

History of Modern Philosophy
Fall 2019
2nd Paper Assignment
Due: 11/8/2019

Papers should be approximately 3-5 pages in length, and are due via email on Friday, November 8. Please send your papers in Word, (Mac) Pages, .rtf, or .txt format.

The papers are due, again, on Friday, November 8. As I have stated in class, I have no problem with papers that are a few hours late. But at some point after the 8th, at my discretion, papers that are not yet turned in will simply not be accepted.

You are free to take a topic of your own choosing, or one of the suggested topics below, but the papers should all be on Locke or Berkeley. Once again, your task is to explain and defend a thesis that you are making about what Locke or Berkeley has to say about some philosophical issue. Note that your thesis should not be (at least not directly) about the *conclusion* one of these philosophers reaches (e.g., “Berkeley thinks *blah blah blah*, and I disagree because *yada yada yada*”), but rather about the *reasons* or *argument* they give for some conclusion. That is, don’t just talk about *what* they think (and why you do or don’t agree), but instead talk about *why* they believe what they believe, and then what you think is right or wrong with their *reasoning*. You may find it helpful to review the general comments I have made about writing this kind of paper. You can find these in the first paper assignment, at: <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~baldner/modpaper1.pdf>.

What follows are suggestions concerning issues about which you might form some thesis you can explain and defend. They are not test questions that you must “answer.” So don’t just go through and respond to each of the questions in a given topic, but find something in the issues that it raises that you have some opinion about. And, again, your job is not simply to tell me that you agree or disagree with the conclusions reached, but to critically discuss the *reasoning* offered in support of these conclusions.

1. Consider Locke’s account of innate ideas. What does he take them to be, and why does he think we don’t have any? What, if anything, is interesting or controversial about his account?

2. Locke claims that ideas (or sensations) are the (only) immediate objects of experience, i.e., of “perception, thought, and understanding.” He doesn’t really defend this claim. Why do you think he believes it? Why would he think we would accept this without argument? What are the philosophical benefits and/or problems associated with such a position?

3. Discuss Locke’s distinction between ideas and qualities. Why do you think he finds it so easy to confuse these two things, even given that his whole purpose is to explain how they are different? What problems do this confusion give rise to in understanding Locke’s account of primary and secondary qualities? Is his account of these matters mistaken, or just explained poorly?

4. What, according to Locke, is *substratum* or “substance in general?” What philosophical questions are at stake in this discussion? Does what he says make sense? Is it plausible? If you like, consider it in light of the criticism that Berkeley makes of this notion.

5. Discuss Locke’s account of language, and the problems that it faces. Explain how these problems are similar to the problems his account of experience faces, specifically, from Berkeley’s Master Argument.

6. Discuss Berkeley's and Locke's understandings of primary and secondary qualities. Is Berkeley correct in his interpretation of Locke—specifically, that on Locke's view, secondary qualities exist only in the mind? As you read Berkeley, do you find passages in which the view attributed to Locke inaccurately represents Locke's view, as you understand it? Or do you find the opposite? That is, does it seem to you that Berkeley's treatment of Locke is appropriate? If so, find one or more places in the text that support your contention, and explain how they do so.

7. In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley argues that he is entitled to believe in the existence of immaterial substance or soul because he has a "notion" of his own existence, even while admitting that he has strictly no "idea" of immaterial substance (just as he has no idea of material substance). Hylas thinks this is unfair, that the arguments that Philonous (i.e., Berkeley) uses against material substance also apply to mental substance. What do you think? Note, I am not (at least not directly) asking whether or not you believe in the existence of a mental substance, but rather, I am asking you what you think of Berkeley's *argument*. Do you think he is *entitled* to continue to accept the existence of mental substance given what he says about the impossibility of material substance? Why or why not?

8. Discuss Berkeley's *Master Argument*. (The argument occurs in both the *Dialogues* and §§22–24 in the *Principles*.) What does Berkeley think the argument shows? Why does Berkeley think we cannot conceive of something that exists unperceived? Explain how this argument is supposed to work and to what extent you think it is an effective criticism against Locke. What is it, precisely, about the kind of position that Locke advocates that makes him susceptible to this criticism? Do you think it succeeds? Explain why or why not.

9. Discuss Berkeley's distinction between "real things" and "*chimeras*." What is the crucial aspect of this distinction? What is the relevance of how Berkeley makes this distinction to a realist like Locke?

Final Suggestions:

No matter which topic you choose, one of the above, or one of your own, you will want to begin with an introductory paragraph that explains to the reader the general issues being discussed. This is not the place to get into the details of your argument. But you need to explain just enough of the “big picture” issues so that the reader will be able to understand your thesis.

Your thesis should occur as a sentence (typically, the last one) in your introductory paragraph. In this statement, you concisely indicate *what* you will conclude, and *how* you will defend this claim. You don't want to give your entire argument here, but you should be able to summarize it in one clause of a single thesis statement. This thesis statement is critically important. It tells your reader where you are “going,” and how you will “get there.” If you can't formulate your thesis statement in a single clear sentence, then you do not yet *know* where you are going. ***So, it is critically important that your introductory paragraph contain an explicit thesis statement. If it doesn't contain one, your paper will lose points from the very beginning.***

Often times it happens that you won't really know what your thesis is until you get to the end of your paper. That is, by the end, perhaps you will be better able to clearly state what your thesis is. ***This is perfectly natural. It is a part of the process of writing papers. But when this happens, that means you are still working on a rough draft.*** So, if this happens to you, that means that you need to re-write your paper. Now that you know what you are going to conclude, tell the reader this up front. And now that you know where you are going, chances are you can “get there” more efficiently than you did in your first draft, when you were still struggling to figure out what you were saying.

So, the thesis statement actually implies an outline for your entire paper. It is your thesis statement that determines where you have to start, where you have to go next, and when you are done. Alternately put, it is impossible to have a clear and well organized paper without a clear and succinct thesis statement.

Finally, write clearly, in grammatically correct English. Chose the words that says exactly what you want to say rather than words that vaguely suggest something in the right “ball park.” Each paragraph should have a clear goal or point to make. Do not keep talking just to fill up space. Make sure that everything you say is relevant to the thesis you are defending and to the issues you must explain in order to defend your thesis.

So, have at it. Try to learn something in the process. Try to have fun. If you enjoy what you write, your reader probably will too. If what you write bores you, it will almost certainly bore your reader as well. Your reader is not me, as the instructor of this class. Your reader is a generally educated person, and it is your job to *teach* them something about Locke or Berkeley, and to *explain* to them why you think what you do about one of the two topics above.

Enough talk: *just do it!*