

# Epicurus vs Kant and Modern Idealism - Introduction

Post by "Eikadistes" of April 9, 2026 at 11:19 AM

## [Quote from Cassius](#)

George Berkeley is relevant to this discussion

I think in a survey of the history of philosophy, Berkeley is one of the best examples of an Idealist. Whereas, for Plátōn, the world of matter that traps souls in cages is not made of *mind*.

## [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

the monistic Idealism of Advaita Vedanta, and of George Berkeley (e.g. "If a tree falls in a forest...") suggests that the stuff of existence **is** *literally* composed of *mind*. Both traditions entertained the idea that we are but ideas in the mind of God. Plátōn would have disagreed with this kind of "Idealism", as did Kant. *Something else* is real besides just thinking.

To my knowledge, Kant isn't arguing for either. In fact, now that I'm thinking about it again, Kant's notion of "noumena" (which is typically I *typically* correlate with "Idealism") may actually be closer to the particles of Demokritos, both of whom suggest that either the material particles, or Kant's "thing-in-itself" are outside of the domain of human knowledge to completely understand.

So, in this regard, though he's part of a trend of "German Transcendental Idealists" insofar as viewing the "true" nature of reality as being something transcendental to the human intellect and more fundamental than the observations that are being reviewed, "Idealist" may not be a good label for Kant, unlike his contemporaries and those whom he influenced.

In his [Critique of Pure Reason](#), Kant identifies "material Idealism" as the opponent to his "transcendental idealism". Of the "material idealists", he refutes both the "problematic idealism" of Descartes (whom history typically calls a "dualist") and the "dogmatical idealism" of Berkeley (whom history typically calls a "monist"). The varieties of [Vedanta](#) provides analogues for these two ideas. In describing and refuting these two forms of Idealism, Kant writes:

## Quote

Idealism—I mean **material idealism**—is the theory which declares the existence of objects in space without us to be either (1) doubtful and indemonstrable, or (2) false and impossible. The first is the **problematical idealism of Descartes**, who admits

the undoubted certainty of only one empirical assertion (assertio), to wit, "I am." The second is the **dogmatical idealism of Berkeley**, who maintains that space, together with all the objects of which it is the inseparable condition, is a thing which is in itself impossible, and that consequently the objects in space are mere products of the imagination. The **dogmatical theory of idealism** is unavoidable, if we regard space as a property of things in themselves; for in that case it is, with all to which it serves as condition, a nonentity. But the foundation for this kind of idealism we have already destroyed in the transcendental æsthetic. **Problematical idealism**, which makes no such assertion, but only alleges our incapacity to prove the existence of anything besides ourselves by means of immediate experience, is a theory rational and evidencing a thorough and philosophical mode of thinking, for it observes the rule not to form a decisive judgement before sufficient proof be shown. The desired proof must therefore demonstrate that we have experience of external things, and not mere fancies. For this purpose, we must prove, that our internal and, to Descartes, indubitable experience is itself possible only under the previous assumption of external experience.

He then affirms of his philosophy that: "This doctrine I call Transcendental Idealism." However, he adds that it is "realist in the transcendental sense". I understand that to mean that Kant definitely believed in an objective reality that exists beyond sense perception. He adds the nuance that the purely empirical description of the world fails because concepts like "matter" and "space" and "time" are themselves mental constructs that are different that reality-by-itself.

This ^^^^ is why I want to suggest that it might be helpful to contrast his propositions against Dēmókritos, with the except of particle physics. It might be fair to say that Dēmókritos believed the that the particles were like the "thing-in-itself", unknowable, separate from propositions in the mind of people. Kant, I think, would say that "particles" are also *constructs* in the mind. (Now that I'm thinking about it, this presents an interesting parallel with a Buddhist doctrine).

So, I think, even though Kant refers to his philosophy as a flavor of "Idealism", he criticizes the other idealists of his era much more dismissively (I think) than the empiricists.