

Epicurus vs Kant and Modern Idealism - Introduction

Post by “Cassius” of March 19, 2026 at 8:45 AM

Introductory Note

This post is intended to provide an introduction to the issues that exist between Epicurus and modern idealism. For ease of reference it also incorporates discussion of Nietzsche's analysis of Kant, which has substantial similarities to the viewpoint of Epicurus. Nietzsche was not an Epicurean. He had sharp criticisms of what he thought was Epicurus' "retreat into the garden." In my view Nietzsche was wrong to consider this to be a "retreat." The more appropriate analogy would be that Epicurus erected a "fortress" where he could bring together his students and develop and teach a philosophy that rejected the dominant viewpoints of the day. Yet on at least two crucial issues Nietzsche clearly stood on the same side of history as Epicurus: both affirm the reality and value of sensory experience, and both mount vigorous objections to philosophies that treat an invisible, super-sensory realm as the true foundation of knowledge and morality.

Nietzsche made both positive and negative remarks about Epicurus, but in important ways both center their viewpoints on defense of this world as revealed to us by Nature as against claims of otherworldliness. For example, in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche traces the entire history of Western philosophy — from Plato through Kant — as a series of moves designed to depreciate this world in favor of another. Epicurus represents, for Nietzsche, the healthier ancient counter-tradition: pleasure-affirming, this-worldly, and against the building of systems based entirely on logic. Against this shared backdrop, we can contrast Epicurean views against Kant and the school of [German Idealism](#) he inaugurated.

The Fundamentals of Modern (German) Idealism

Modern idealism emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as the dominant philosophical movement in Europe, springing from the work of [Immanuel Kant](#) and carried forward by [Johann Gottlieb Fichte](#), [Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling](#), and [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel](#). Its central and defining claim is that the structure of reality as we experience it is not simply "out there" waiting to be passively received, but is actively shaped — in part or in whole — by the mind.

For Kant, this meant that the human mind imposes fundamental categories (such as causality, substance, and unity) and pure forms of intuition (space and time) onto raw sensory input. What we perceive is therefore always already processed through these mental filters. The world as it appears to us — the *phenomenal* realm — is knowable, but the world as it is in itself independent of all perception — the *noumenal* realm, or *Ding an sich* ("thing-in-itself") —

forever exceeds our cognitive grasp.

Kant called this reorientation the "[Copernican Revolution](#)" in philosophy: just as Copernicus moved the sun rather than the earth to the center of the solar system, Kant moved the knowing subject to the center of the epistemological universe.

Later idealists radicalised this move. Hegel dissolved Kant's "thing-in-itself" altogether, arguing in the [Phenomenology of Spirit](#) that reality just is the self-unfolding of rational Spirit (*Geist*) through history. The material world is not merely conditioned by mind but is a manifestation of it.

Kant's Categorical Imperative and Other Key Views

Kant's ethical philosophy is inseparable from his metaphysics. Because genuine freedom — the kind required for moral responsibility — cannot be located in the phenomenal, causally determined world, it allegedly must be ascribed to the self as a "noumenal" being. Humans can self-legislate because they are citizens of an intelligible realm beyond nature.

From this foundation Kant derived his idea of the [Categorical Imperative](#): what Kant alleges is the supreme principle of morality that commands unconditionally, without reference to desire, pleasure, or consequences. In its most famous formulation: "*Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*" Notice what this excludes. The "good" will, for Kant, has nothing to do with the agent's happiness or sensory satisfaction. A generous act performed because it produces pleasure is, in Kant's strict view, morally worthless. Only duty — rational duty, legislated by pure practical reason — carries genuine moral weight.

This yields a vision of the moral agent as a purely rational being straining against natural inclination. Pleasure is, at best, morally neutral; at worst, it tempts us away from duty. Kant further distinguished the *highest good* (*summum bonum*), a synthesis of virtue and happiness. Kant alleged crucially that happiness enters only as a consequence merited by virtue, never as its foundation. The architecture of Kantian ethics is resolutely top-down: pure reason commands; the senses obey or are ignored.

