

Reading Guide #1 - Reality and Experience

Plato, from *Republic Book 7*

1. Describe the cave analogy. How, according to Socrates, are the cave-dwellers like us?
2. How would a cave dweller react to being brought into the light of day? What is this supposed to show about us?
3. Upon returning to the cave, how would a former cave-dweller respond? How would h/she be regarded?
4. "Eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes: when they change from the light into the darkness, or from the darkness into the light" (518a). Explain.

Descartes, *First Meditation*

Meditation I

5. Why does Descartes want to demolish his opinions? How does he proceed?
6. "It is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" (76). How is Descartes being deceived?
7. How does Descartes come to doubt all of what his senses tell him?
8. How are general things less doubtful than particulars?
9. Of what does Descartes think might be certain even if he is dreaming?
10. What makes Descartes doubt the truth of mathematics?
11. "[I] am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised; and this is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion, but is based on powerful and well thought-out reasons" (78-9). Explain what these three reasons are.
12. Distinguish doubt from denial. Is Descartes doubting or denying?

Meditation II

13. What is the first thing that Descartes claims he can not doubt? Why can't he doubt it?

Descartes, "The Story of the Wax"

14. Describe Descartes's experiment with the wax. How does the experiment generalize to other objects?
15. "I must therefore admit that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone" (84-5). Explain.

Descartes, "The Story of the Sun"

16. Why does Descartes conclude that our ideas of external things are not creations of our imagination?
17. What is the resemblance hypothesis? How does Descartes use the example of the sun to reject that hypothesis?

Locke, On the Primary/Secondary Distinction

18. Describe and differentiate the two sources of ideas.
19. When do we start to have ideas?
20. How can a positive idea come from a privative cause?
21. “[I]t will be convenient to distinguish them as they are ideas or perceptions in our minds; and as they are modifications of matter in the bodies that cause such perceptions in us...” (II.VIII.7). What does this mean? Why does Locke think that this distinction is important?
22. How does Locke distinguish ideas from qualities?
23. What are the primary qualities? (Provide a description and a list.)
24. What are the secondary qualities? (Provide a description and a list.)
25. How do ideas of external objects get into our minds, according to Locke?
26. How do we get ideas of secondary qualities?
27. “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” (II.VIII.15). Explain.
28. Do we think that the warmth is in the fire? What does this show?
29. “Take away the sensation of them; let not the eyes see light or colors, nor the ears hear sounds; let the palate not taste, nor the nose smell, and all colours, tastes, odours, and sounds, as they are such particular ideas, vanish and cease, and are reduced to their causes, i.e. bulk, figure, and motion of parts” (II.VIII.17). Explain.
30. How does the example of the porphyry support the primary/secondary distinction?
31. How does Locke’s discussion of the water support his primary/secondary distinction?
32. How does Locke demonstrate that figure is a primary quality?
33. How are powers different from primary and secondary qualities?

Berkeley, from the *Principles*

34. What are the three types of ideas?
35. What is an object, like an apple, for Berkeley?
36. What exists, besides ideas?
37. How does Berkeley argue that the essence of unthinking things is their being perceived?
38. What contradiction arises from the belief that sensible objects have an independent existence?
39. How does the notion of the independent existence of material objects depend on the doctrine of abstract ideas?
40. What kind of abstraction does Berkeley say we can perform? What can’t we do, as regards abstraction?
41. Can an object which I don’t perceive exist? Explain.
42. How does Berkeley argue that there can be no material substratum for our ideas?
43. Why can’t our ideas of objects resemble material substance? How does this show the primary/ secondary distinction to be unhelpful?
44. “In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable” (§10). Explain. What does this show?
45. How does Berkeley argue that number does not exist without the mind?
46. Explain Berkeley’s argument against the primary qualities from the relativity of perceptions.
47. What problem does Berkeley find in the argument that matter supports extension?
48. How is the supposition of external bodies unnecessary?
49. “In short, if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now” (§20). Explain.

50. Why doesn't thinking of an unperceived object refute Berkeley?
51. How are ideas passive? How does Berkeley show this? What does this demonstrate? What, then, causes ideas and their changes?
52. Describe the differences among will, understanding, and spirit. How does Berkeley argue that there are no ideas of spirits?
53. Explain the argument for the existence of a higher power in §29.
54. What are laws of nature, according to Berkeley? Be specific. How do we learn them? Why are they useful?
55. Distinguish real things and images.

G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World"

56. How does Moore prove the existence of the external world? Why does he call his proof "perfectly rigorous" (196)?
57. How can we prove that external objects have existed in the past? Does such an argument prove that the external world exists now?
58. Why might someone want proof of Moore's premises? How does Moore respond?
59. "I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it" (199). Explain.
60. Why does Kant think that some philosophers take the existence of an external world on faith? Does Moore agree?

Ludwig Wittgenstein, "On Certainty"

61. How does whether a proposition can turn out to be false depend on what we take as evidence for the proposition?
62. Can we infer p from 'I know that p'? Can we infer p from 'She knows that p'? Can we infer p from some one's utterance "I know that p"? Explain the differences.
63. Could the discovery of a planet prove the existence of the external world? Explain.
64. How does Moore's view overlook statements like, "I thought I knew"?
65. "My believing the trustworthy man stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure" (§23). Explain. How does this assertion relate to the question of the existence of the material world?
66. Are the moves in a language game determined by strict rules? Explain.
67. Given that 'There are physical objects' is senseless, how can we use such sentences?
68. According to Wittgenstein, can we understand the difference between knowledge and belief in terms of corresponding mental states?
69. How is 'I know that...' a logical insight?
70. How is 'I know that...' supposed to express a relation?
71. In what way does Moore lack the grounds for his claims?
72. Explain Wittgenstein's river bed analogy. To what do the river and the river bed correspond?
73. Why might Wittgenstein's system be open to the criticism that it denigrates objective truth? (See §108.) How does Wittgenstein respond?
74. How does the game of doubting presuppose certainty?
75. Why is experience a cause, but not a ground, of our experience?
76. "When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition" (§141). Explain.
77. Why do testing and justification come to an end?