (1690). An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/locke/locke1/Book2a.html#Chapter%20VIII>.