The Deep Kinship Between Kant and Platonic Idealism

The structural similarities between Kant's system and [Plato's philosophy](#) are profound, and not accidental. Kant himself acknowledged Plato's influence, writing in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that Plato rightly saw that our faculties of knowledge reach beyond the empirical. Both thinkers cleave the universe into two levels: for Plato, the sensible world of fleeting appearances versus the eternal realm of [Forms](#); for Kant, the phenomenal world of spatiotemporal experience versus the noumenal realm of things-in-themselves.

Both distrust the senses as ultimate arbiters of truth. For Plato, the eyes and ears deliver only shifting, contradictory opinion (*doxa*); genuine knowledge (*episteme*) requires ascent to the intelligible. For Kant, the senses supply the raw material of experience, but the cognitive work is done by the understanding's *a priori* concepts — and the deepest moral and metaphysical truths lie beyond the reach of sensory evidence altogether. Both philosophies thereby assign decisive importance to an unseen, non-empirical domain as the ultimate ground of value and knowledge.

The ethical parallels are equally striking. Plato's "Form of the Good" transcends the visible world and grounds all value; Kant's pure reason issues moral laws that transcend nature. In both cases, right action is defined not by what feels pleasurable or produces happiness but by conformity to something higher, more rational, more permanent than the sensory flux of embodied life.

Epicurus: Embracing the Senses, Rejecting the Ideal

Epicurus would have found this entire picture deeply misguided. Writing in Athens in the late 4th century BCE, he built a philosophy founded frankly and unapologetically on the senses, anticipations, and feelings of pleasure and pain. For Epicurus, the senses, anticipations, and feelings are the only reliable source of knowledge; they never lie in their immediate deliverances, even when our interpretations of them go wrong. There is no need to posit an invisible realm of Forms to explain why we know what we know. The world perceived through our senses is the world; the attempt to locate reality elsewhere is a flight from nature born of fear or vanity.

Epicurus rejected Platonic idealism on every front. The Forms are false and philosophically redundant: to explain why beautiful things are beautiful, we need only point to their material properties and the natural responses they produce in perceivers — not to a transcendent Form of Beauty.

Epicurus' atomist materialism held that everything that exists is composed of atoms and void. The soul itself is material, dispersing at death, leaving no residue for a Platonic afterlife.

In ethics, the contrast is equally vivid. Where Plato subordinated bodily pleasure to the care of the soul and its conformity to the Good, Epicurus declared that "*pleasure is the beginning and end of the blessed life.*" The best life according to Epicurus is rooted firmly in natural human experience, not in conformity to transcendent norms. Philosophy is medicine for the soul, but the ailments it cures — fear of death, fear of the gods, insatiable ambition — are identified empirically, by observing what actually causes human misery.

Nietzsche: Siding with the Senses Against Idealism and Stoicism

Nietzsche, writing two millennia later, diagnosed the same pathology in both Plato and Kant. In [Twilight of the Idols](#) (1889), his chapter “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” is a devastating six-step narrative tracing the concept of a “true world” beyond the senses from Plato through Christianity through Kant, culminating in its eventual abolition. For Nietzsche, Kant’s noumenal realm is Platonism in disguise: another way of downgrading this world in favour of an inaccessible beyond.

Nietzsche’s specific critique of Kant’s ethics is equally pointed. He mocked the categorical imperative as mechanical and life-denying, arguing in [Beyond Good and Evil](#) that Kant’s insistence on universalisability ignores the vital particularity of individuals and situations. The very coldness of the Kantian moral demand — its indifference to what we desire, feel, and naturally are — struck Nietzsche as a symptom of the ascetic ideal: the self-lacerating wish to deny nature in favour of an abstract norm.

Against Stoicism — whose demand that we conform our will to the rational order of nature Nietzsche considered nearly as problematic — and against Platonic-Kantian idealism alike, Nietzsche championed what he called the “will to power” — driven by the feelings given by Nature, as the authentic sources of value. His concept of the *Übermensch* (the Overman) is a figure who creates values out of the fullness of life rather than deferring to transcendent commands. Nietzsche explicitly commended Epicurus for recognizing that the goal of philosophy is relief from needless suffering and the cultivation of genuine pleasure — a goal achieved not by escaping the material world but by understanding it more honestly.

