

# Lockes analysis of material substance philosophy essay



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Locke inherited his concept and analysis of substance from Aristotelian notion, basing on the category of substratum (underlying object). Locke believed that substance really exists in the world, and that all qualities or properties of everything carry the supposition of the substratum. Thus, Locke considered the substance to be a main background of the qualities. He stated that for groups of simple and clear ideas in conjunction there could be the substance behind them.

Locke also argued that our perceptions and senses did not allow us to understand fully the concept of substance. Locke held to the idea that there existed a distinction between such primary qualities, such as solidity and extension. The secondary qualities, according to Lock, are taste, color, smell and sound. The primary qualities are present in the physical body, so it is natural that they exist objectively. However, the secondary qualities are “afforded only subjective significance” (Great philosophers). Locks states that “the Ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves; but the Ideas produced in us by these secondary qualities, have no resemblance of them at all” (Locke, p. 173). It presupposes that if we see an object and perceive its primary qualities, we should bear in mind that there are also some secondary qualities, some underlying substance. Locke postulated the idea of some material substratum that supports his idea of primary qualities: “we accustom ourselves to suppose some substratum wherein they do subsist and from which they do result, which therefore we call substance” (Locke, p. 390)

**In Berkeley's refutation of Locke's Materialism, explain the two arguments that Berkeley advances to prove the subjectivity of the tactile sensations of heat and cold.**

Berkeley misunderstood the idea of Locke's differentiation between primary and secondary qualities. Berkeley considered that our secondary qualities' perceptions can be different according to various circumstances. They have nothing in common with the objects themselves. Berkeley focuses on the inseparability of the concept of body and primary qualities. Berkeley admits that both heat and cold are in material substances. That leads to the conclusion that if cold and heat are in material substances, then the object contains the degree of warmth that is felt. So, if something feels hot, it appears that it is really hot. Therefore if it feels cold, it is really cold. The evident conclusion is that if it feels both cold and hot, it is cold and hot. Berkeley's argument is that it is absurd, as nothing can be hot and cold at the same moment. Therefore the whole assumption is erroneous and both heat and cold are not in material substances. Thus, it appears to be such an argument: "the same water, at the same time, may produce the idea of cold by one hand and of heat by the other; whereas it is impossible that the same water, if those ideas were really in it, should at the same time be both hot and cold" (Mackie 1976).

**State Locke's definition of the secondary quality of sound. Give Berkeley's refutation of Locke's theory of sound.**

Trying to make the clear distinction between the objects' primary and secondary qualities, Locke resented a rather vivid ontological distinction. The primary qualities are in the object. They are mind-independent and their existence does not require any perceiver for them. At the same time the

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secondary qualities are the result of the primary ones. They are based on the relationships between the perceiver and the object itself. A very famous example demonstrates this idea: a tree falls in the woods and makes a sound; however there is no one around to hear this sound of a falling tree. It illustrates the idea that in case when a perceiver is absent those vibrations that are created by the falling tree are not converted in the sound experience as there is no one to perform this conversion. Thus, the sound of a falling tree automatically becomes the secondary quality of the motion of the tree. In this case the motion of tree is the primary quality. This distribution between the primary and secondary qualities depends only on the presence of a human being able to hear the sound of the tree. Thus, these relational secondary qualities exist only between the object and the human perceiver. As Locke raised various epistemological questions, this difference was essential for him, this differentiation was of major importance. His idea is that such notions as color, taste, sound and appearance do not exist in the universe on their own, but strictly depend on our perception.

Berkeley rejects the idea that there are primary and secondary qualities. This distinction fits into the project of his: he tries to make us think that materialism cannot preserve the belief of the common sense that tables can have shapes and colors that resemble those which we perceive directly. So, these phenomenal qualities are not to be used to characterize matter.

### **What is Locke's position on the secondary quality of color? Give Berkeley's response to Locke regarding colors.**

When we perceive the world that is around us, we do not actually perceive only the ideas of the world, but what is the indirect interpretation of it. Thus,  
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a gap is created between what is perceived and who perceives. The ideas of the physical world we perceive are actually not what is really true about the physical world. This idea of Locke is vividly presents in his example of crushing an almond: “ Pound an almond, and the clear white colour will be altered into a dirty one, and the sweet taste into an oily one. What real alteration can the beating of the pestle make in any body, but an alteration of the texture of it?” (Locke, p. 199). When our senses inform us about taste and color of the almond, they tell us lies. They inform us incorrectly and show us what is apparent to us, but not true in the physical world. This is a scientific explanation to the idea that in order to know the world we live in properly and objectively, we must consider the primary qualities of objects that surround us, but not their secondary ones. That will give us the true knowledge of the world.

Berkeley stated that the variation of colors we experience when we look at some object shows us only one thing. If we treat this object as material one, we can hardly enumerate all its colors and avoid contradicting to ourselves. Sometimes such changeable factors as sunlight or shadow can make us determine the wrong color of the object.

### **How does Berkeley respond to Locke’s argument about things seen at distance?**

Berkeley agreed that distance was not immediately seen. He recounted his position with earlier writers, such as Descartes who considered that distance was judges by a natural geometry that was based on the angles between the eyes (or the angles of light rays that fell upon the eyes) and the perceived object. Berkeley rejected such accounts. He considered that there is no

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visible connection between the idea and the distance. Here is just a customary connection between the ideas of two types. One person perceives distance by sight due to the correlation between visual and non-visual ideas. But if a person is blind for example, has no notion of visual distance; those object that are remote will seem visual and close for them. Berkeley, as the majority of the philosophers of the period he lived in, assumes that this world can be analyzed with the touch; hence a touch provides access to the world. Visual ideas of an object may vary with one's perception of distance from the object. If a person approaches to a tower, from being obscure, faint and small, it becomes large, clear and vigorous. The visual appearance of a tower constantly changes. The Berkeley idea is that visual ideas are mere representations of signs of tactile ideas. The relations between them are like between the words and their meanings. Experience is the base for associative connection.