

Topics in Early Modern Philosophy: British Empiricism

Philosophy 509

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Spring 2009

Paper #1

Write an essay of 5-7 pages in length on one of the topics below. (You may also write on another topic of your own choice, but only after consulting with me.) Papers are due in class on Tuesday, March 3rd.

- (A) According to Locke, what is an *idea*? How do we arrive at ideas (simple, complex, abstract, and so on)? What is the relation between ideas and the world of objects? Do you find Locke's view helpful, persuasive, correct? Why or why not?
- (B) Locke distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities. What is the distinction, and how does Locke draw it? What qualities count as primary, what as secondary? Do you think that this distinction is real (or helpful)?
- (C) Locke argues that substance is a *something-I-know-not-what*. What does he mean by this? How do we arrive at our complex ideas of substance? What is the relation between substance and attribute? How does Locke's view here (II.xxiii) relate to his distinction between real essence and nominal essence? Critically evaluate his position.
- (D) What is Locke's view concerning identity over time and, in particular, *personal identity*? How does he argue for this view? Do you agree or not?
- (E) In the Epistle to the Reader, Locke says that it is "necessary to examine our own abilities, and see, what objects our understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with." By the end of Book IV, how does Locke draw this line? That is, what are the bounds of our knowledge? Do you agree or disagree with him?

When referring to Locke's *Essay*, please cite the Book, Chapter, and Section. For example: "Yadda-yadda-yadda." (*Essay*, II.xxiii.3)