How Epicurus’ Rejection of Platonism Extends to Kantian Idealism

The argument structure that led Epicurus to reject Platonic idealism would, if extended forward in time, lead him to reject Kantian idealism with equal force. Consider the parallel moves:

First, Epicurus objected to Plato’s *noumenal dualism* — the claim that there is a higher realm (the Forms) that does the real explanatory and normative work, while the sensory world is demoted to mere appearance. Kant’s *thing-in-itself* performs the same structural function set out by Plato: it is an unseen, unknowable bedrock invoked precisely because the sensory world cannot, on Kant’s view, supply ultimate grounding on its own. Epicurus’ reply would be the same: the appeal to an inaccessible beyond is false — it is philosophically unnecessary and psychologically motivated by fear rather than evidence.

Second, Epicurus’ ethical naturalism — the view that pleasure and pain are our natural moral guides — directly contradicts Kant’s insistence that [inclinations have no moral worth](#). For Kant, the very fact that an action feels rewarding is a reason to be suspicious of its moral purity. For Epicurus, the fact that it produces pleasure (including that of our friends) is precisely what recommends it. The Epicurean would view Kantian moral straining — duty for duty’s sake, regardless of consequences, regardless of feeling — as a kind of philosophical self-torture with

no natural justification.

Third, both Plato's and Kant's systems require a self that, at its moral core, transcends the natural order: Plato finds this in an immortal rational soul, Kant finds it in a "noumenal agent." Epicurus dissolved this duality entirely. The soul is material; death is the ending of sensation, not an supernatural reckoning. There is no noumenal self behind the empirical person. Epicurean psychology is fully continuous with Epicurean physics: one world, all the way down.

Summary: Fundamental Differences and the Superficiality of Apparent Similarities

One might object that Epicurus and Kant both prize reason, both seek human well-being, and both recommend a kind of philosophical self-cultivation. Are these not deep points of convergence? On reflection, they are superficial resemblances masking irreconcilable foundations.

The *reason* that Epicurus prizes is empirical, corrective, and therapeutic — reason that helps us think clearly about the evidence provided by the senses, anticipations, and feelings, and therefore what actually produces pleasure and avoids pain. The *reason* that Kant prizes is pure logical reasoning, which issues commands with no reference to sensory experience whatsoever. These are almost antithetical conceptions sharing only a name.

The *well-being* each seeks is equally divergent. Epicurean *eudaimonia* is constituted by pleasure widely understood to include all experience that is not painful — it is measured by what we feel. Kantian *happiness* enters the picture only as the appropriate reward for virtue in a teleological universe governed by moral law; it is never the criterion of right action. To confuse these two conceptions is precisely the error that Kant warned against in his distinction between [hypothetical and categorical imperatives](#).

At the deepest level, the divide is metaphysical. Epicureanism and its Nietzschean echo are philosophies of *this world*: these bodies and this life are all we have and all we need. [German Idealism](#) and its Platonic ancestor are philosophies of *otherworldliness*: reality's ultimate character, and morality's ultimate authority, lie in a domain the senses cannot reach. No amount of terminological negotiation can bridge that gap. When Nietzsche declared that the "true world" had become a fable, he was — consciously or not — continuing with the project that Epicurus had begun twenty-two centuries earlier: the project of bringing defending *this world* against the claims of *mysticism*.

Post by "Cassius" of March 19, 2026 at 9:02 AM

This thread and its timing was prompted in part by the following post which I saw recently on Twitter/X. I am not posting to approve or disapprove of the writer of the post or the person whose death is being referenced - Ari Larijani, an Iranian military leader. This thread should not be diverted into an assessment of Larijani, the situation in the Middle East, or any other political theme.

But the post is relevant because I was shocked to see that Larijani was apparently a strong admirer of Kant and his categorical imperative. The post states that Larijani *authored multiple works on Kant's philosophy*. For those who in opposition to Muller don't like Larijani, I am not trying to imply that Kant should be viewed negatively on a "guilt by association" basis. I post this not to comment on Larijani but to provide a stark example of how Kantian idealism is being explicitly incorporated in consideration of key practical events in the world today.

Quote

[Blunt @Shinamuller 12h](#)

As an avid reader of Immanuel Kant during my teenage years, I disciplined myself morally in ways that external chaos could never achieve. Kant's categorical imperative became my inner compass: act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. This pure reason-based ethics grounded me, turning personal turmoil into a commitment to principles that transcend circumstances.

