

## ***Essay Guideline: Locke & Berkeley on Certainty***

Essay Topic: Compare and contrast the answers Locke and Berkeley give to this question: Can we be certain that the world is as it appears to us?

Before beginning this paper, make sure you go over your lecture notes and the appropriate parts of the textbook. You'll need to have a pretty good grasp of their theories before you start writing.

### **Outline**

#### I. Locke's Answer

1. Describe Locke's representative realism (without going into unnecessary detail).
  - i. Physical objects are lumps of matter, existing independently of us.
  - ii. We are aware of physical objects only indirectly, by means of mental representations.
  - iii. Our mental representations of objects include both primary and secondary qualities. The issue of accuracy applies only to primary qualities.
2. We *cannot* be certain that the world is as it appears to us.
  - i. Locke's conclusion that the world is as it appears to us depends upon an inference to the best explanation. This type of argument provides evidence for its conclusion, but falls short of providing certainty.
  - ii. Mental states that are vivid, stable, detailed, coherent, and involuntary are *probably* an accurate representation of the world, but we cannot rule out the possibility that the world is quite different than it appears.

#### II. Berkeley's Answer

1. Describe Berkeley's idealism (without going into unnecessary detail).
  - i. Physical objects are clusters of ideas in minds.
  - ii. We are directly aware of physical objects.
2. We *can* be certain that the world is as it appears to us.
  - i. We cannot be mistaken about the contents of our own minds. The physical world is in our own minds. Therefore, we cannot be mistaken about the physical world.