

Epicurus vs Kant and Modern Idealism - Introduction

Post by “Cassius” of April 9, 2026 at 9:31 AM

George Berkeley is relevant to this discussion, so here's a summary of the issue there:

Berkeley's Subjective Idealism ("esse est percipi")

Berkeley attacks the very foundation Epicurus stands on — the reliability of sensation as a guide to external reality. Berkeley argues that material substance is an incoherent concept: all we ever actually have is perception, and "matter existing independently of mind" is something no one has ever experienced or could experience. Therefore minds and ideas are all that exist.

Epicurus's response would be aggressive and direct. Berkeley's argument is self-refuting by the Canon's standards: it uses the evidence of perception to deny the external world that makes perception intelligible. For Epicurus, sensation is not a veil between us and reality — it is a contact with reality. The eidōla (films of atoms) that strike our sense organs are literally from the objects perceived, carrying structural information about them. The causal chain from object to perception is physical and real.

More pointedly, Epicurus would note that Berkeley's "ideas in the mind of God" sustaining reality is simply the Platonic move in different dress — replacing the physical world with a mental/divine substrate that the Canon cannot reach. The argument is that Berkeley has traded one metaphysical claim (matter) for another far more extravagant one (universal divine mind).