The loss of Ali Larijani, a true Kantian thinker who authored multiple works on Kant's philosophy, including explorations of mathematical method, metaphysics, and synthetic a priori judgments in his thought, feels profoundly personal to me. Here was a man who confronted what he saw as a materialist, genocidal empire on high moral ground, much like Kant's insistence on treating humanity always as an end in itself, never merely as a means. His death is not just a political event; it is a blow to that rare fusion of philosophical rigor and principled action.

The United States, through its Rewards for Justice program, placed a bounty of up to \$10 million on Larijani's head (along with other senior Iranian officials, including Mojtaba Khamenei) just days before his reported killing in an Israeli strike. This act reduces a human being, regardless of political role, to a price tag, a means to an end in geopolitical maneuvering. If this practice were to become a universal principle, no head of state would ever be safe again. Imagine Donald Trump, or any leader, subject to the same logic: bounties issued by adversaries, turning political opposition into licensed assassination markets. The world would descend into a state where dignity evaporates, reason is subordinated to power, and perpetual insecurity reigns, precisely the antithesis of Kant's vision of a kingdom of ends, where rational beings coexist under

laws they give themselves. Larijani, this committed Kantian (Syed Kantian, as some might say), left a piercing question for the Muslim world in his final public message before his martyrdom: Which side are you on? He framed the confrontation as one between America/Israel on one side and Muslim Iran/forces of resistance on the other, urging Islamic nations to unite rather than remain silent or complicit. He emphasized that true security, progress, and independence come not from narrow nationalism but from solidarity across the Ummah, echoing a bloc-like unity similar to the European Union.

Today's EU stands, in many ways, on Kant's anti-nationalist philosophy. Kant viewed nationalism as outdated, a relic of particularism that must yield to cosmopolitan right and perpetual peace through federations of free states. Larijani, in his last message, similarly rejected narrow nationalism for Iran or the Muslim world, advocating instead for a collective strength akin to a supranational bloc that could guarantee dignity and autonomy for all, much like Kant's ideal of a federation transcending sovereign rivalries. I am in no position to write a full obituary for him yet; the shock is still too raw, the grief too immediate. But I will write one, in time. For now, this is simply an acknowledgment: a Kantian light has dimmed, yet the imperative he lived by, and that he helped instill in me, remains undimmed. We must will a world where such principles prevail, not bounties and eliminations.

Also, in preparing the initial post, I ran AI searches to validate the key points being made. This is a discussion forum and discussion of the points made in the first post are welcome. The issues revolve around the following points, in this case analyzed by Grok:

Outline Of Areas Of Difference Between Epicurus and Kantian Modern Idealism

Core Goal of Life / Highest Good

- Epicurus (Hedonist / Egoistic eudaimonism):
The ultimate goal is happiness (eudaimonia), defined as a pleasant, undisturbed life. Pleasure is the highest intrinsic good; pain the only intrinsic evil. He prioritizes stable, long-term pleasures — freedom from bodily pain (aponia) and mental disturbance (ataraxia) — through moderation, satisfying natural/necessary desires, friendship, and simple living over luxury or excess.
- Kant (Deontological rationalism):
The highest good (in terms of moral worth) is a good will — acting purely from duty for duty's sake, independent of inclinations, pleasure, or consequences. Happiness has value but no moral worth unless it flows from virtue/moral action. The good life is one guided by

autonomous reason following the moral law.

Basis of Morality

- Epicurus:
Morality is instrumental/prudential. Rules like justice, honesty, and non-harm promote personal (and communal) pleasure/minimization of pain reliably. There's no absolute, categorical duty detached from consequences — ethical behavior is wise self-interest in a social contract that benefits everyone involved.
- Kant:
Morality is absolute, a priori, and derived from pure reason via the Categorical Imperative:
 - Act only on maxims you can will as universal laws.
 - Treat rational beings always as ends in themselves, never merely as means.
Empirical factors (pleasure/pain, consequences) play no role in determining rightness — only reason does.

Role of Pleasure & Desire

- Epicurus: Pleasure is the starting point, criterion, and end of ethics. Manage desires rationally: pursue natural/necessary ones, enjoy natural/non-necessary ones moderately, avoid vain ones.
- Kant: Inclinations (including desire for pleasure) are heteronomous and can undermine moral motivation. Actions done for pleasure or inclination lack moral value. True morality requires acting from respect for the law despite inclinations.

