

Q- Critically evaluate Representative Realism of John Locke?

INTRODUCTION:

John Locke's Representative Realism articulated in his Essay "Concerning human understanding" is a cornerstone of Empiricist tradition. Locke argued that mind perceives the external world indirectly, through ideas that "represent" material objects. This epistemological stance, grounded in causal theory of perception and primary-secondary qualities distinction, sought to reconcile reality of external world with subjective nature of experience. It stands on the intersection of ontology and epistemology, representative realism bridged naïve realism's direct immediacy and Idealism's mental exclusivity.

1- THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS:

1.1 THE THEORY OF IDEAS:

☆ ☆ Locke's ontology proposed that all objects of thought are "ideas" in the mind, derived either from sensation - the impact of external objects on our senses - or Reflection - the mind's observation of its

own operations. These Ideas serve as representations of external substances. By grounding knowledge in sensory input, Locke positioned himself firmly within the empiricist camp, rejecting speculative metaphysics in favour of observational data.

1.2 - PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUALITIES:

Locke distinguishes primary qualities, such as extension, solidity, figure, as intrinsic properties of matter, independent of perception, from secondary qualities like colour, taste, sound etc. which exist only as sensations in the perceiver. This ontological bifurcation is aimed to safeguard realism while explaining perceptual variations. That primary qualities are faithfully represented in the mind, secondary qualities depend upon sensory apparatus and do not resemble their causes.

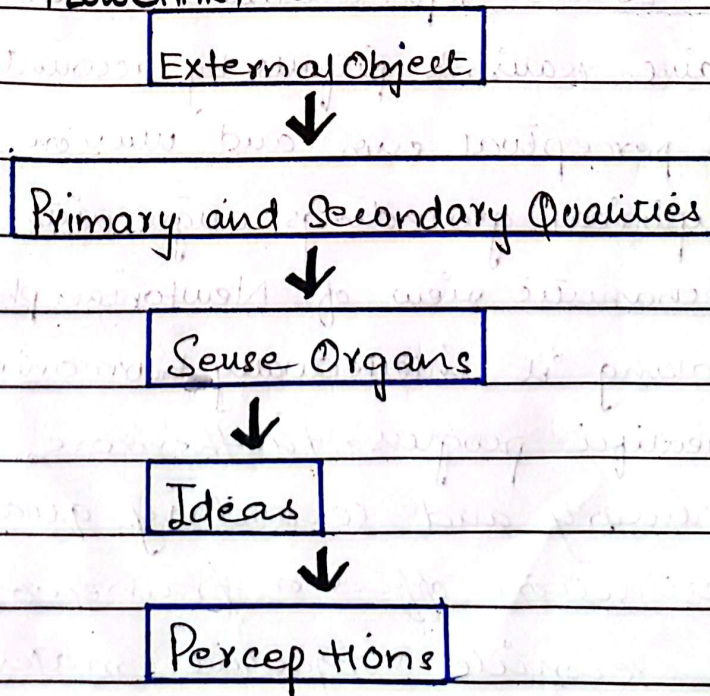
2- THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL STRUCTURE :

2.1 - CAUSAL THEORY OF PERCEPTION :

Locke's model is explicitly causal ; external objects, via their primary qualities, produce ideas in our minds through mechanical interaction. The resemblance thesis asserts that ideas of primary qualities resemble their external counterparts, while ideas of secondary qualities are mere effects. This preserves a commitment to correspondence theory of truth, where mental content mirrors external reality - at least partially.

2.2 - LOCKE'S PERCEPTUAL MODEL

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2.3- EPISTEMIC GAP AND VEIL OF

PERCEPTION :

The very mediation Locke insists upon create the veil of perception problem that our access to reality is always indirect, through ideas, never to the objects themselves.

The epistemic gap implies that resemblance between ideas and objects can never be directly verified, leaving Locke's realism vulnerable to scepticism.

3- CRITICAL APPRAISAL TO LOCKE :

3.1- STRENGTHS OF LOCKE'S MODEL :

Locke's representative realism avoids naïve realism's pitfalls by accounting for perceptual error and illusion. Its empirical groundings align with the mechanistic view of Newtonian physics, making it intellectually harmonious with scientific progress. Furthermore, the primary and secondary qualities distinction offers a framework to reconcile objective material

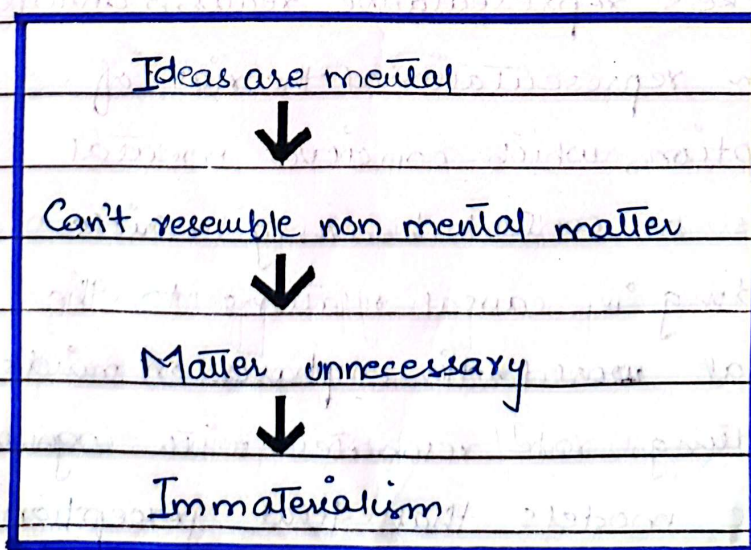
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properties with subjective experience

3.2 - BERKELEY'S IDEALIST CRITIQUE :

George Berkeley challenges Locke's distinction by arguing that both primary and secondary qualities are mind-dependent. If qualities are perceived through ideas, they cannot resemble material substances, since ideas are mental entities and matter is nonmental. This undermines the resemblance thesis and leads to Berkeley's "immaterialism": *esse est percipi* ("To be is to be perceived").

3.3 - LOGICAL MAP OF BERKELEY'S OBJECTION:



3.4 - HUME'S SKEPTICAL EMPIRICISM :

David Hume intensifies the challenge by questioning causal inference itself. For Hume, the link between perceptions and external causes is a habit of thought, not a rationally justified principle. If Locke cannot guarantee a causal connection between ideas and objects, his realism collapses into a form of phenomenalism where only perceptions exist with certainty.

4- CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND MODIFICATIONS :

4.1 - INFLUENCE ON MODERN PHILOSOPHY OF MIND :

Locke's representative realism anticipates modern representational theories of perception, which conceive mental states as content bearing vehicles standing in causal relations to the external world. His emphasis on mind's mediating role resonates with cognitive science models that treat perception

as information processing.

4.2 - NEO REALIST AND PHENOMENOLOGIST RESPONSES :

Twentieth century direct realists reject Locke's veil of perception, insisting that perception puts us in direct contact with the world. Phenomenologist like Husserl & Merleau Ponty offer an alternative by emphasizing intentionality - the mind's direct "aboutness" towards objects - thus bypassing the need for representational intermediaries. These approaches aim to dissolve, rather than bridge the epistemic gap Locke left unresolved.

5. CONCLUSION :

Locke's representative realism remains a seminal contribution to modern epistemology, offering a systematic account of how perceptions mediate between mind and world. However by

locating knowledge within ideas rather than direct acquaintance with objects, Locke left behind problem of epistemic gap - a vulnerability exploited by Berkeley epistemic.