

General Philosophy Paper (PPE Prelims etc.)

Topic 5: Primary and Secondary Qualities

Briefly explain how Locke understands the distinction between primary and secondary qualities: does it imply that physical objects don't really have colours, or that their colours are dependent on observers? What evidence does Locke give for his distinction, and how well does it stand up to critical examination? What objections can be brought against the distinction, and is it ultimately defensible? Even if it is not defensible, can this investigation teach us useful lessons about the sorts of properties that our scientific theories should ascribe to objects, and the relevant criteria for identifying them?

Note that the official syllabus and Faculty-recommended reading for this paper can be found from either of the following Web addresses, which also include live links to online resources:

http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/misc/undergrad/general_syllabus.shtml
<http://philosophy.hertford.ox.ac.uk/genfaclist.htm>

The list below broadly follows the Faculty recommendations, but adds Berkeley, Hume and Ayers, and promotes Lowe and Mackie above Bennett and Armstrong. Read Locke, Lowe and Mackie first, but consider Ayers' little book for getting an overview of what Locke is up to, read Bennett (difficult but rewarding) only if you find it manageable, and leave Armstrong until last (and if time permits).

READING

* John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (any decent edition will do, but the best is the OUP edition edited by Nidditch), Book II Chapter viii.

George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (any decent edition will do), §§8-15.

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I iv 4 paragraphs 3-14.

Michael Ayers, *Locke: Ideas and Things* (Phoenix, 1997), pp. 3-29.

* E. J. Lowe, *Locke on Human Understanding* (Routledge, 1995), chapter 3, pp. 35-59.

* J.L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke* (OUP, 1976), chapter 1, pp. 7-33.

Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers* (OUP, 2003), volume 2, chapter 25, pp. 74-91

D.M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge, 1968), chapter 12, pp. 270-90.