Differences / Incompatibility (fundamental and deep):

- They are largely incompatible at the core level. Epicurus is consequentialist/hedonist (morality serves happiness as the sole intrinsic good), while Kant is strictly deontological (morality is independent of happiness; happiness can even follow virtue but never grounds it).
- Kant explicitly critiques Epicurean ethics as "self-love" or "selfishness" because it makes morality hypothetical/conditional on empirical pleasure — something he sees as incapable of producing truly universal, necessary moral laws.
- Epicurus would view Kant's duty-based system as unnecessarily austere and disconnected from human nature (why ignore pleasure/pain when they're the natural guides?).
- No hybrid is straightforward: You can't fully merge them without undermining one or the other. A "Kantian Epicurean" might try to argue that duty aligns with long-term happiness, but that risks reducing Kant to hypothetical imperatives (which he rejects). Conversely, making Epicurean pleasure secondary to duty would betray Epicurus's

hedonism.

- In essence: Epicurus asks, "What rationally maximizes a pleasant, secure life?" Kant asks, "What does pure reason demand of any rational being?" They point in different directions — one naturalistic and empirical, the other rationalist and absolute — so their views are mostly incompatible, though with intriguing points of overlap in promoting rational tranquility and ethical consistency.

Post by “Martin” of March 22, 2026 at 2:56 AM

The rejection of both plain rationalism and plain empiricism is an overlap between Epicurus and Kant.

Kant replaced them with a unified epistemology drawing from parts of both of them. Based on his new approach to epistemology, scientists usually present their theories as models of reality instead of truth on reality.

Epicurus replaced rationalism and empiricism with another unified epistemology within which the most basic theories still claim truth on reality. This claim is an unproven belief which is akin to religion and Platonism and not necessary for a materialist world view.

A philosophy which rejects Plato's idealism more profoundly and does not make superfluous claims on truth is more convincing. Under this aspect, my choice is Kantian instead of Epicurean.

Post by “Cassius” of March 22, 2026 at 6:09 AM

Thank you Martin. It will be helpful for us to dig further into Kant and clarify why he is such a lightning-rod for dispute. This should prove to be a very useful thread.

So just so I am clear - because you've apparently read a lot more Kant than I have:

Would a Kantian take the position that it is not true that there are no supernatural gods, not true that there is no life after death, and not true that [pleasure is the guide of life](#)?

Post by “Martin” of March 22, 2026 at 9:57 AM

Quote

Would a Kantian take the position that it is not true that there are no supernatural gods, not true that there is no life after death, and not true that [pleasure is the guide of life](#)?

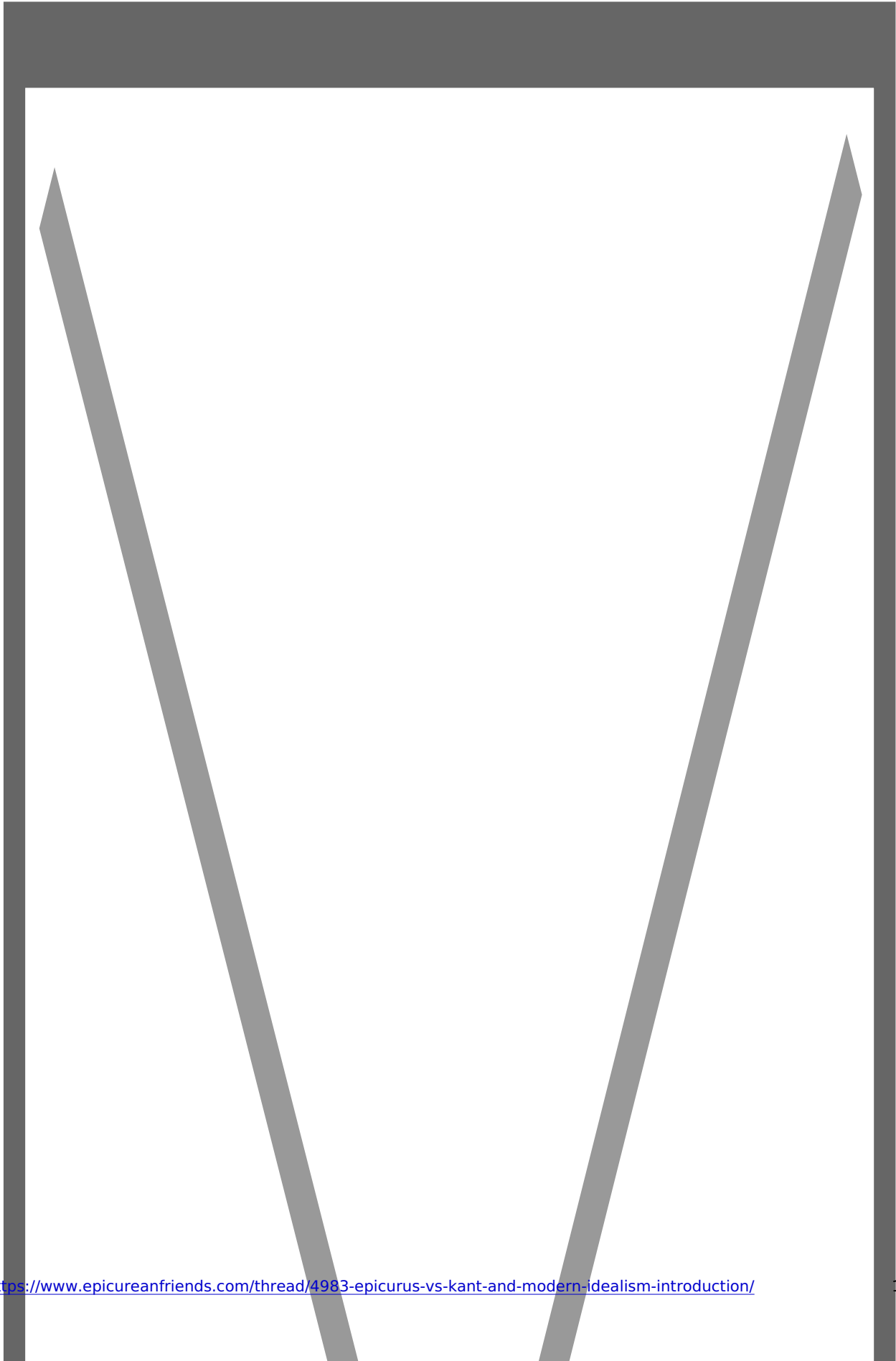
Kant himself does take these positions. However, later Kantians may differ. I am an Epicurean, not a Kantian. My reference to being "Kantian" is limited to him as being named as the original source of the distinction between a model and truth. He used different terminology and an idealistic framework. Others reformulated his epistemology within materialism. Other than that and his version of the golden rule, I do not know much about other aspects of his philosophy. I have read very little from Kant himself but more from those who refer to him.

I found two references for dummies on Kant's epistemology and one reference for professionals. Although the one from Nature has been created with A.I. (which I usually would not want to read or share) I have to concede that it is convincing and easy to understand. The second reference is riddled with mistakes but seems to correctly present Kant's epistemology. The third one is mostly above my league:

[Kantian Philosophy and Epistemology | Nature Research Intelligence](#)

<https://yohanesnuwara.medium.com/the-epistemology-of-immanuel-kant-5e5e7fbd1e48>

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Post by “Eikadistes” of April 2, 2026 at 10:52 PM

In his introduction to *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes:

Quote

“The light dove, cleaving the air of her free flight, and fleeing its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of the senses, as setting too narrow limits to understanding, and ventured out beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of the pure understanding.”

I think he agreed that the world of senses, by itself, is "too narrow", but at the same time, Kant heavily criticizes Plátōn for the same reasons that he criticizes the pure rationalism of Descartes. This is important, because as far as "Idealism" goes, Kant is distinguished.

... well, honestly, they're all unique, but, by comparison, Kant is especially analytical.

There are a number of types of Idealisms, and they are each a little different. Plátōn's "Idealism" sometimes reminds me of Descartes (who is **not**, so far as I know, considered an "idealist" by historians of philosophy) in that both thinkers privileged the substance of mind, but neither concluded that the observable world is *literally* composed of *mind*. Typically, we use the word "dualist" with Descartes, and use the word "idealist" with Plátōn, **however**, some scholars consider Plátōn to be a "Realist", in that his *Worlds of Forms* **does** objectively exist, and a world of gross matter is actually trapping our immortal souls in a tricky cage of flesh.

By contrast, 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.

Kant's "Idealism" (if that's what we want to call it, and *I'm not sure if we do*) is **significantly** more analytical than his German peers, each of whom were much, much more influenced by the recently-translated (at the time) copies of the ancient Indian *Upanishads* and *Gita*, which heavily support a form of monistic Idealism that bleeds into 18th-century German philosophy (e.g. *we're just bubbles in an ocean of consciousness* and *life is but a dream*). Kant doesn't suggest anything (so far as I know) like this, and only his peers embrace a mystical kind of

Idealism. Even the American Transcendentalists, entranced by Nature privileged (as Emerson wrote) an "invisible eye". This kind of "bubbles-in-an-ocean-of-consciousness" neither accurately describes Plátōn nor Kant.

[Quote from Martin](#)

The rejection of both plain rationalism and plain empiricism is an overlap between Epicurus and Kant.

I think this is the main thing. Both philosophers demand an 'observe-and-consider' approach to understanding reality. While I *personally* think that Kant's inclusion of "noumena" might qualify him as a kind of Idealist, that's just historical taxonomy. I'm comfortable being wrong on that point. If "Idealism" means "everything is mind", then neither Plátōn nor Kant are Idealists. (I see them both as Idealists, but, again, I think it's just historical taxonomy to an extent).

Outside of this historical significance though, Epíkouros and Kant would argue. Kant wouldn't steal a loaf of bread for a starving child. Epíkouros would have died rather than betray a loved one. They fundamentally disagreed on the question of the divisibility of space, and I think you'd have a tough time convincing Epíkouros that a "thing-it-itself" is any *thing* at all. Still, Kant is a unique enough thinker that we'll find *some* parallels and *some* points of tension with anyone.

Post by “Cassius” of April 3, 2026 at 6:48 AM

[Quote from Martin](#)

My reference to being "Kantian" is limited to him as being named as the original source of the distinction between a model and truth.

if you are correct Kant is apparently saying that truth is never possible, on "models," some of which work better than others. I believe Epicurus would say that this is effectively the same thing as saying that "nothing can be known" just using different terminology.

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Epíkouros and Kant would argue. Kant wouldn't steal a loaf of bread for a starving child. Epíkouros would have died rather than betray a loved one. They fundamentally disagreed on the question of the divisibility of space, and I think you'd have a tough time convincing Epíkouros that a "thing-it-itself" is any thing at all.

Excellent points by Eikadistes. And this bleeds over into comments by [DaveT](#) in another thread. I do not believe Epicurus would view someone who would "fail to steal a loaf of bread for a starving child" as simply choosing another path in life. Epicurus would find that conduct outrageous and deserving of strong verbal condemnation if not worse. Ideas have consequences and this is the kind of result of Kantian ideology that deserves the forcefulness of a Nietzsche to condemn in adequate terms.

Post by "DaveT" of April 3, 2026 at 9:13 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I do not believe Epicurus would view someone who would "fail to steal a loaf of bread for a starving child" as simply choosing another path in life. Epicurus would find that conduct outrageous and deserving of strong verbal condemnation if not worse. Ideas have consequences and this is the kind of result of Kantian ideology that deserves the forcefulness of a Nietzsche to condemn in adequate terms.

Why must extreme examples be used to dispute a point in discussion. Extremes are not the norm for belief in my opinion. This is an example of the type of argumentation that can be found in Lucretius that diminishes its power. Giving five examples of extremes is not helpful to deep consideration of an issue under discussion. Does anyone really think a man like Kant would actually frown on someone's act of stealing bread to feed a starving child? That example seems absurd also for the fact it is twisting fiction for philosophical argument. By the way, it was a fictional story In Les Misérables, Jean Valjean was unjustly convicted for stealing bread to feed starving children.

Post by "Cassius" of April 3, 2026 at 11:25 AM

The applicable cliché is hard cases make bad law, but the problem is in the one size fits all law rather than in the cases. If Kant was consistent (and I know nothing about his personal life) he would either follow his categorical imperative or ditch the entire effort.

That's why we have courts of equity and executive clemency and jury nullification, to avoid the harsh consequences of these who seek one size fits all at the expense of individual real people.

Hard cases are very useful for focusing the mind and making sure that we all understand the implications of our positions.

Cicero's dilemma on the Catiline Conspiracy and the phrase "The Constitution is not a suicide pact" are also useful extreme hypotheticals.

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).

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.

Post by "Cassius" of April 9, 2026 at 11:52 AM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

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.

It's a constant struggle to decide how much diving into the details is sufficient. However it seems pretty clear to me that the ultimate goal is being sure that we have a grasp of the "big picture" regardless of the twists and turns of how some of these philosophers seek to distinguish themselves individually. Everyone seems to want to make a name for themselves with new jargon, but I see very little in the end that makes any real difference.

At the moment i am hard-pressed to come up with a better high-level way of expressing it beyond what Nietzsche was apparently doing with his "true world" figure of speech (such as in Twilight of the Idols). No matter how you slice it between *mind* or *matter* or any other single word, it seems like the issue always comes back to whether we are going to choose to live and die by the senses in *this* world, or by something we think we can identify only in our minds in *another* world.

Eikadistes if you come up with equal or superior ways of summarizing these issues please be sure to highlight them. I know a lot of people get frustated and simply pass over discussion of the details, and that's probably OK - *just so they have an outline/higher-level understanding of the real dividing lines.*

In the case of most if not all of these philosophers who are variants of Platonism or any form of idealism, I'm not sure that it's necessary to know much more than their orientation toward the relative value and roles of the senses vs the mind - at least that's the way I see it at the moment.

Post by "Eikadistes" of April 9, 2026 at 4:19 PM

These are by no means precise, just a general overview of some relevant comparisons:

Who?	Whatchamacallit?	What it is?	For real?	Like how?
Dēmókritos	(Skeptical) Atomism	Atoms & Void	Not bodies, just atoms.	Vaisheshika
Plátōn	Platonic Realism	Matter & Form	Formally, yes.	Vedanta
Aristotélēs	Immanent Realism	Hylomorphs	Hard "yes".	Nyaya
Pýrrhōn	Greek Skepticism	Good question.	Maybe?	Ajñana
Epíkouros	(Dogmatic) Atomism	Bodies & Void	Literally.	Charvaka
Descartes	Cartesian Dualism	Thought & Extension	Both Mind & Matter are.	Samkhya , Dvaita Vedanta
Spinoza	Substance Monism	God	In every way.	Bhedabheda Vedanta
Berkeley	Immaterialism	God's mind.	God's dream.	Advaita Vedanta

Kant	Transcendental Idealism	Thing-in-Itself	Some <i>Thing</i> is.	Vedanta
Fichte	Subjective Idealism	Absolute Ego	Our minds are.	Yogācāra Buddhism
Hegel	Absolute Idealism	Spirit	The spirit is.	Bhedabheda Vedanta
Schelling	Objective Idealism	Absolute	<i>Absolutely!</i>	Kashmir Shaivism
Schopenhauer	Pessimism, Voluntarism	Will	<i>Unfortunately...</i>	Advaita Vedanta
Emerson	Transcendentalism	Over-soul	<i>Naturally.</i>	Advaita Vedanta

Again, just a rough sketch, mixed with some loose parallels with Indian philosophy.

Note that some of those thinkers did not (and would not) use the words I provided for their own philosophies. (Fichte in particular wouldn't like the words I used for him, but he can deal with it). The Indian philosophies are pure approximations. I only mention them because the Transcendentalists were heavily influenced by the recently-translated [Upanishads](#) and [Gita](#). (Perhaps *mistranslations* in some cases, but translations, nonetheless).

If a lot of it sound similar, it's because it is. The German Transcendentalists were directly inspired by the same branches of Indian philosophy that inspired Roman Neoplatonists. They also provide an example of a continuation of a Greek re-branding of Indian ideas (as with Pýrrhōn).

Post by “Cassius” of April 9, 2026 at 7:49 PM

Very useful Eikadistes! n They are arranged in chronological order?

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 9, 2026 at 8:09 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

They are arranged in chronological order?

Yeah, I think I got their birth year right, more-or-less.

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 9, 2026 at 8:16 PM

I also don't mean to imply that any of the Greeks (besides Pýrrhōn), or Descartes, Spinoza, Berkeley or Kant were inspired by Indian philosophies; they just provide interesting parallels. Maybe some were of which I am not aware, but primarily Pýrrhōn, the neoplatonists, and transcendentalists.